



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

EMPLOYER BRANDING IN PORTUGUESE COMPANIES: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND INTERNATIONAL MASTER STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Communication
Studies – Strategic Communication and Leadership

By

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Faculty of Human Sciences

September 2024



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Abstract

Portugal has become an increasingly popular destination for international students, yet the country faces a significant challenge in retaining this talent post-graduation. This study explores how Portuguese companies utilize Employer Branding (EB) strategies to attract and retain international Master's graduates, with a focus on their migration intentions. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research combines qualitative interviews with EB professionals from large Portuguese companies and a quantitative survey of international students. The findings highlight a disconnect between what companies offer and what international graduates seek, particularly around competitive salaries, career advancement, and work-life balance, leading to low retention rates. Findings indicate that while some companies have advanced EB strategies, others are still in the early stages of formalizing their approach. Additionally, language barriers and structural challenges within organizations further complicate talent attraction and integration. Despite these challenges, the research offers actionable insights for enhancing EB strategies, focusing on adapting Employer Value Proposition (EVP) offerings and addressing internal barriers, to support talent retention and mitigating brain drain in Portugal. Future research is recommended to further investigate the interplay between EB and broader corporate strategies, as well as the long-term impact of these practices on talent migration.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Employer Value Proposition, Talent Attraction, Talent Retention, Portugal, International Students, Graduate Migration, Brain Drain, Communication Strategies

Resumo

Portugal tem vindo a tornar-se um destino cada vez mais popular para os estudantes internacionais, no entanto o país enfrenta um desafio significativo na retenção deste talento após a conclusão do mestrado. Este estudo explora a forma como as empresas portuguesas utilizam as estratégias de Employer Branding (EB) para atrair e reter os estudantes internacionais diplomados de mestrados, focando nas suas intenções de migração. Utilizando uma abordagem metodológica mista, a investigação combina entrevistas qualitativas com profissionais de Recursos Humanos (RH) de grandes empresas portuguesas e um inquérito quantitativo a estudantes internacionais. Os resultados evidenciam um desfasamento entre o que as empresas oferecem e o que os licenciados internacionais procuram, em especial em relação a salários competitivos, progressão na carreira e equilíbrio entre vida profissional e pessoal, o que conduz a baixas taxas de retenção. Os resultados indicam que, embora algumas empresas tenham avançado com as estratégias de EB, outras ainda se encontram numa fase inicial de formalização da sua abordagem. Além disso, as barreiras linguísticas e os desafios estruturais dentro das organizações complicam ainda mais a atração e a integração de talentos. Apesar destes desafios, a investigação oferece perspetivas acionáveis para melhorar as estratégias de EB, concentrando-se na adaptação das ofertas de EVP e na abordagem das barreiras internas, para apoiar a retenção de talentos e atenuar a fuga de cérebros em Portugal. Recomenda-se a realização de investigação futura para aprofundar a interação entre o EB e as estratégias empresariais mais amplas, bem como o impacto a longo prazo destas práticas na migração de talentos.

Palavras-chave: Employer Branding, Employer Value Proposition, Atração de Talentos, Retenção de Talentos, Portugal, Estudantes Internacionais, Migração de Licenciados, Brain Drain, Estratégias de Comunicação

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AML	Área Metropolitana de Lisboa
ASA	Attraction-Selection-Attrition
EB	Employer Branding
EBEP	Employer Brand Employee Platform
EBSP	Employer Brand Strategic Platform
EEX	Employee Experience
EU	European Union
EVP	Employer Value Proposition
eWOM	electronic Word-of-Mouth
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HR	Human Resources
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
LLM	Large Language Model
MNC	Multinational Corporation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RBV	Resource-Based View
ROI	Return on Investment
RQ	Research Question
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TM	Talent Management
TPB	Theory of Planned Behavior
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
US	United States of America

1. Introduction

Portugal has recently emerged as a favored destination for digital nomads, young professionals and international students – both in Erasmus and for a full-time Master program. Drawn by the country’s vibrant culture, favorable climate, and growing international reputation in higher education, students from all around the world choose a Portuguese university. However, despite this attraction, the country faces significant challenges in retaining international talent – not as remote workers for foreign companies but in a Portuguese company –, particularly after these individuals graduate and complete their studies. The increasing popularity of English-language Master's programs at Portuguese universities has led to a more diverse student body, with international students with many different nationalities choosing Portugal for their high-quality higher education. Nevertheless, many of them face hurdles in transitioning from academia to the local job market.

Statistics highlight a trend where many Portuguese students – as are believed to international students –, plan to leave the country post-graduation. For instance, a study at the University of Coimbra revealed that nearly 70% of students consider emigrating after completing their studies (Lusa, 2024). This trend suggests that the educational investments made by Portugal are often benefiting other countries as graduates seek more favorable conditions abroad.

Employer Branding (EB), particularly the Employer Value Proposition (EVP), is a very prominent topic, when aiming to be a great place to work and an attractive employer. Whether or not these strategies have been underutilized by many Portuguese companies in their talent recruitment strategies, is unknown, but the statistics indicate this possibility. This leads to the assumption that Portuguese organizations often overlook the potential of a more international talent pool, failing to fully leverage it in their efforts to attract international graduates aside from Portuguese graduates. Given the strategic importance of retaining skilled workers, there is a pressing need to explore how Portuguese companies can more effectively communicate their employer brands to this demographic. Are they aware of the potential of international Master graduates from Portuguese universities that could join their workforce as young talents from sought-after degrees? And do they use EB strategies to target them before they leave the country?

Despite Portugal's growing appeal as a destination for international students, particularly those enrolled in English-language Master's programs, the country is faced with the aforementioned significant challenge: retaining these often highly skilled graduates after they graduate from a Portuguese university. There are many hurdles when trying to enter the job market in Portugal that especially international graduates' encounter. However, what these are, and which specific migration intentions international students have remains underexplored. The role and effectiveness of EB strategies in influencing their decision to stay or leave, to the best of our knowledge, has not been yet investigated at length and concerning this specific target group and Portuguese companies.

The problem becomes particularly pressing when we consider that the existing literature has largely focused on the emigration of young Portuguese professionals, leaving a gap in understanding the motivations and decisions of international graduates. While anecdotal evidence and limited studies suggest that many international students plan to leave Portugal after graduation, there is little empirical research to confirm these trends or to understand the underlying reasons in depth.

Furthermore, the presumed underutilization of EB strategies by Portuguese companies aggravates this issue. Many organizations are believed to not fully leverage their EVP to attract and retain international talent effectively. This oversight not only diminishes the potential talent pool available to these companies but also contributes to the broader issue of "brain drain" in Portugal, where the education and skills developed within the country at Portuguese universities are then often lost to other nations.

This gap in understanding the extent of this topic is problematic because it potentially limits the ability of Portuguese companies and policymakers to develop targeted strategies that could help retain international graduates, thereby strengthening the country's workforce and economic future. Addressing this issue is essential not only for improving the competitiveness of Portuguese organizations but also for mitigating the adverse effects of talent loss on the broader economy.

Thus, this study seeks to fill this critical gap by investigating the migration intentions of international Master's students at Portuguese universities and evaluating the effectiveness of current EB strategies in influencing these intentions. By providing empirical insights into these areas, the research aims to contribute to both academic knowledge and practical applications in the field of talent management in Portugal.

Building on the identified gap in understanding the migration intentions of international Master's students in Portugal and the effectiveness of EB strategies, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: *What EB strategies are being implemented by Portuguese companies and how do Portuguese companies use them to attract international Master students and recent graduates?*
- RQ2: *How are the EB strategies perceived by international Master students at Portuguese universities and how successful are they?*

These research questions are designed to explore both the supply side (Portuguese companies) and the demand side (international graduates) of the talent retention challenge in Portugal. This mixed-method study leverages the Employer Branding Roadmap Model (Minchington, 2006) to structure the qualitative analysis through interviews, while the Theoretical Framework Model of Employer Branding by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) informs the quantitative analysis of survey data. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive approach to understanding and evaluating the EB efforts in the Portuguese context. In pursuit of the answers to the above research questions, this study has the following objectives:

In pursuit of answering the above research questions, this study aims to achieve the following objectives: (1) to identify the specific employer branding strategies currently being employed by Portuguese companies; (2) to examine how these companies tailor their employer branding strategies to attract international Master students and recent graduates; (3) to assess the perceptions of international Master students at Portuguese universities regarding the effectiveness and appeal of these strategies; and (4) to determine how successful the current employer branding efforts are in meeting the expectations of international Master students.

These objectives are aligned with the overarching goal of the study: to fill the identified gap in the literature and provide actionable insights that can help Portuguese companies improve their EB strategies to better attract and retain international talent.

This study is designed to explore the EB strategies of Portuguese companies and their effectiveness in attracting and retaining international Master's graduates from Portuguese universities. The scope of the research encompasses two primary target groups: large Portuguese companies that engage in EB activities and international students who are

currently enrolled in or have recently graduated from Master's programs at Portuguese universities. By focusing on these specific groups, the study aims to provide detailed insights into the dynamics of talent retention in Portugal.

This research study is organized into six main chapters, each of which builds upon the previous to develop a comprehensive analysis of EB strategies in Portuguese companies and their impact on retaining international Master's graduates. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a detailed literature review, which is divided into three key sections. The first section explores the concept of EB, examining the EVP, its strategic role in organizations, and its integration with modern communication tools and generational differences. The second section of the literature review focuses on talent management and human migration, discussing successful strategies for attracting and retaining talent, with a particular emphasis on the global context of graduate migration. The final section examines the corporate attractiveness of Portugal, analyzing macroeconomic indicators, regional investment appeal, and the influence of governmental policies on the employment landscape for international talent.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, detailing the mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative analyses. It explains the research design, the data collection methods, and the frameworks used to guide the analysis, specifically the Employer Branding Roadmap model (Minchington, 2006) and the Theoretical Framework of Employer Branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This chapter also addresses ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the data results, with a division between quantitative findings from the survey conducted with international Master's students and qualitative insights from interviews with EB professionals at Portuguese companies. These findings are analyzed using the theoretical frameworks introduced earlier in the thesis.

In Chapter 5, these findings are analyzed using the theoretical frameworks presented in chapter 2, discussing the observations based on the existing literature and considering the implications for EB practices in Portugal. This chapter also explores the practical applications of the findings for companies and policymakers.

Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings, reflecting on the research questions, and offering recommendations for enhancing EB strategies to better

attract and retain international talent in Portugal. The chapter also suggests avenues for future research, addressing the gaps and limitations identified in this study.

2. Literature review

2.1 Employer Branding

The following chapter will be the focus of this literature review concerning the topic of EB and different research areas connected to the subject in question. First, the concept of EB will be introduced. Second, we then move on to EVP and introduce different models accordingly. Third, we highlight different approaches and roadmaps to EB strategies which is followed by, fifth, the relation between EB and strategic communication. Sixth, after briefly introducing generational theory, we will look at the impact of generational differences on EB and the workplace. Seventh, the role of social media regarding EB is presented and different approaches illustrated with examples. And finally, eighth, EB and new technologies are reviewed, highlighting especially the influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

2.1.1 The concept of Employer Branding

This subchapter introduces the origins of the concept of EB and offers different definitions that evolved over time. Then the relevance of EB will be addressed and its components in identity, culture and vision explored. It is followed by a distinction between internal and external EB, with an elaboration on further details regarding internal branding and internal marketing as well as integrated marketing and corporate branding. To conclude this subchapter, a cross-cultural and geographic perspective will allow for a globalized view on this concept.

Employment decisions in the 20th century were influenced by localized factors such as community reputation, word-of-mouth, and conventional indicators like job stability and security (Goldin, 1994; Maslow, 1997). The concept of EB, although formally introduced later, finds its origins in the mid-20th century amid transformative shifts in the job market and societal dynamics (Gruenberg, 1980), that shaped a corporate culture. During this period, significant changes in demographics and evolving societal expectations reshaped the nature of work. Employment transcended mere transactional arrangements, carrying substantial societal weight as it influenced individual identities and statuses within communities (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977).

Societal shifts, including demographic changes and evolving lifestyle expectations, played a pivotal role in redefining the employment landscape and the employee's work values (Kalleberg & Marsden, 2019). The significance attached to being employed by a specific organization or within a particular industry underwent notable transformations. Employment became more than a contractual agreement (Keynes, 1937); it became intertwined with broader societal and cultural factors, influencing individuals' identities and their roles within communities. This historical context laid the groundwork for the eventual formalization of EB as a strategic organizational practice (Barrow & Ambler, 1996). It recognizes the multifaceted nature of employment within the broader socio-economic milieu, acknowledging that the mid-20th century served as a crucial juncture in the evolution of how individuals perceive and choose employers (Namely, Inc, 2018). This paradigm shift reflects a strategic response to the evolving dynamics of the job market. Organizations recognized the need to actively shape their image to attract and retain talent (Ogilvie & Stork, 2003). Its formal introduction at the end of the 20th century brought benefits such as enhanced talent attraction and retention.

The concept of EB first emerged in 1990, when Simon Barrow, at that time Chairman of People in Business, presented it at a scientific conference organized by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Initially, Barrow (1990) defined EB as “a set of functional, economic, and psychological benefits attributed to employment” (p. 4). Since then, the global management community has embraced the concept and more in-depth research was carried out. Barrow himself, in a collaboration with his colleague Ambler, officially introduced EB in an academic paper six years later. They defined EB as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with employing company” (Barrow & Ambler, 1996, p. 187).

With less focus on the packaged benefits for the employee, Backhaus and Tikoo then carried out more research from the employer's perspective and argued that EB is “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity” (p. 117) and “a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors” (p. 502) (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). These definitions underline the requirement of companies to appeal to potential employees as unique, desirable and better than the competing companies who offer comparable jobs. What for a long time was not considered relevant, has eventually become one of the most important character traits as an employer, according to the authors.

In the same year Sullivan (2004) highlighted EB as “a targeted long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm” (p. 27). In his research he focused mainly on the strategic approach and path to EB, which will be further discussed in chapter 2.1.3.

Comparable to Backhaus’ and Tikoo’s first definition (2004) of a unique identity, Martin et al. (2011) defines EB as “a generalized recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing a high-quality employment experience and distinctive organizational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to other” (pp. 3618-3619). This focus on the recipient’s awareness of the employer’s impeccable reputation describes in detail the external impact of satisfied employees.

Biswas (2013) later wrote about EB as “the image or face of a subject” (p. 163), which together with the organization that employs people can be called EB. Conducting EB eventually leads to an established employer brand, which Backhaus (2016) later argued as it acting as a critical component of corporate identity and influences the perception of potential and current employees as well as the wider public. For this approach all stakeholders are being considered, not only current or future employees.

More recently, Veloso (2018) comparably defined EB as “a long-term strategy towards an audience to manage the reputation and perception of employees, potential employees and other stakeholders towards a given company” (p. 29), which constitutes another important focus of this literature review. The concept includes strategic efforts and measures that companies use to actively build and strengthen an attractive employer, later converting into tangible benefits (Dowling, 1993; Keller, 1993). More specifically, these are marketing, human resources and communication strategies that aim to emphasize corporate culture, values, the work environment and the overall employee experience (Dell & Ainspan, 2001).

The relevance of EB is supported in the literature by the assumption that an “investment in an organization’s human capital is a precursor for subsequent organizational success, especially in such a competitive global market” (King & Grace, 2008, p. 369). A positive employer brand is seen as a key contributor to an organization's performance as the workforce characterizes the employer (Schneider, 1987).

When looking for new talent, companies often talk about finding the "perfect person-organization fit" (Cable & Judge, 1996; Giehlen et al., 2020) between their values, company culture and candidate expectations. It is about attracting candidates as an employer brand

who not only have the required skills but are also in line with the values and corporate culture to ensure a long-term and successful working relationship (Giehlen et al., 2020). Is the new colleague a good fit for the company and does it suit them? This topic will be further discussed in chapter 2.2.1.

The examination of the literature includes an in-depth look at the fundamental components of the employer brand, which is also referred to as the "DNA of the company" (SAGE, 2023). Following this metaphor, the fundamental elements that shape the identity, culture and vision of a company and thus form the unique composition of its employer brand are analyzed by the company.

Brand and corporate identity are terms that can mistakenly be mixed, while they mean different things. Brand identity is about establishing specific features and values of a product that stakeholders associate with the brand. Corporate identity is about the characteristics, values, and focus of the company that made the product (Melewar & Karaosmanoğlu, 2006).

Establishing a robust brand identity is crucial to secure long-lasting competitive advantages and effectively distinguish and managing brands (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2004). Well-crafted it can foster positive perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors among diverse groups of stakeholders. Consumers, for instance, perceive added value in products when a company possesses a unique, coherent, and distinctive identity (Coleman et al., 2011), leading to increased preference and loyalty (Johnson and Zinkhan, 1990; Simões et al., 2005). Moreover, a compelling brand identity enhances an organization's appeal as an employer serving as a vessel for a better corporate identity. While boosting employee motivation and also attracting high-quality applicants, a strong brand identity has a positive effect on the employer brand (Melewar, 2003).

Organizational culture is described as the collective assumptions, values, and norms that influence the behavior of an organization's members (Zheng et al., 2010). The way people and groups interact with each other, with customers and with stakeholders is influenced by organizational culture. In most cases, it also has an impact on the extent to which employees identify with their organization, which in turn leads to higher productivity and lower employee turnover. (Schrodt, 2002). Other than organizational culture, frequently used synonyms in business are "corporate culture," "workplace culture," and "business culture". The aforementioned organizational identity and organizational culture are two

factors that contribute to the positive or negative reputation and attractiveness of an employer (Jiang & Iles, 2011; Sageder et al., 2016)

Another important component when discussing an organization's EB is its vision statement. The vision is the desired and aspired future state of the company, which conveys an ideal picture of what the organization should look like in the future (Papulova, 2014; Suranga, 2014). It ensures continuity and stability and helps to reduce the complexity of the organization. A company's vision also serves as a pivotal component in the field of EB, representing its future aspirations and guiding principles. Scientifically, the vision aligns with the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) – further discussed in chapter 2.1.2 –, influencing organizational culture and attracting talent that resonates with shared values. It communicates a compelling narrative, fostering a sense of purpose and engagement among employees (Schrodt, 2002; Yousf & Khurshid, 2021). A well-articulated vision contributes to a positive Employee Experience (EX) – see subchapter 2.1.2 –, while reinforcing the employer brand. This alignment cultivates a work environment where employees connect with the broader organizational mission and corporate identity, fostering loyalty and commitment, crucial elements in attracting and retaining top talent within the competitive employment landscape (Schrodt, 2002).

It is important to emphasize that "THE employer brand" does not exist as a uniform concept, but rather every nuance that differentiates an organization from others is expressed in the unique creation of its employer brand (Theurer et al., 2018). Similar to consumer branding, the literature points out that EB pursues different perspectives as it addresses both internal and external target groups.

Internal EB (Foster et al., 2010; Staniec & Kalińska-Kula, 2021) focuses primarily on employee retention, as satisfied, happy and loyal employees (Fredrickson, 2000; Kahn, 1990) are considered crucial for the sustainable development and positioning of an employer brand: low employee turnover and loyal employees are usually the reward (King & Grace, 2008). In contrast, external EB aims to create an appealing image on the labor market and thereby clearly differentiate itself from other companies (Cable & Turban, 2001; De Stobbeleir et al., 2016).

The interface between internal and external EB is identified as critical to the overall success of the concept (Ahmed et al., 2022). While internal EB aims to strengthen the

internal corporate culture, external EB strives for a differentiated positioning on the labor market.

Foster et al. (2010) emphasize the significance and interconnectedness of corporate branding, internal branding, and EB. While earlier research detected a stronger focus on external branding, internal branding is now considered by many authors as equally important (Foster et al., 2010).

Internal EB and internal marketing refer to efforts to promote corporate culture and values within the organization to engage and motivate employees (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). This is the only way to ensure that employees present the company to the outside world in the best possible way (Wieseke et al., 2009) and that they know the company's goals so that all employees are pulling in the same direction. This strengthens brand loyalty and increases employee productivity by living an organizational identity and shared organizational culture (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Possible negative influences are EB messages that are inconsistent with the company's organizational identity and therefore facilitate its destabilization as employees will revise their image and understanding of the organization. But not only insiders but also new employees who just entered the organization will regard inconsistencies as broken brand promises (Robinson et al., 1994). As a consequence, the psychological contract was violated shortly after accepting a new position and no initial bond was formed (Robinson & Rousseau, 2000).

The psychological contract is an unwritten mutual understanding between an employee and the employer, reciprocal expectations which then shapes trust and commitment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A contract breach and inaccurate messaging will, according to research, eventually lead to employees quitting and other negative organizational outcomes. Maxwell and Knox (2009) as well as Bodderas et al. (2011) have conducted studies that highlight the positive outcome of internal EB and marketing regarding attributes of a united employer brand, which in turn will lead to a strong organization identity and satisfied employees.

After discussing internal EB, the perspective now shifts to external EB. The employer image decides over sustained competitive advantage (Wright et al., 1994). When executed effectively, external EB embodies attributes that are valuable, rare, and challenging to

replicate (Cascio & Boudreau, 2012), which will be specified further when discussing the EVP in chapter 2.1.2.

Together with the product brand (i.e., the brand of the goods and/or services produced), the employer brand forms the corporate brand. While EB specifically targets the company's reputation as an employer, corporate branding focuses on the image of the organization as a whole (Cable and Turban, 2003). Therefore, each organization must comprehend its reputation by all stakeholders (Cravens & Oliver, 2006). Is the organization's image in harmony with its identity? Corporate branding emphasizes the external image of the company and its values. It aims to gain the trust and loyalty of clients, investors and the general public – mainly with regard to its products or services (Fombrun, 1996).

Integrated marketing, on the other hand, strives to seamlessly connect external and internal efforts to present a consistent image internally and externally (Shimp, 2010). The prerequisite for this holistic approach is once again the corporate identity, which defines the company's values and goals as well as the uniform yet slightly customized communication for each channel.

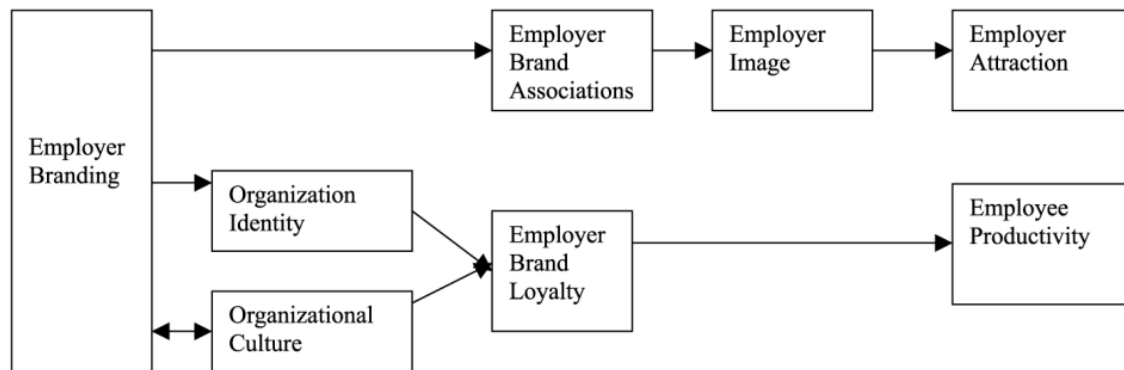
The authors Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) created the “Theoretic Framework Model of Employer Branding” (see figure 1) and split up the outcome of EB into two parts: employer attraction and employee productivity. Employer attraction – the external part – is reached, when the associations with an employer brand create an image of the employer which, in the best case, leads to an attractive place to work. Employee productivity – the internal part – on the other hand requires a high level of loyalty towards the employer brand, through identification and commitment. This in turn is due to two factors, which include all employees: the identity and culture of an organization decide about the employer brand loyalty. According to this model, it also leads to an increased employee productivity, a stronger willingness to work and longer company loyalty. In addition, it is assumed that organizational loyalty is linked to organizational culture.

Gifford et al. (2002) have shown that improved quality of employment experience through organizational culture increases loyalty to the organization. Moreover, the theoretical framework model attributes both EB and organizational culture a two-way relationship, as both either positively or negatively influence the other (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). According to Sullivan (2002), identification with the employer brand ought to be based on information about the existing organizational culture. Every variable in this model

is decisive for the EB success of an organization and managers are required to be aware developing and maintaining it (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework Model of Employer Branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 505)



A challenge in EB is considering the different cultural backgrounds of all stakeholders involved. Local and global employees and applicants have different motivators and expectations of employers due to cultural differences. Cultural factors such as work ethic, hierarchy, flexibility, recognition and work-life balance significantly influence job expectations (Harris & Moran, 2000) and the likelihood of an application (Gowan, 2004). Therefore, it is essential that cross-cultural EB considers and understands local cultural differences in order to effectively attract talented candidates in an increasingly globalized world.

For an EB responsible in the HR or External Communication department hiring cultural experts with expertise in the respective market can prove to be very helpful in shaping a fitting EB approach. Caligiuri et al. (2010) highlights that “companies should consider crafting their recruitment message to fit the cultural norms of the country where they are recruiting and also encourage their recruiting staff members to tailor their messages to fit the candidates they are trying to attract” (p. 137). Standardization when recruiting internationally is not recommended and does not lead to new top talent employees (Ma & Allen, 2009).

Geographic talent mismatch is a phenomenon where organizations are faced with an imbalance of talent in different geographic locations (Ihlanfeldt & Sjoquist, 1998). Some

regions and some professions may have a greater demand for certain skills than others (e.g., agriculture, health care). Similar to various cultural motivators, EB has proven to help mitigate this misalignment by targeting the needs and expectations of candidates in these regions (Marinescu & Rathelot, 2016). The impact of globalization and graduate migration on EB will be further discussed in chapter 2.2.2.

It can be concluded that a strategically thought-out and effective EB is not just a “nice-to-have” option, but a decisive lever for long-term corporate success (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Companies that recognize the importance of an attractive employer brand and take appropriate measures to position themselves sustainably in a highly competitive environment, ultimately lay the foundation for long-term employee retention and company performance. To ensure this, the company offers a set of values to its employees, which is known under the term EVP and will be introduced in the following subchapter 2.1.2.

2.1.2 Employer Value Proposition

This subchapter will first explain the concept of EVP, followed by discussing its attributes and the concept of employee experience. Four models will then help outline the importance of the subject: EB model for SMEs, the recommended EB model, the EB wheel and finally the EB Excellence Framework.

Applicants are often asked what added value they can bring to the company and why they should get the job (Williams et al., 2019). But not only candidates during the interview process but also the companies increasingly are asked to present their value and name the elements of their attractive employment offer to the potential future employee. It has also been described as "give and take" (Adams, 2022), which characterizes the relationship between employer and employee in a given company, sets expectations for performance and behavior, and then determines the rewards for meeting those expectations.

The EVP forms the fundamental basis of EB. According to Edwards (2010), values and impacts emerge as organizations define and meticulously handle their desired employment experience to offer an attractive EVP. When introducing the concept of EB, Ambler and Barrow (1996) defined EVP as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (p. 187), elaborating further on the nature of said benefits. One of the most recent definitions of EVP described it as “a set of attributes that the labor market and employees

perceive as the value they will gain from their work” (Gartner, 2019, p. 67). While this definition does not specify the nature of the attributes it shines a light on both the internal and external perspectives.

In 2012 the scientists Kucherov and Zavyalova described the “Employer Value Attributes” as being of potentially economic, psychological, functional or organizational nature. First, the highly attractive economic attributes as part of a company’s EVP are, among others, work hours arrangement, high salary, a just bonus and reward system and reliability in job security. Second, the psychological attributes include a strong corporate culture, healthy workplace relationships, collaborative teamwork and an unbiased evaluation of work performance. Third, it is all about functionality and attributes name such as job responsibilities, training perspectives, paths for professional development and opportunities to leverage employee’s capabilities. And fourth, the organizational attributes matter as to its leadership in the market segment, international scope of activity, the historical company narrative, the brand prestige, the reputation of its executives and their leadership approach (Kucherov & Zavylova, 2012).

Numerous studies have predominantly focused on exploring EVP attributes related to content, such as instrumental and symbolic image dimensions (Saylan & Eroğlu, 2019). Notably, brand-related elements, referred to as process attributes, which constitute the essence of EB theory, have been largely overlooked. The findings in a study by Kanwal and Van Hoyer (2023) suggest that process attributes, encompassing distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus of the employer brand, serve as valuable factors for fostering employees' connection with their organization. Moreover, distinctiveness and consistency emerge as especially crucial in enhancing employees' perceptions of attractiveness and their positive advocacy for the company.

According to the global Randstad Employer Brand Research 2024 report, the top five reasons and EVP attributes why job seekers choose an employer are salary and benefits (its significance increases with age), a good work-life balance (higher valued by women and Generation X), a long-term job security (the higher the level of education the more important), a pleasant work atmosphere (prioritized more by women and older generations) and finally equity (higher valued by women and Gen Z), which is 2024’s runner-up. Among the top EVP drivers there are some significant regional differences. In Europe a pleasant work atmosphere ranks much higher than anywhere else and while globally a good work-

life balance is highly valued this is not the case in Latin America (Randstad, 2024). These preferences have been relatively stable over the past years.

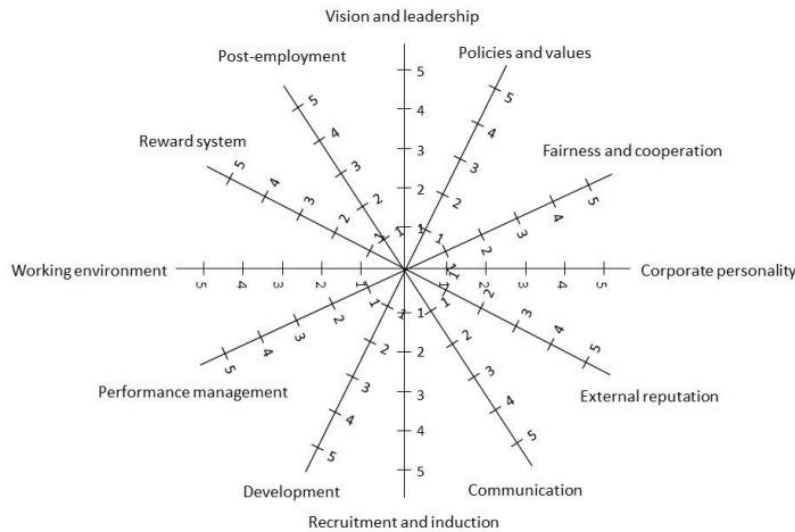
The Employee Experience (EEX) is a pivotal element and commitment within an organization's EVP. It has evolved significantly and gained prominence in organizational psychology, management studies, and human resources. Researchers Sutton and Griffin (2004) pioneered the exploration of EEX, introducing 'pre-entry expectancy' and 'post-entry experience.' Pre-entry expectations involve anticipations before entering an organization, while post-entry experience encompasses interactions throughout the employee journey. EEX is also a managerial philosophy prioritizing employees and understanding workplace factors' impact (Plaskoff, 2017), since an optimal EEX has been found to correlate with excellent customer experience (Tavis, 2020).

Jacob Morgan defines EEX from a human resources perspective as the cultural, physical, and technological environment that shapes a positive workplace experience (Morgan, 2017). Thereby, EEX includes all the experiences that an employee lives through from application to termination within a company (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013; Gallup, 2018). Though linked to employee engagement, EEX differs in being the sustainable means to achieve it (Gallup, 2018). Based on a research study by IBM, a so-called "Employee Experience Index" was also designed, which measures five factors: belonging, purpose, achievement, happiness and vigor (IBM & Globoforce, 2016). This is intended to measure the EEX individually within the company and to find opportunities for improvement that ultimately lead to greater well-being and increased performance.

The "Employer Brand Wheel" introduced by People in Business (PiB) (Barrow & Mosley, 2005), is a visual representation capturing the essential elements that shape the employee experience of the employer brand. Illustrated in figure 2, it serves as a valuable tool for corporate internal workshops by offering insights into the current perception of the company by employees. It not only depicts the present organizational image but also provides a structured framework for discussions on the desired future state of the company. Communication and relationships are central in the workplace and their visualized influence on the employee experience help the company to offer a fitting EVP. The wheel is instrumental in facilitating conversations about the company's evolving identity and aspirations.

Figure 2

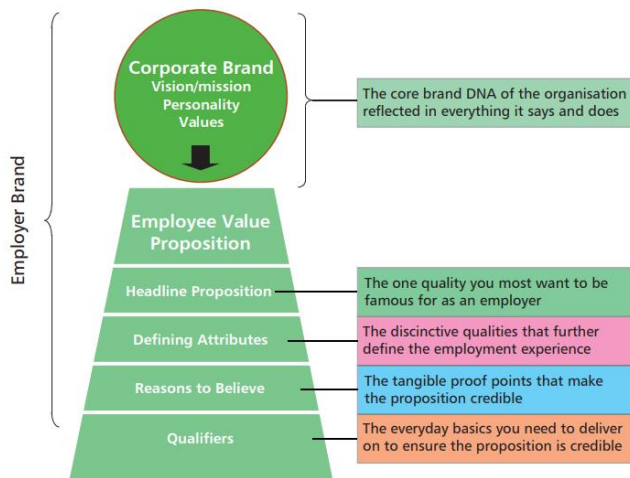
The Employer Brand Wheel (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, p. 9)



Furthermore, the “Recommended Employer Brand Model” by Barrow and Mosley (2005) is designed to showcase the many different variables involved in shaping an employer brand (see figure 3). One part is the corporate brand with its core DNA, which then has direct impact on the EVP as the other part. The EVP is itself divided into four different elements: the headline proposition, the defining attributes, reasons to believe and qualifiers which together generate the EVP. The corporate brand together with the EVP builds the employer brand. The aforementioned process attributes within EVP are highlighted in this model with regards to one known top quality, distinctive qualities further defining the employment experience, tangible proof as to why believe the given EVP and its content as well as the provided framework that upkeeps the promised EVP.

Figure 3

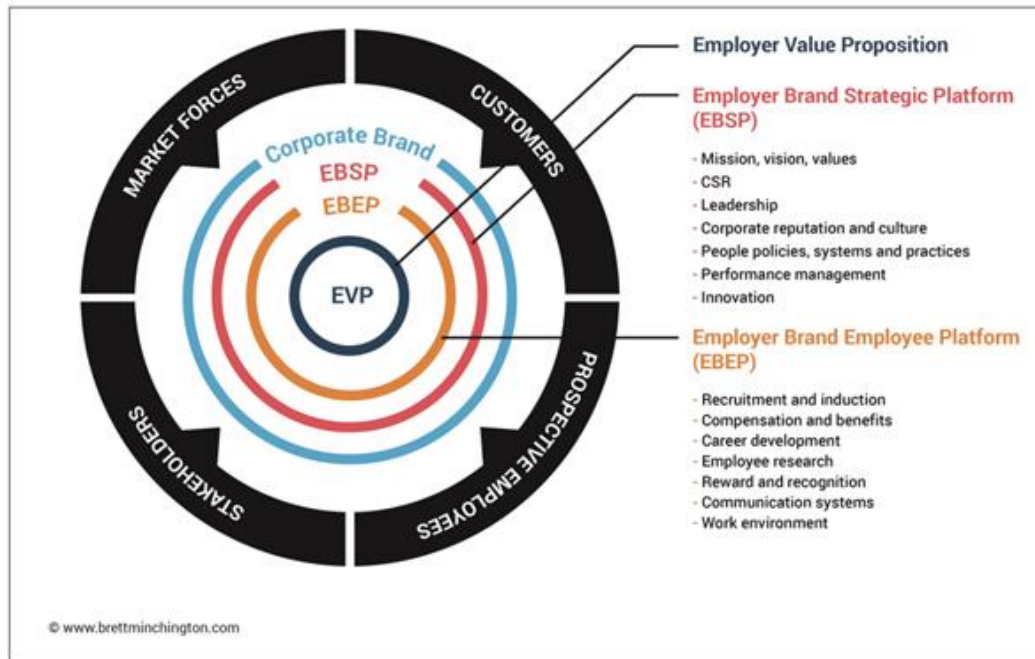
The Recommended Employer Brand Model (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, p. 23)



In 2006 Minchington created “The Employer Brand Excellence Framework” (figure 4) to assist organizational leaders in implementing measures and strategies for the management and evolution of their employer brand. The multiple layered circle contains EVP in the center, encircled by the Employer Brand Employee Platform (EBEP), the Employer Brand Strategic Platform (EBSP) and as the outer layer the corporate brand. EBEP is meant to outline several structures and information regarding the recruitment process and information for employees to enhance internal EB. The circle closer to the corporate brand is the EBSP which defines the different elements of a company’s strategy like corporate culture, vision, leadership and corporate social responsibility. Finally, on the corporate brand there are forces that have a significant impact on it: the market forces, customers, stakeholders and prospective employees. When designing an EB approach the strategy is recommended to consider all the different elements internally and externally. This will be further discussed in subchapter 2.1.3.

Figure 4

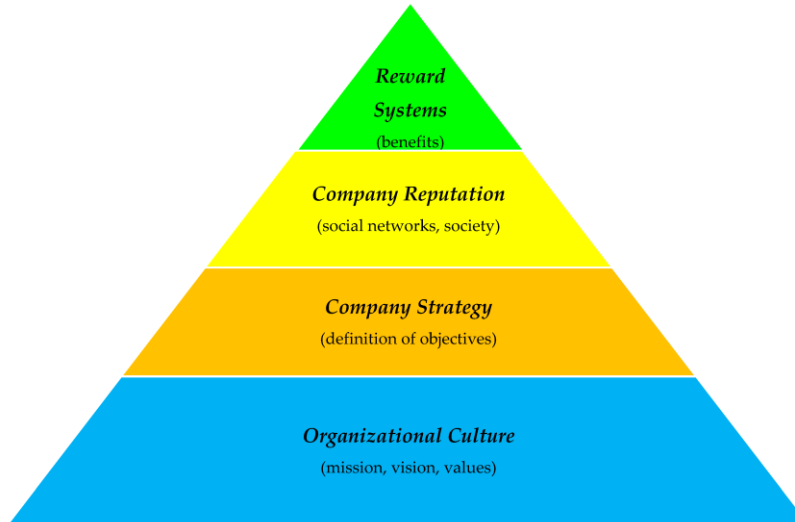
The Employer Brand Excellence Framework (Minchington, 2018, p. 50)



Specifically tailored for small and medium enterprises (SME) Monteiro et al. (2020) introduced a novel Employer Branding model (see figure 5). Illustrated as a pyramid inspired by Maslow's (1943) figure, the model aims to assist SMEs in implementing strategies for talent attraction and retention, minimizing costs associated with recruitment, and enhancing competitiveness. The pyramid emphasizes a reward system at the top level, highlighting the importance of keeping employees motivated, trained, and engaged for optimal productivity. Reputation management follows, acknowledging the impact of opinions and experiences on talent retention, especially in the era of social media dissemination. The model emphasizes the significance of organizational strategy, considering available resources and adapting to market changes. Rooted in organizational culture, the model underscores the role of mission, values, and vision in clarifying an organization's purpose and objectives for its employees.

Figure 5

Employer Branding Model for SMEs (Monteiro et al., 2020, p. 10)



2.1.3 Employer Branding Strategy

This subchapter on EB strategy first explores fundamental concepts such as business strategy, strategic management, and an EB concept with its ten measures. It further investigates eight key elements crucial for a successful employer brand, including attention to the attraction economy. Theoretical perspectives, such as the Resource-Based View, Signaling Theory, and the Theory of Social Identity, are introduced. Additionally, the chapter examines the integration of EB strategy with overall business strategy, process strategy, and an integrated internal mix on three strategic levels. Further topics include an EB Roadmap, Business Model, and Ecosystem Model within the broader framework of an Integrated Strategy Model.

A well thought-out and implemented EB strategy helps the company to be perceived as an attractive employer, which in turn helps to attract and retain highly qualified employees (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). The word “strategy” comes from the Latin word “stratagem” and can generally be defined as the outline of the methods (resources) by which the goals (ends) can be attained (Heuser, 2010; Simeone, 2020). It originated in the Roman military context to describe a military strategy but eventually was introduced to business context by Porter (1980) as a “broad formula for how a business is going to compete, what its goals should be, and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals” (p. 24). It is a systematic

approach that coordinates resources, activities and decisions in order to fulfill a predetermined purpose. Organizations can be divided into three main levels of strategy: Corporate, business and functional strategy (Vancil & Lorange, 1990; Johnson & Scholes, 1993). For creating an EB strategy all three levels have to be considered and involved.

In addition, Sezões (2017) highlights the importance of a robust business strategy and the multiple benefits that can result, including tapping into new sources of recruitment, increasing employee engagement, differentiating from competitors and enhancing reputation and social responsibility. The business strategy comprises a company's long-term plan to achieve competitive advantages and goals (Teece, 2010). Strategic management steps into the execution phase and involves the formulation, implementation and evaluation of these strategies, taking into account resources and capabilities. It is a dynamic process that aligns a company with its external environment and promotes adaptability and sustainable success through well-founded decisions (Teece et al., 1997).

In view of the increasing importance of the EB concept and its applicability in companies, Brett Minchington (2010) presented ten measures that need to be developed, reviewed or revised. These include: (1) the precise definition of the brand experience, purpose and impact on employees; (2) focus and prioritization, with excellence in line with strategic objectives; (3) a revision of the business model and organizational structure; (4) the strategic positioning of EB at the executive level; (5) the expansion of networks and business relationships; (6) the integration of sales and business development; (7) the reduction of duplication and bureaucracy for employees; (8) a critical review of resource allocation, taking into account flexible working models; (9) strategic talent management to maximize returns; and (10) the development of close partnerships with suppliers to ensure a coherent employer brand.

Building a steady and positively perceived employer brand requires considerable investment on the road to business success. Almost two decades ago, Sullivan (2004) identified eight key elements that every successful employer brand has. These include: (1) establishing a culture of sharing and continuous improvement, (2) achieving a balance between effective management and high productivity, (3) gaining public recognition, for example through inclusion in Great Place to Work lists, (4) employees proactively sharing their individual stories from the corporate context, (5) achieving status as a topic of conversation, (6) becoming a role model and benchmark company, (7) raising awareness of

best corporate practices among potential applicants, and (8) using metrics to evaluate brand building. A holistic consideration and implementation of these elements thus form the basis for an effective design and implementation of an employer brand strategy that promotes long-term business success. If implemented correctly, the high investments lead to a high return of investment (ROI) and are demonstrably amortized (Minchington, 2006).

Over the years the narrative of the job market changed from attention economy to attraction economy (Simon, 1992). Companies must appeal attractive to employees as the demographic change in many sectors allows a greater choice from the jobs offered. During the ongoing “war for talent” (Chambers et al., 2001; Beechler & Woodward, 2009) it is also the goal of an employer to attract the best talent instead of merely marketing their brand name for the public’s attention.

There are different theories in a strategic EB approach, four of which will be explained in the next paragraphs: resource-based view theory; signaling theory; theory of social identity and brand equity theory.

The resource-based view (RBV) is a concept in strategic management on which the field of EB is grounded (Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). It focuses on a company's unique resources and capabilities as sources of long-term competitive advantage (Peteraf, 1993; Acedo et al., 2006). According to this concept, a company's competitive position depends on its ability to accumulate and utilize resources that are valuable, rare and difficult to replicate with reputation being considered as a very valuable and intangible resource. The RBV emphasizes internal factors and argues that a company's competitive advantage lies primarily in its internal resources, rather than in the external environment (Peteraf, 1993).

Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) explores how people and companies exchange information in order to reduce uncertainty and create trust. In the corporate context, signaling means actions or characteristics that provide credible indications of the quality, intentions or capabilities of a company. The signaling concept is particularly relevant in HR management and EB. Here, companies use various signals such as branding, employee benefits and recruitment practices to emphasize their attractiveness as an employer (e.g., Banerjee et al., 2018; Slaughter et al., 2014).

The theory of social identity developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) examines how people derive their self-image and social identity from their association with social groups. It assumes that people categorize themselves and others into social groups,

which leads to preference and prioritization of one's own group and to a potential bias against other groups. In an organizational context, social identity theory helps to understand how employees identify with the respective company and employer – therefore an essential theory to consider in EB – and how identification with the brand and corporate culture influences attitudes and behavior. Newer research however criticizes oversimplification and little attention to characteristic diversity among individuals of one group (Brown, 2000; Huddy, 2001).

According to Schulz and Brandmeyer (1989), brand equity is made up of all positive and negative associations of stakeholders in relation to the brand and the resulting economic data of the competition. Bekmeier-Feuerhahn (2013) describes the brand equity theory as consisting of brand strength and brand profit. Brand strength describes the driving force from the individual intangible appreciation for the brand (measurable in brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty) and brand profit, the economic gains resulting from the brand. A positive brand equity contributes to (future) customer preference, loyalty, the ability to achieve premium prices and drives successful EB (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Keller et al., 2011).

Barrow and Mosley (2005) presented nine core principles as part of their model "Employer branding strategy from and to business strategy". Firstly, the EB strategy should be formulated in terms that are recognized by senior management (1). A forward-looking discussion with supporters and the identification of potential objections are crucial (2). Thirdly, a clear identification of the challenges to be addressed by the strategy is necessary, such as a poor external image, recruitment difficulties or low staff retention (3). Integrating the strategy into the overall business plan and demonstrating its contribution to achieving overarching goals is the fourth point (4). The fifth principle is to explain how the strategy complements and coordinates existing initiatives in the areas of human resources, marketing and communications (5). Providing benchmarking evidence that illustrates how other companies, particularly competitors, have benefited from this approach is the sixth principle (6). A realistic assessment of the desired results in terms of costs and added value, including key figures for measuring success, is the seventh principle (7). The clear presentation of the time and financial effort required to implement the strategy and the expected return is the eighth principle (8). Finally, the authors emphasize the ninth principle, which involves highlighting or even dramatizing the benefits of success. Emotional commitment and gut

feeling are particularly addressed here, as even sober investment decisions can be influenced by them (9).

In order to build an employer brand and develop an EB image, organizations have to start the process to do so. Literature introduces us to many different approaches, from which every organization has to identify their own approach to an EB image and strategy.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe the EB process in three steps. The first step is to develop a "value proposition" that summarizes the unique offerings for current and potential employees. Careful research looks at the company culture, management style, employee qualities, the existing image of the company and impressions of product or service quality. The synthesis of this data forms a clear value framework that serves as an authentic representation of what the company offers. This value proposition represents its core message and forms the basis for subsequent brand communication.

The second step of external marketing starts with the company communicating its value proposition to the target groups – potential candidates, recruiters and employment agencies. This external branding not only attracts the desired target audience, but also harmonizes with the overall company and product branding. The coherence of all brand messages is central to effective EB as it ensures consistency with the broader corporate identity and strategic objectives.

Internal marketing or internal branding completes the process by embedding the employer brand into the corporate culture. This third step, which is critical to maintaining the brand promise to current employees, integrates the value proposition into the structure of the workplace. Internal marketing within EB aims to foster a workforce that is committed to the company's values and goals and aligns individual aspirations with the company's overarching mission (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Ahmed et al. (2003) have argued in their work that, when developing an EB strategy, the organization needs to pay more attention to an integrated internal mix of three groups taking place at all three levels of strategy. First, the top management group is responsible for support, empowerment, vision, leadership and a strategic and enabling environment. Second, the business processing group takes care of staffing, operational or process changes and installs incentive systems. And third the cross-functional group involves HR, internal communications, corporate communications and marketing (Ahmed et al., 2003).

One of the contemporary frameworks for developing an EB strategy is the “Employer Brand Roadmap” by Minchington (2006). This roadmap outlines a structured approach to strategically create and manage EB, divided into four key phases, namely concept, design, integration, and evaluation phase.

The (1) concept phase is where the EB process begins by defining clear objectives for the employer brand, particularly aimed at talent attraction, retention, and engagement. Key stakeholders are identified, and a specialized EB team is established to manage the process. In this phase, current EB practices are reviewed (if they exist), and a detailed research analyzing both internal and external factors is conducted to develop the EVP. The results of this research help identify the target audience and formulate a comprehensive EB strategy.

In the (2) design phase the focus shifts to collaboration. A coalition of internal stakeholders is built, including HR, marketing, and senior management, to ensure the employer brand aligns with overall corporate strategy. At this stage, a clear business case for the employer brand is developed, which includes setting the budget and expected outcomes. The EVP is then designed, along with collateral materials, ensuring that the messaging reflects the company's core values and appeals to both current and prospective employees. Creating an EB framework integrates recruitment and retention practices into the larger corporate goals follows, which later then guarantees the consistency and strength of the employer brand.

The third step on this roadmap is the (3) integration phase. It involves the activation of the designed EB strategy. The brand architecture is put into action, aligning it with existing HR management systems and organizational processes. A comprehensive communication plan is launched, ensuring all stakeholders are engaged and the EVP is actively promoted both internally and externally. Employee engagement is critical during this phase as the success of the EB strategy hinges on the participation of the workforce. Ongoing management is also part of this phase, involving continuous monitoring, updates, and adjustments to ensure the employer brand remains aligned with evolving business goals and employee expectations. This stage is where leadership plays an ongoing role, guiding the EB strategy to keep it dynamic and effective.

And finally, during the (4) evaluation phase the focus shifts to measuring the success of the EB strategy. This involves setting up KPIs and metrics to assess how well the employer brand is performing in attracting, retaining, and engaging talent. ROI measurements are

conducted to determine the financial impact of the EB initiatives. In this phase, the results are reviewed with senior management, and adjustments are made as necessary to fine-tune the strategy for long-term success.

This approach is comparable to the one developed by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) but adding the last phase of measuring the return on investment and reviewing the results of the EB strategy. In the same publication Minchington (2006), also emphasized to measure the investment in EB effort, which will, in most cases, lead to a high ROI. According to his research and experience the investment of resources into creating an employer brand strategy is economically worthwhile.

Minchington developed the “Employer Brand Business Model” (2017) with the aim of helping managers to embed the employer brand as a business function. The model (see figure 6) is used to initiate discussions with executives on how to harmonize the employer brand with the overarching business strategy. In addition, the model enables the identification of actions that organizations can take to prepare for upcoming changes in the workforce that could impact both the organization and the industry over the next three to five years. The author also recommends conducting an audit with business leaders to apply the model more effectively. This serves to assess the state of the business and identify organizational gaps that may affect the strategic connection of customers, resources (applicants, employees, freelancers, contractors and on-call workers) and profits.

Figure 6

Employer Brand Business Model (Minchington, 2018, p. 49)



One year later Minchington (2018) also developed “The Employer Branding Ecosystem Model” (figure 7) over a five-year span, offering a fresh perspective on the elements shaping EB development. This model provides insights into key focal points for employer brand development, guiding organizations in strategic enhancements. The EB ecosystem being center focus, six different areas of its ecosystem are then connected and further explained in its parts: industry, trends, employer brand equity, employer brand attributes, EVPs and employment lifecycle.

Figure 7

The Employer Branding Ecosystem Model (Minchington, 2018, p. 47)



2.1.4 Employer Branding and Strategic Communication

After defining strategic communication, in the following consistent EB messaging will be explored. Therefore, the approach of integrated communication channels is taken and explained, while later backed up with research on differentiation on the job market. The current battle for young talent and the measure corporate influencers, used by companies, is derived from existing literature and illustrating examples.

Having a strategic communication approach is integral to successful EB as it weaves together the threads of messaging, channels, and engagement to create a compelling EB narrative (Denning, 2006). It consists of a variety of concepts, formats and approaches aimed to attract, engage, and retain top talent, while ultimately achieving a competitive advantage

in the dynamic landscape of talent acquisition. The strategic communicative approach to internal EB differs from external EB, as it serves another purpose. Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2013) define strategic communication as “the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals” (p. 74). As this and many other definitions focus exclusively on the external perspective, the “public sphere” the authors mention has to be extended to the organization’s employees to serve internal EB.

The main reason why strategic communication is a central part of EB is to ensure consistent messaging. Building a coherent narrative across various channels and interactions reinforces the desired EB image (LaBelle & Waldeck, 2020). Moreover, the adaptation of communication to different target groups, with segmentation and personalization, plays an important role. Audience alignment requires understanding the preferences, needs, and expectations of it in order to later engage specific talent segments (Eisenberg, 1984). Various concepts such as authenticity, coherence, storytelling, transparency and openness serve as cornerstones for a successful communication strategy in EB (LaBelle & Waldeck, 2020). It is also crucial to monitor the responses to the communication strategy in order to make adjustments accordingly and respond to feedback. In addition, effective EB communication requires a long-term vision and continuous efforts to build and maintain the image as an employer, just like as a corporate brand (Mahoney, 2021).

Furthermore, integrated communication channels are key (Percy, 2014). Various means such as career websites, blogs, social media, video marketing and specific EB events are used. These are used to present the company's values, employee stories and career opportunities, whether in the form of visual content (Holston, 2015), testimonials or interactive events. As channels, Internet portals in particular are important tools for addressing the younger target group. The Internet is the go-to source for researching jobs, internships and inspiration, as well as being available around the clock. This is why companies like to use the following tools, among others, to address them (Kuar et al., 2015; Studd & Herdan, 2017): Image films or recruiting videos, an active presence and recruiting in social media (especially Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn) and a profile on employer rating portals (e. g., Glassdoor).

As the job market becomes increasingly competitive and globalized (Hoffmann, 2016), companies have to differentiate themselves, showcasing and arguing why they are an

employer of choice, in order to stand a chance at keeping and winning the best talent. Internally the company's values and its organizational culture must be cohesive and nurtured properly. This fosters a sense of belonging and engagement among current employees and lessens the likelihood of losing talent.

In the battle for young talent, so-called "diamonds in the rough" (Tulgan, 2015), it is essential to be proactive in addressing and recruiting them at an early stage. Cooperation with universities and colleges is an effective mean of strengthening the reputation of the employer brand. Although often with less professional experience, young talents often possess curiosity, up-to-date theoretical knowledge and a great deal of motivation, which, when properly guided, can give companies the decisive edge (Chițu, 2020). For an employer brand this includes networking with university career centers, participating in training and university fairs, offering positions for working students and interns, and other cooperation agreements with colleges and universities (Stuss & Herdan, 2017).

While famous people as corporate brand ambassadors are still of high relevance (Padayachy, 2017) many companies nowadays additionally opt for employee brand ambassadors (Al-ShuaiBi, 2016) and corporate influencers, also known as fostering employee advocacy (Thelen, 2020; Thomas, 2020). The testimonial of an employee with the firm is often regarded as more credible than one from a remunerated person of public interest (Hesse et al., 2020). Involving employees as ambassadors for the corporate culture contributes to the authenticity and credibility of communications.

Strategic communication in EB is not a one-time effort but an ongoing process. Therefore, a consistent, agile and long-term approach helps build a strong and enduring employer brand that can withstand its volatile surroundings in the market and industry.

2.1.5 Employer Branding and Generational Differences

In this subchapter we will first have a look at the generational theory and then introduce the four generations that are currently present at the workplace. The individual formative experiences that shape their characteristics will be discussed, followed by exploring the different work values and therefore possible challenges in the work environment. To conclude, EB specifics in relation to Gen Z and how to best approach and convince them, which in this study is the target group, are examined.

Before taking a closer look at generational theory, it is important to better understand the term "generation". There is the genealogical, the pedagogical and the historical-sociological concept of generation (Liebau, 1997; Mannheim & Wolff, 1970). The genetic succession of family members is understood as the genealogical concept of generation. The different generations are defined by the biological relationship of the family members. Whereas the pedagogical concept of generation regards a generation as a learning connection, where teachers face learners. And the historical-sociological concept of generation refers to a generation as a social grouping that was born in a certain period of time and shares certain common experiences (Liebau, 1997). In this section of the literature review, the term "generation" will always be used referring to the historical-sociological concept of generation.

Generational theory dates back to the German sociologist Karl Mannheim, who introduced the concept of generation and cohort analysis in the 1920s. In 1952, Mannheim introduced the generation theory (Mannheim, 1928/1952). According to this theory:

[...] belonging to the same generations or age group endows the individuals sharing in [it] with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action. (Mannheim, 1952, p. 291)

As Mannheim described it in the mid-20th century, a generation is defined on the one hand by its years of birth and on the other hand by several common social and economic conditions during its formative years of youth and early adulthood. A so-called common generational personality, i.e. similarity in characteristics, thinking, values and beliefs, emerges from two aspects: firstly, there is a common localization in historical time and secondly, the experiences and events of that time have led to a profound understanding of this historical position (Strauss et al., 1991).

Generations and age are by no means conceptually the same, even though this measure is often used to group age groups in empirical studies. So-called age effects can be considered to increase convergence in certain age groups (Rhodes, 1983). Age effect here means an increasing similarity of individuals from two different generations when they reach the same age (i.e. person A becomes more similar to person B at a certain age as soon as they reach this age). On the other hand, there are generation effects, which show a relative

divergence. Two individuals are dissimilar at a certain age or at a certain point in time, which distinguishes them (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Consequently, personality traits that manifest themselves through age-related changes do not affect generational identity (Scott, 2000). This means that baby boomers and millennials, for example, although subject to age-related changes, retain their generational identity. Therefore, they exhibit different characteristics, thought patterns, values and beliefs when they reach the same stage of life. However, it should be noted that individuals born on the cusp of a generation do not necessarily differ greatly from those born just one year later on the other side of that border (Meeks et al., 2013).

Schuman and Scott (1989) found consistent evidence in their research for the hypothesis that adolescence to early adulthood (Griffin, 2004), and events occurring during this time, have the greatest impact on individuals and their recollections. Consolidating one of the basic assumptions of generational theory, Asenault (2004) successfully reiterated the previously mentioned findings. Further studies were able to prove that shared social experiences are formative for generational theory and also confirm the aforementioned assumptions (Strauss et al., 1991; Lancaster & Stillman, 2005; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Dries et al., 2008). With regard to work values, Smola and Sutton (2002) found that these depend more on generational experiences than on biological age.

Currently present in the workplace are four different generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2008): The baby boomers (1946-1964), the Generation X (1965-1980), the Generation Y, also known as Millennials, (1981-1996) and about a decade ago the Generation Z (1997-2012). Generation Z is in 2024 about 12 to 28 years old and the youngest part of the employees (Merriman, 2015; Williams et al., 2010). In addition, there is Generation Alpha (2013-present), which are not yet part of the workforce.

Historical societal events as well as personal and social life events individually influence how each generation lives, thinks and to some extent acts – as already mentioned in the introduction to generational theory (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola & Sutton, 2002). These key formative events are being highlighted below for each of the four generations in the workforce. As these naturally differ on a national and regional level, only historical-social events that had an international impact are considered here.

A “period of increased exposure and openness to change that children experience as they enter adolescence and early adulthood” is defined as a formative experience (Schuman

& Corning, 2014, p. 148). During these “impressionable years” (Schuman & Corning, 2014, p. 147) events that take place have a much higher impact on the individual as it is known to be a critical period in life.

Although Generation Z felt the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, they mostly do not remember the event itself. Among the most influential historical and societal moments were named the legalization of the same-sex marriage and the Covid-19 pandemic (Cheng et al., 2020; Cox et al., 2023). They grew up in a digital era with constant access to technology and information which then revolutionized the working world (Solomon, 2017). After witnessing many extreme natural disasters with devastating effects, Generation Z regards the climate crisis as a formative and ongoing threat that impacts their life (Nadeem, 2023)

Following the determination of the shaping and influential events for each generation, we now will look at the generational differences in the workplace and their work values. Chen and Choi (2008) defined values as “beliefs and personal standards that guide individuals to function in society” (p. 596). Therefore, in relation to the workplace, work values are understood to be “evaluative standards relating to work or the work environment by which individuals discern what is ‘right’ or assess the importance of preferences” (Dose, 1997, pp. 227-228). Those work values were found to be an influential factor on employees’ job satisfaction and commitment (Gursoy et al., 2008). EEX as discussed in subchapter 2.2.2 is therefore subject to the individual work values of each generation.

The oldest generation in the workplace in 2024 is the Baby Boomers who often live to work. Due to their formative experiences and their social upbringing, they respect authority and hierarchy at work (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Moreover, characterized as less self-centered they are seen to value altruism and intellectual stimulation (Chen & Choi, 2008).

Generation X is described as the first generation that works to live (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Smola & Sutton, 2002), while still respecting and appreciating hierarchy (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). A high-self-enhancement and valuing security and independence was described as important to Generation X (Chen & Choi, 2008).

The work values of the Millennials are balanced between the love to work and enjoyment of life, while constantly seeking autonomy (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). They place high value on economic return of their work in the form of a high monetary salary (Chen & Choi, 2008), while being the first generation to pay attention to mental health issues

(Deloitte, 2021) resulting from extreme over-working. In addition, Generation Y places great value on transparency in the job (Chillakuri, 2020) as well as immediate feedback after tasks completed.

Compared to its predecessors, in the workplace, Generation Z showcases unique characteristics as they live and enjoy life while work to provide for their necessities (Mahapatra et al., 2022). Often being called out as lazy and spoiled, a study has proven them to be tech-savvy, valuing diversity and inclusion and prioritizing a healthy work-life balance (Ozkan & Betul, 2015). Gen Z grew up in a digital era with constant access to technology and information which then revolutionized the working world (Solomon, 2017). An entrepreneurial spirit (Adecco, 2015), a strong emphasis on individual expression and the dislike of micromanagement (Ghura, 2017) are common denominators. Their expectations for the EVP offered by an organization include a transparent and positive work environment (Chillakuri, 2020), career advancement opportunities, purpose-driven and challenging work (Ghura, 2017) and a commitment to social and environmental responsibility. Higher flexibility, autonomy, remote work, home office, more vacation days or the 4-day-week are often high on the priority list on Generation Z employees (Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Urgal, 2023).

However, the interplay between Generation Z and older colleagues can present challenges rooted in different communication styles, work preferences, and expectations (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Generation Z are digital natives (Lanier, 2017) who are being led by Generation X or, in some cases still, Baby Boomer managers (Bateh, 2018; Nielsen, 2017). This circumstance influences working together significantly as the normalcy of technology at work and in communication is regarded differently. Bridging the generation gap requires fostering an inclusive work environment that values diverse perspectives. Training programs on effective communication and mentorship initiatives (Fodor et al., 2018; Iorgulescu, 2016; Puiu, 2017) can help address potential misunderstandings and enhance collaboration.

EB on the search for new young talent to join an organization is intricately linked with Generation Z. As more than 98% actively use social media every day (Ahmed, 2019; Abdillah & Putro, 2022), companies must strategically build their employer brand to resonate with this generation. Looking at the age span, Generation Z currently, and for more than a decade already, shapes the youth culture, consist of educated young adults entering

the job market and therefore, heavily influences society. Authenticity, a strong engaging online presence on the platforms most used – currently Instagram and TikTok (Beilharz, 2022) –, and a clear articulation of relevant values are essential to attract and retain Generation Z talent.

2.1.6 Employer Branding and Social Media

We start this subchapter with reviewing the integration of social media in EB as well as providing guiding definitions. It is followed by naming the advantages and disadvantages of social media and how an employer brand is shaped on different platforms. Moreover, we will highlight how organizations find the right social media platforms, which EB content they can play and what role corporate influencers play. At the end, the concept of an electronic word-of-mouth is introduced and challenges of EB on social media are named.

The integration of social media has become extremely important in daily life and therefore also in the context of EB. Sharing and receiving all kind of information online has increased the speed and the way different stakeholders come across information on a potential employer (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Alongside online job portals and company websites, social media plays a central role as the preferred channel for obtaining information considered as more credible (Dineen et al., 2019). According to the global Randstad Employer Brand Report (2024), 85% of job seekers look for jobs online. Out of the top four online channels, job boards and job search engines are on first place with 54%, LinkedIn is on second place with 35% and social media on number three with 34% (Randstad, 2024). Companies are advised by the results to not only strategically plan their presence on the company website, but also on various online and social media channels. Moreover, the growing influence of Generation Z on the labor market is very visible and has not only grown up digitally, but also spends a considerable amount of time online (Rottier, 2018).

Social media offers a dynamic and interactive space for companies to not only advertise job openings but also actively shape and communicate their employer brand (Kuar et al., 2015). The combination of wider reach, engagement opportunities, and personalized storytelling (Crişan & Borţun, 2017) makes social media a valuable addition to traditional job portals like e.g., Stepstone, for effective EB. Leveraging social media offers organizations advantages, including cost-free (paid posts excluded) and unrestricted access, along with quicker response times in communication and activities (Furu, 2011). Likes, shares and comments enhance visibility of the employer brand and carefully designing

authentic content regarding employee experiences offers brand control and an active shaping of the brand image. Cappelli (2001) pointed out that not only active job seekers could be identified and approached using the internet, but also passive job seekers who stumble across a promising EVP leading to an application.

The introduction of the internet and later, social media, to the recruitment process, facilitated it for both the organization and job seekers to find a match (Borstorff et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2011). A person open to work and currently on job search will also experience a number of benefits through EB on social media. Traditional application processes only allowed an insight into the company culture at a later stage of the process, as e.g., during the job interview. If an organization actively uses their social media accounts to shape their employer brand, many available talents can make more informed decisions as they better understand the company culture, the work environment and growth opportunities when applying for a job (Subbarao et al., 2022). Authenticity, consistent brand presence, transparent communication about an organization's EVP and posts about job openings enable convenience, build trust and start a virtual connection, which in turn increases employer brand awareness (Katiyar & Saini, 2016).

The unique characteristics of these platforms and each organization individually can leverage their potential by consciously involving this approach to EB. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the mechanisms of social media, especially in terms of targeted influence in the EB process, is recommended. Different social networks on the market appeal to specific target groups.

Through a strategic presence on platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Instagram, companies can strengthen their employer brand and appeal to potential candidates (Backhaus, 2016). The selection of content should be tailored to the respective platform (Koçak et al., 2021). For example, platforms such as TikTok and Instagram mainly reach the younger generations, which makes them effective tools for recruiting apprentices or trainees. Visual insights into the work culture, animated short videos as well as online-challenges all while engaging with the community and responding to comments, are low-cost measures to shape a positive employer brand (Genoveva, 2022).

For full-time and senior positions, on the other hand, professional networks such as LinkedIn are more suitable. On LinkedIn, companies could share professional developments, employee stories and industry insights (Backhaus, 2016; Joglekar & Tan,

2022), while Twitter and Facebook can be used for the latest company news and events (Hollensen et al., 2017; Mäläskä & Nadeem, 2012). YouTube offers the opportunity to present recruiting videos and short employer presentations to strengthen the employer brand through audiovisual content.

Apart from content generated by HR or corporate communications, the previously mentioned corporate influencers are increasingly popular to share the individual employee experience (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2014). A strong personal online presence on different platforms gives the employer brand actual names and faces. They make the brand more relatable and approachable by adding a human touch. Being currently employed by the organization in question, the credibility of the messages conveyed increases and reinforces trust in the employer brand (Yeh, 2014) – as if it were a friend sharing insights about his job. Usually privately managed accounts generate a higher reach of their content shared with followers, leading to increased visibility and engagement (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2014).

The already mentioned friend who shares his opinion, experiences and recommendations with you in private – the so-called word-of-mouth – can also be found online as a digital version. The concept electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), sometimes called social media word-of-mouth (Gupta & Harris, 2010), on job-review and social media platforms is considered being of higher value than other content (Ahamad, 2019; Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). Corporate influencers and their content are examples of the eWOM. Coming from employees or candidates, the eWOM can build trust among potential hires and they believe the opinions of their peers (Yeh, 2014). Some brands have already received a positive buzz around their employer brand, when content went viral and reached a wide audience. This real-time impact of a successful eWOM powerfully strengthens the perception of an employer brand (Pandey, 2023).

Nevertheless, social media has given individuals and in particular current or former employees the power to worsen or even ruin an employer brand. As credibility through personal approach usually stays high, accusations or shared negative experiences can go equally viral and significantly damage an employer brand (Backhaus, 2016 & Chen-Yu et al., 2016). In this case, close monitoring of the online EB perception and mood is crucial, to be able to immediately respond, uncover lies or moderate comments (Elving et al., 2012).

Overall, social media platforms not only provide direct access to the target group, but also offer the opportunity to influence the perception of the employer brand in an individual

way. Strategic use of these channels can therefore make a significant contribution to strengthening the employer brand and effectively attracting and retaining talent.

2.1.7 Employer Branding and New Technologies

With Generation Z growing up being so called digital natives (Lanier, 2017), the older generation witnesses also a change of the technologies used in the workplace. During the Covid-19 pandemic the use of many tools was intensified as smooth and easy communication became indispensable and remote work (Wilson & Chen, 2020) called for new solutions. These prevailed even after the end of the pandemic as many companies now offer also remote or hybrid jobs. Through videoconference tools like Microsoft Teams and Zoom (Cortez, 2020), co-workers no longer had to be in the same room for a meeting. This digitalization of the workplace required and still requires adaptability and a willingness to learn a new way of working (Rachinger et al., 2019; Appiah et al., 2020).

Although being a much older concept (McCarthy et al., 2006; Kaynak, 2021), since 2022 one term is all-around and is used in different scenarios: Artificial Intelligence (AI). Before then, AI was mainly used in the technology scene and by experts, while the average digital worker had maybe heard of it but never actually experienced it. Certain softwares are using algorithms and machine learning for years now, but never “visible” for the average user.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used now more than ever and has also found its entrance in the field of EB. Especially Large Language Models (LLM) and Generative AI tools can be seen in frequent use by EB departments (Pandey, 2023). These technologies and tools include the AI-chatbot “Bard”, the LLM “ChatGPT” and the collective virtual shared space “Metaverse”. In the world of the Web 3.0 lies the future of EB as a recent study has shown (Baratelli & Colleoni, 2022).

Using AI effectively in EB a precise planning, data-protection and a clear communication with stakeholder is required, to ensure that the technology leads to the desired outcome and strengthens the relationship with the employees. If used correctly, the integration of AI and AI-assisted tools can be implemented in EB in the following ways:

Developing captivating EB messages (Olsen & Pracejus, 2020; Theurer et al., 2018) can be supported by leveraging generative AI algorithms. Successfully communicating a

company's work culture and environment, its mission, vision and central values helps in shaping the employer brand.

Precise decision-making in choosing the “perfect fit” (Ahamad et al., 2022) is a decisive competitive advantage as data analytics assist in this challenging task. It allows for a personalized candidate experience (Barger & Labrecque, 2013), as the applicants data can be analyzed, recommending tailored recommendations of open positions, training programs and career paths, which, in the long run, strengthens the ties with the company and the interest of potential candidates (Baratelli & Colleoni, 2022; Dabirian et al., 2017).

Moreover, further automated recruitment processes could be achieved using AI (Simsek et al., 2020). Starting with the viewing of the candidate's application or even the execution of interviews. A speed-up recruiting process and a focus of strategic tasks allows recruiters the “outsourcing” of standardized processes.

Apart from communication with the potential candidate via e-mail, a multilingual chatbot for this interaction is becoming increasingly popular among brand managers and recruiters (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Julian, 2023). Integrating a chatbot like, e.g., Bard, onto company's websites or social media platforms, allows for an effective and immediate communication with applicants. AI-managed chatbots answer questions immediately, provide information and give them a positive experience.

It has been shown that the first few weeks after starting at a company long-lastingly shape the employee's perception of the employer brand. Therefore, a personalized onboarding-process is crucial (Kivinen, 2023), and AI can support in generating this experience. Analyzing beforehand the individual's skills and preferences facilitates the positive introduction and integration of the employee into the company.

Forecasting future outcomes is an indispensable measure in different areas of a business using new and historic data predicting trends and activities through machine learning and AI (Simsek et al., 2020). Predictive analytics through AI (Pandey, 2023) is used to identify patterns in employee behavior. This enables companies to recognize potential exits at an early stage and take preventative measures to strengthen employee loyalty.

According to human capital theory, it is understood that higher employee education translates into increased productivity in the labor market (Nafukho et al., 2004). Hence, sophisticated personnel development and employee training (Chen, 2022) should be a top priority for every company. AI-driven learning platforms can create personalized training

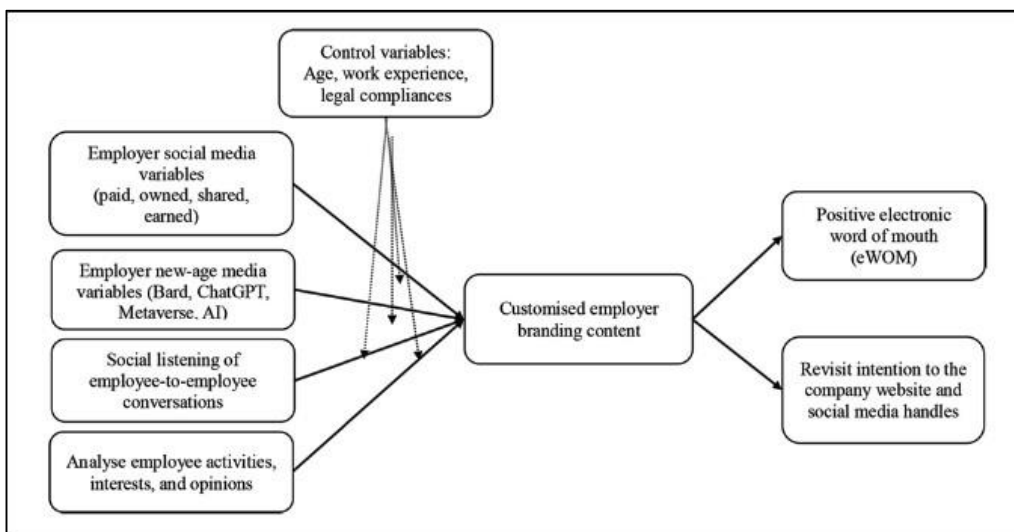
programs that meet the individual needs and skills of employees (Christodoulides et al., 2011; Pandey, 2015). This not only promotes professional development, but also underlines the company's commitment to recognizing and fostering potential.

The market offers a variety of social media listening tools (Buzoianu & Bîră, 2021), which allow companies to always be well informed with broad insights into employer brand perceptions. Powered by AI they enable companies to react to trends, adapt their messaging and respond proactively to feedback. Brand and Human Resources (HR) managers used to do this manually but can now focus on tasks that are not software based or statistically predictable.

In a recent study by Pandey (2023) a conceptual framework summarizing the ‘Future of Employer Branding’ (see figure 8) was developed. Therefore, the control variables age, professional experience, and compliance with the laws of the country in which the representative operates, have been determined. In order to obtain customized EB content four factors are highlighted: employer social media variables, employer new-age media variables, social listening of employee-to-employee conversations and analysis of employee activities, interests and opinions. The used predictive analysis helps with personalization of EB content and ultimately generate positive eWOM and increases the revisit intention to the company website and social media handles (Pandey, 2023).

Figure 8

Future of Employer Branding: A Conceptual Framework (Pandey, 2023, p. 263)



Switching from the corporate to the applicant perspective with regards to experience and level of satisfaction with AI tools used in the recruitment process, science is divided on the basis of few studies on this topic. Van Esch and Black (2019) have found that a majority views the AI-assisted tools in recruiting as “trendy, novel empowering, convenient and motivating to engage with”. Moreover, companies who incorporated AI in the application process were perceived as innovative and technology-savvy as opposed to traditional methods applied (Miles & McCamey, 2018; McIlvaine, 2021).

Other studies though suggested that candidates are less likely to apply for a job when AI tools are used due to differences in computer anxiety (van Esch & Mente, 2018) or the absence of personal contact and advice through an HR professional (Johnson et al., 2009). The same study also found dissatisfied applicants over AI-assisted recruiting based on its mainly one-way communication with no option for questions, doubts or any kind of human interaction.

While some research shows that an AI software is more objective in its feedback (Horodyski, 2023) – as the results and recommendations given are based on facts and numbers – there are also findings of discriminatory AI-tools. Originating from the statistical discrimination theory (Tilcsik, 2020) the so called algorithmic bias has been found to lead to discrimination and inequality, particularly when the information about race and gender is included in the initial data (Jackson, 2021). As most AI-software are trained with data sets from current high-performing employee profiles mostly originating from US companies (Raghavan et al., 2020), the algorithmic bias has been seen to predict recommended and concerning criteria such as race, color, gender, and personality (Lloyd, 2018).

New technologies in the context of EB and recruitment are differently fast advanced and tested. Moreover, the transformational speed of this sector with new AI-tools emerging every day, suggests a cautious observation of the current situation. Facilitation and increased speed of completion shows various advantages, while discrimination and lack of transparency are regarded as disadvantages.

2.2 Talent Attraction and Retention

2.2.1 Characteristics of Successful Talent Attraction and Retention

In today's competitive organizational landscape, talent has become the cornerstone of success, driving innovation, competitiveness, and growth. This chapter aims to break down

the details of talent management, with a particular focus on the art of talent attraction. Beginning with an exploration of the concept of talent, the chapter proceeds to define talent management and talent attraction. Subsequently, it highlights the importance of and the difference between attracting and retaining talent, emphasizes their complementary but different functions and elaborates on the Employer Brand Impact Model. Moreover, the chapter also looks at the Attraction-Selection-Attrition model and examines its theoretical foundations and practical implications for talent management practice. Finally, the concept of the fit between person and organization is addressed and the latest developments in talent management are presented.

The word “talent” is generally defined as “a natural ability to do something well” (Oxford University Press, 2024). Transferred to the business context, a talent or talented employee is an individual who possesses valuable skills, expertise, and qualities that contribute to the success, innovation, and growth of an organization. Leaving behind the thought of a binary classification with talented or high-skilled vs. untalented or low-skilled workers, as a talent can be “anyone with skills corresponding to the needs of public and private, place-specific economic and social development strategies” (Flood et al., 2024, p. 12). As the global environment is evolving and regional needs differ, this approach focuses rather on the local job markets, the requirements of a community and factors in all types of workers. A highly-skilled and university-educated worker is equally as important to any economy as is the person with basic skills in low paid jobs, as they keep the economy of every country running and are vital to its success (Diebolt & Hippe, 2022). The redefinition of talent is essential to better understand and then address the problem of regional understaffed professions, which is why the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2023) names entrepreneurs, highly educated workers and university students and graduates as the three groups of talented migrants every country should consider in their migration and labor politics.

There is no generally accepted definition for the concept of talent management (TM), as it is used in different contexts and for different purposes (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Nevertheless, one of the most cited definitions describes TM as:

[...] activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to

facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization. (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 305)

The aforementioned definition of TM is one of many, as there has not been reached a consensus about the concept. Who is and who is not regarded as a talented employee for an organization in a specific role, differs in the work of different scholars on this field (Meyers et al., 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Generally, it refers to the strategic approach that organizations take to attract, develop, retain and deploy talented employees to effectively achieve business objectives. According to Sloan et al. (2004) this strategic approach is “to put the right person in the right place at the right time” (p. 236). At the heart of talent management is the recognition of human capital as a strategic asset, whereby companies strive to optimize the use of talent in order to promote innovation, competitiveness and sustainable growth (Fernandes et al., 2023).

According to Ewerlin and Süß (2016) there are four phases and functions of TM: identification and attraction of talent, deployment of talent, development of talent and retention of talent. In the following, we will have a closer look at the first phase of talent identification and attraction and the last phase of talent retention.

Talent attraction is a competitive field in which companies compete for the attention and loyalty of highly qualified employees (Mosley, 2016). However, it is not just about casting a wide net and recruiting the most talented candidates. It is about crafting a compelling story, why someone should work with the organization (Pandita & Ray, 2018), that in turn aligns with the goals and values of the potential talent (Smith & Smylie, 2021). This means painting an authentic portrait of the organization's culture, values and opportunities (King & Vaiman, 2019; Harsch & Festing, 2019), while taking into account the inherent complexities and challenges of talent attraction in a highly competitive environment with other employer brands.

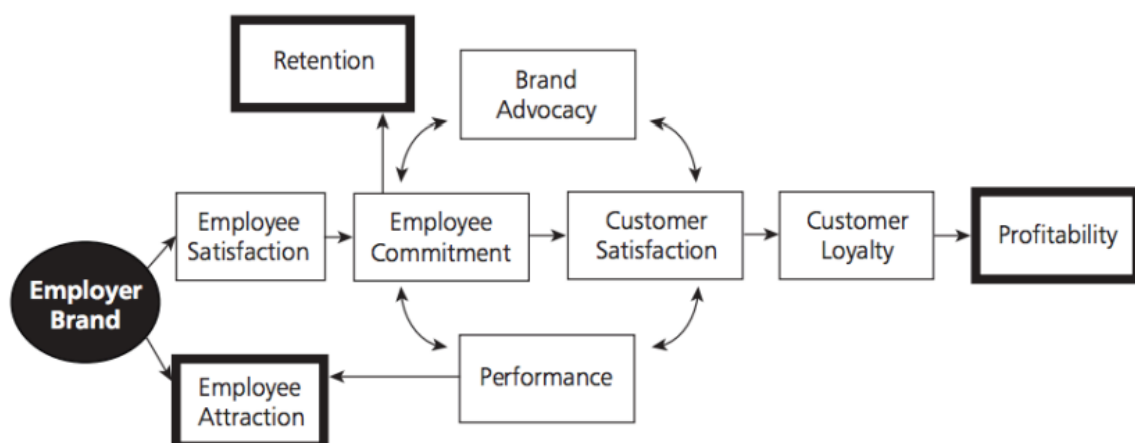
In contrast, talent retention measures focus on ensuring that employees experience a pleasant working environment in order to retain them in the organization in the long term (Κάρργας & Tsokos, 2020). While usually much attention is paid to talent attraction, its symbiotic relationship with talent retention deserves equal attention. In the constant search for talent, organizations often overlook the important task of nurturing and retaining existing talent among their own employees (Bolander et al., 2017). Recruiting talent may be the proverbial bait, but without a supportive environment for growth, development and

flourishing, talent will inevitably fall through the cracks and result in a higher turnover (Hatun, 2010; Bonneton et al., 2019). In the retention phase an organization has to focus on motivating and integration employees into the organizational culture, while maintaining a healthy performance review system to reward talent and hard work (Latukha, 2016). A balanced approach to talent management therefore requires a seamless integration of talent attraction and retention strategies to create a sustainable talent ecosystem.

How talent management is undoubtedly part of successful EB can be seen in Gaddam’s (2008) “employer brand impact model” (see figure 9). It shows the multifold impact of having a strong employer brand on the organization as a whole. The ultimate goals are employee attraction as well as retention while being a profitable brand. A strong employer brand leads to both employee satisfaction among current employees as well as employee attraction in recruiting. Happy employees therefore are more committed and are less likely to quit the organization, resulting in successful employee retention. Achieving a high employee commitment can be seen to have a positive impact on customer satisfaction due higher performance, which both build brand advocacy. Finally, an organization with loyal customers and loyal employees is an example of profitability. This model shows that ultimately a strong employer brand has a positive impact on all different areas of an organization, including talent attraction and retention.

Figure 9

Employer Brand Impact Model (Gaddam, 2008, p. 47)



In 1987 Schneider famously stated that “the people make the place” (p. 437), referring to the employees that make an organization who it is, not just economically speaking but from an organizational culture point of view. In order to maintain or maybe even improve the company as a good place to work, new candidates have to be a good fit among the current employees and with the organization in general. Therefore, about nine years later Kristof (1996) defined the person-organization fit as “compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when at least one entity provides what the other needs or they share similar fundamental characteristics, or both” (p. 4-5).

This concept underlines the importance of the match between individual characteristics and organizational characteristics for employee satisfaction, performance and retention. Person-organization fit encompasses two dimensions: (1) person-job fit, which refers to the compatibility between a person's skills, abilities and preferences and the requirements of a particular job (Kristof-Brown, 2000), and (2) person-organization fit, which refers to the fit between a person's values, attitudes and goals and the company's culture, values and mission (Kristof, 1996). Consistent and congruent values significantly shape an organization culture and are of high relevance in the recruiting process (Werbel & DeMarie, 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Not just on the organization's side the person-organization fit is a primary criteria when making the employment decision, but the potential employee will also determine his or her value congruence before accepting the job offer (Ostroff et al., 2005).

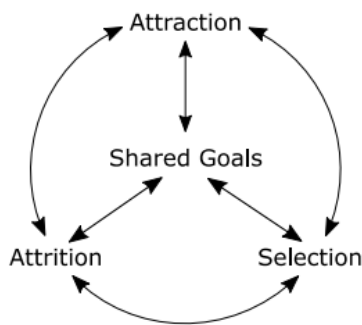
By fostering a strong person-organization fit, companies can increase employee engagement, job satisfaction and commitment, resulting in better performance and lower turnover rates. For an employer brand achieving a high degree of overall person-organization fit in their company, is regarded as especially desirable in the ongoing “war for talent” and the dynamic labor market (Ng & Burke, 2005). Where talent is courted, an appealing person-organization fit within an attractive organizational culture can be the key to winning the contract.

The Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model was developed by Schneider (1983) and is based on the organizational psychology and human resource management literature. It provides a conceptual framework for understanding the interplay between organizational characteristics, individual attributes and employee outcomes (see figure 10). According to the ASA model, organizations attract individuals whose personal characteristics match the

values, culture and job requirements of the organization. In the selection process, applicants are then filtered based on their fit with the company's requirements, resulting in hiring the people who best fit the organization. The ASA model can therefore be seen as an advanced concept of person-organization fit, which takes this centrally into account. In addition, the ASA model assumes that turnover occurs when the characteristics of the individual and the organization do not match, leading to dissatisfaction, disengagement or attrition of employees from the organization.

Figure 10

The Attraction-Selection-Attrition Model (adapted from Link & Jeske, 2017, p. 89)



According to the authors, organizations need to understand and leverage the dynamics of recruitment, selection and turnover. Only then can they optimize their talent management practices to attract, retain and develop high-performing employees who effectively contribute to the company's success.

Nevertheless, one criticism of the ASA model was later put forward by Schneider (1987) himself. He argued that the ASA model, when applied in human resources management, leads to an increasing similarity of employees. Ultimately, this restricts the actions of the organization and, due to a lack of disruptive impulses, has a negative impact on the economic development of the company. Schneider et al. (1995) refer to this effect as the "homogeneity hypothesis". A desired social homophily among employees is therefore rather dysfunctional for organizations, as they become resistant to change.

2.2.2 Graduate Migration and Globalization

Starting off with the definition of Globalization, this subchapter will then introduce the phenomenon of human migration, with a focus on graduate, employee and labor migration and mobility. Two theories – the push-pull-factor theory and the theory of reasoned action – will then be explained, which are commonly used to explain the reasons behind the actions taking place. Afterwards, the partly tangible and intangible variables of hard- versus soft- and social factors as well as individual characteristics are presented. How migration can hurt or benefit a country, is then discussed in the part regarding brain gain versus brain drain. Further, the nationalities and cultural backgrounds of students and graduates and their impact on the decision are explained.

Ritzer and Dean (2014) define globalization as “the process by which people, objects and information flow in multiple directions across the planet as well as the structures they encounter, which can be barriers or catalysts to the flows” (p. 13). It is also the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of economies, societies, cultures and political systems worldwide. Giddens (1990) defines four dimensions of globalization: (1) the world capitalist economy, where the level of wealth defines a state’s influence within the global political order; (2) the nation-state system, where sovereignty is reflexively under watch; (3) the world military order with not only the bipolar powers in the east and the west, but continuously more powerful players; and (4) the global (international) division of labor, differentiating regions by its industrial development. While these four cornerstones were set at the beginning of research on globalization, they are still considered as valid and a fundamental base of explaining the phenomenon (Raikhan et al., 2014).

In an interview in 2016 Giddens later added: “The driving force of globalization then as now – with the extraordinary advance of the digital revolution – was above all communication, especially electronic communication” (Kolarz, 2016, p. 5). All actions of communication can change the dynamics of globalization. A rapid cross-border flow of goods, services, capital, information and people can be observed at an increasing pace (Ritzer & Dean, 2024). Advances in technology, transportation and (electronic) communication facilitate these movements and processes. The phenomenon of globalization has led to greater economic integration, cultural exchange and geopolitical relations, shaping various aspects of human life and development on a global scale (Raikhan et al., 2014). While the aforementioned researchers argue mainly in favor of globalization, there are some

scholars who point out on the danger and possible harm of globalization, which is then often responded to with growing nationalism or regionalization (Kacowicz, 1999; Yang, 2007).

Globalization also acts as both a driver and an enabler of human migration. Human migration is defined as “the permanent change of residence by an individual or group” (Britannica, 2024). It is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon involving the relocation from one geographical location to another. This movement can occur within a country (internal migration) or across international borders (international migration) (King et al., 2008). It is influenced by a multitude of factors, including economic opportunities, political stability, social networks, environmental conditions, and personal aspirations. Migration patterns and trends have significant implications for demographic shifts, labor markets, cultural diversity, and socio-political dynamics in both sending and receiving regions (Lee, 1966). Castles et al. (2014) argue that conventional wisdom explains that “migration is driven by geographical differences in income, employment and other opportunities” (p. 25). In Europe, the migration facilitated by free movement within Schengen aids in alleviating disparities in some jobs within the labor market (OECD, 2014).

Graduate migration refers to the movement of individuals, particularly skilled professionals and graduates, across regions or countries in search of employment, career advancement, educational opportunities, or better living standards (Faggian et al., 2007). This mobility is driven by various factors such as job market conditions, wage differentials, skill demands, industry sectors, and global economic trends. The cross-border mobility of highly educated individuals contributes to labor market dynamism, both, in the country of origin and the host country (Lowell et al., 2004), knowledge transfer, innovation diffusion, and the global exchange of talent and expertise (Corcoran & Faggian, 2017).

In order to explain graduation migration and mobility several different theories have been developed or adapted by academic scholars. The push-pull theory of migration (Lee, 1966) is based on the assumption that people are influenced by both push factors (conditions or circumstances in the home country that force them to migrate) and pull factors (attractions or opportunities in the destination country that attract migrants). Push factors include economic hardship, political instability, conflict, lack of job prospects, limited educational opportunities, environmental problems or social unrest. Pull factors include better employment prospects, higher wages, quality education, political stability, security, healthcare and a better standard of living.

From the perspective of students and graduates, Trần et al. (2021) strengthen that there are certain factors that influence their decision to leave one country and move to a different one. On one hand, push factors may include, e.g., economic disparities, limited career opportunities, or political instability in the home country. On the other hand, pull factors, e.g., encompass attractive job markets, educational opportunities, or higher quality of life in the destination country (Lipura & Collins, 2020). This theory provides a framework for understanding the complex motivations underlying graduate migration decisions and their implications for labor market dynamics and economic development (Trần et al., 2021).

A study investigated the mobility intentions of students shortly before they graduate. The researchers Hooijen et al. (2017) were able to identify a particularly high influence on the decision – to stay in the Rhine-Moselle Euroregion after the end of their studies – in the following factors: the perception of quality of life, openness and future career opportunities being decisive criteria. Part of the soft location factors with a great influence on mobility intentions were also the distance to the life partner and other social ties, such as family and friends.

A second approach to explaining decisions within graduate migration is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The TRA proposes that an individual's behavioral intentions are shaped by their attitudes toward the behavior and the subjective norms surrounding it. Attitudes represent personal evaluations of the behavior, such as positive or negative views on the outcomes and experiences of migration. Subjective norms reflect social influences, including family expectations, peer pressure, cultural norms, and societal values, that shape an individual's intentions and behaviors related to migration (Fishbein, 1980). Together, these factors predict behavioral intentions and subsequent actions.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Icek Ajzen (1991), extends the TRA by adding the component of perceived behavioral control. TPB suggests that an individual's behavior is determined by their intention to engage in the behavior, influenced by three factors: attitude toward the behavior (how favorably or unfavorably the person views it), subjective norms (perceived social pressure to perform or avoid the behavior), and perceived behavioral control (the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, which can also directly influence behavior). Applying both theories to migration studies

enhances the understanding of the cognitive processes, motivations, and social influences that drive migration behaviors among university students and graduates (Lu, 1998).

In the following, several decisive factors in graduate migration will be explained: hard locational factors, soft locational factors, social factors and individual characteristics (Hooijen et al., 2017).

Hard locational factors in graduate migration refer to tangible, measurable aspects of a destination that influence migration decisions (Sleutjes, 2013). Concerning graduation migration these include job availability (Venhorst et al., 2011), economic factors like salary levels (Pethe et al., 2009), an affordable transportation network (Lawton et al., 2013), language proficiency (Adserà & Pytlíková, 2015) and quality of education (Sleutjes, 2013). Examples include specific job opportunities in a particular industry or access to renowned universities.

In contrast, soft locational factors are intangible and subjective. Research has shown that they encompass elements like quality of life and lifestyle preferences (Hansen et al., 2003), the living environment (Marlet & Van Woerkens, 2005) and the availability of cultural and social activities (Florida, 2002). For instance, a graduate might be drawn to a city with a vibrant cultural scene or a supportive expatriate community. Both types of factors play significant roles in shaping migration patterns and destination choices among graduates.

Moreover, social factors like family, friends and close personal relationships determine the likelihood of graduate migration (Pethe et al., 2009). Where one's social contacts are located has a significant influence on staying or leaving the host country, as various studies have shown (Balch et al., 2012; Sleutjes, 2014).

And finally, individual characteristics have to be taken into account as every student decides for him- or herself is the best way to go forward. Thereby, a decrease in mobility correlating with an increase in age has been found by scholars to differentiate migration patterns age-related (Faggian et al., 2007; Venhorst, 2011). Another individual variable is gender, where Faggian et al. (2007) also found that women are more likely to migrate than men after obtaining a university degree due to employment possibilities. For foreign men they have been found to be higher in the host country than for women.

Moreover, a decision to migrate is seemingly more likely to be answered positive if previous migration experiences have been made (Venhorst et al., 2010; Haapanen & Tervo,

2011). The mobility behavior of a graduate student depends partly on encounters and a certain familiarity with possibly starting over at a different location (Faggian et al., 2007).

Brain gain and brain drain are both terms used describe global talent flow (Boeri et al., 2012; Rowe et al., 2013). Whilst some countries lose talented employees to more attractive locations, other benefit from their potential to entice people that working for a local company is worth it.

Brain gain, refers to the acquisition of skilled individuals from other countries, contributing to knowledge transfer, innovation, and human capital accumulation in the receiving country (Straubhaar, 2000). The investment in educating young international students, which then decide to start their career in the respective country, pays off (even when receiving tuition fees) as it is regarded as attractive to stay, live and work there. Upon starting a new job their work outcome and taxes immediately benefit the host country's economy (Szelényi, 2006). Winning over and persuading young talent enhance the workforce, productivity, and innovation capacity of destination countries (Boeri et al., 2012). Not exclusive to young graduates, return migration can later also lead to brain gain, when a skilled and experienced worker returns to the country of origin (Mayr & Peri, 2008).

Opposed stands brain drain, which refers to the emigration of highly skilled or educated individuals (such as graduates) from their home country to other countries, leading to a loss of talent, expertise, and human capital in the sending region (Lowell & Findlay, 2001; Szelényi, 2006). This can be regarded as a possible negative consequence if graduates decide to leave the host country after having been provided an education at their universities. Therefore, brain drain can pose challenges for the development and competitiveness of sending countries. The invested knowledge in young talent will be used elsewhere and not benefit its economy later (Abreu et al., 2014). Other than the term brain drain, the consequences lead to brain waste (underutilization of skills), demographic imbalances (aging population, youth drain), challenges in sectors like healthcare and education, diverse social impacts, reduced innovation and research capacity – which can lead to a possibly vicious cycle (Boeri et al., 2012).

Furthermore, a study has found that the nationality and cultural background of students influence their migration experiences, integration processes, and identity formations (Faggian et al., 2006). Factors such as language proficiency, cultural adaptation, social networks, ethnic identity, religious affiliations, citizenship status, and acculturation

dynamics play a role in shaping migrants' experiences, sense of belonging, social interactions, and participation in host societies (Wilken & Dahlberg, 2017).

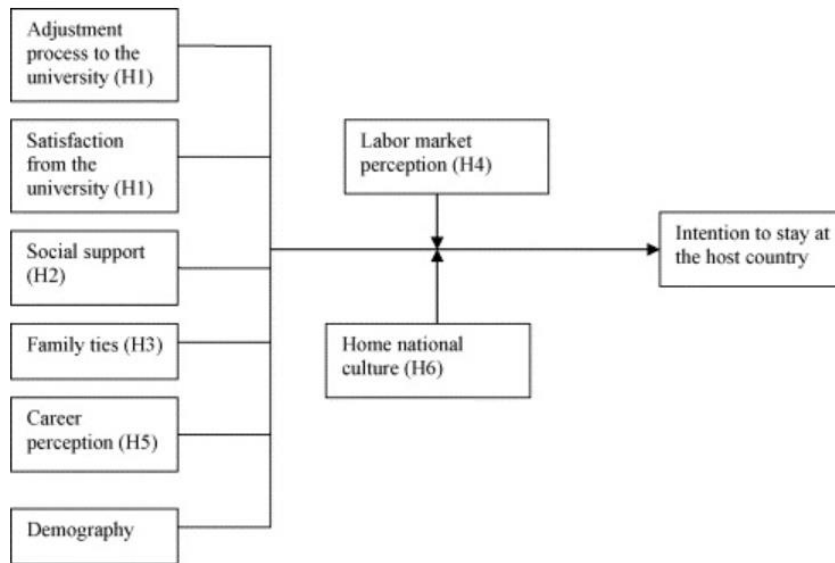
Due to difficulties in adapting to the culture of their host countries and many challenges in acclimating to their new environment, some students are more likely to return to their home countries instead of continuing their stay abroad (Ploner & Nada, 2020; Augusto et al., 2022). A study found that this is especially the case for China, Taiwan, Thailand, Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Latin America (Baruch et al., 2007).

Moreover, a decisive factor concerning the cultural background and the likeability to stay, is the experienced racial discrimination by the guest student in the host country. Therefore, racism was found to directly influence to decision to move back home (Dengg, 2022). Understanding the diverse backgrounds and identities of migrants is essential for addressing integration challenges, promoting social cohesion, and fostering inclusive societies in the context of global migration flows.

In a study researching the motives of graduate migration, the developed research model (see figure 11) presents a comprehensive perspective of six primary (adjustment process to the university, satisfaction from the university, social support, family ties, career perception, demography) and two secondary factors (labor market perception, home national culture) that influence the likeliness of international students and graduates to either stay in the host country or to return back to the home country. The findings of this study indicated that the key factors impacting a foreign student's choice to either stay or return were the perception of the labor market in the host country, the student's adjustment process to the university, and family ties of the student in both host and home countries (Baruch et al., 2007).

Figure 11

Factoring influencing the decision to stay abroad (Baruch et al., 2007, p. 104)



2.2.3 Campus Recruitment and Career Center Partnerships

This subchapter first introduces the concept of campus recruitment. Second, the concept is explained looking at the United States of America (US) as the most prominent country to make use of it. This is followed by, third, a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages for the companies to pursue campus recruitment as a talent recruitment strategy. And finally, three measures of conducting EB through campus recruitment are being presented and explained.

The concept of campus recruitment is understood to be a place (college or university) and target group (advanced students or graduate students from different fields) to search among for new young talent. If a company wants to hire new employees and in particular attract the most talented yet inexperienced candidates straight from their educational institution, their HR team starts campus recruitment as a new strategy (Rao, 2009). While this strategy is new to some organizations, some also have long-standing and long-term cooperations with certain colleges or universities. Especially relevant when looking to recruit well educated specialists in different fields, hiring straight from campus once a year can be of great interest to HR when looking to fill a certain position. While these candidates might not have much professional experience (at most internships), the organization can still shape and train the young but promising employees (Patel & Rana, 2007; Rashmi, 2010).

A report from Aptitude Research (Laurano, 2023) found that 58% of companies based in the United States of America (US) have a dedicated early talent or campus recruitment program in place. Especially since Covid-19 the trends show that companies increasingly use virtual platforms to recruit graduate students and now try to find a balance between virtual and in-person events to approach possible candidates. Moreover, showing and practicing a real interest in diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) and looking for talent outside of Ivy League colleges is recommended in this report. An increased presence at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) could already be found in current strategies, while other areas to address DEI are still underrepresented. Different technologies already support many HR strategies and automation is now continuously present in campus strategies. An increased efficiency, consistency and transparency in communication and the recruitment process have been found to be beneficial to both the recruiters and students (Laurano, 2023).

In the US almost every college, but especially the prestigious Ivy League schools, are considered rich sources of campus recruiting (Binder et al., 2015). Ten years ago, a large study conducted among US students and recent graduates revealed that while almost 98% of companies consider campus job fairs as successful for recruiting talented graduates while in reality students responded much better to a coherent story and personal referral from friends when looking for an attractive employer brand (Agrawal, 2016).

Nevertheless, before even finishing their degree, the top of the year already has many different job offers on the table (Ellis, 2024). A later study suggests that about 70% of all mid- to large-sized companies are hiring young graduates via campus recruiting (Laurano, 2018). With some changes and difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic, campus recruitment is back in place, though not necessarily always in-person (Schwartz & Marcos, 2021; Ellis, 2024). Few research studies have been conducted in recent years, while many service providers and websites emerged that have specialized in the “war of young talent”. Blogging about tips on the best universities to find young talent for different industries (Morgen, 2023), listing the most innovative campus recruiting strategies (RM Team, 2023), or offering an HR software, tool or program tailored to the needs of campus recruiters (Kaushik, 2024).

When debating whether to recruit Master graduates and implementing a specific EB strategy to address this target group, there are different arguments in favor and against doing

so. Several studies have explored the feasibility and predicted reliability of this measure, and both sides will be presented in the following.

Supporting this recruiting approach, a study has found that strengthening and stimulating the organization's internal growth (Bogatova, 2017) due to new perspectives, business ideas and a fresh outlook brought in by campus recruit which in turn create a competitive advantage for the company (Hafeez & Farooq, 2017). The young talents are usually eager to share their ideas and wish to make a difference in their new job (Hafeez & Farooq, 2017).

Concerning the services and products offered by the company these candidates are often more passionate about them and support proactively a quality increase (Hafeez & Farooq, 2017). They tend to be up to date on the latest trends and news relevant to their profession with the aim of remaining competitive among the workforce (McCracken et al., 2015).

Helping to establish a solid employee base (Bogatova, 2017) as recent graduate hires are seen as valuable corporate assets (Hafeez & Farooq, 2017). The company is required to understand the opportunities the new hires mean, how to capitalize them and get the highest reward possible for corporate operations (Caballero & Walker, 2010).

It is most likely the new graduates first job, which leads to higher probability of conducting stronger internal promotions as its workforce is capable to grasp the diverse spectrum of internal and external operations (Bogatova, 2017)

Young and "shapable" employees facilitate the establishment of a strong organizational culture and lived corporate values (Bogatova, 2017). Rather still easily impressionable and often passionate about their work, their team and their company, recent graduates are likely to soak up the perceived and taught organizational culture.

Hiring candidates from college or university often comes with a financial incentive as they are still relatively affordable. For young companies and smaller start-ups this offers an attractive option to employ high quality recruits with a limited budget. Although not exclusively, as these firms also require expertise to grow their business, but sometimes cannot meet the high expectations in salary of older candidates (Rehman & Mazhar, 2016).

In addition, new graduates are found to perform at their peak and offered attractive career opportunities pay off for the company itself (Bogatova, 2017). Their learning mentality from university, enthusiasm and eagerness to learn as well as to put their acquired

knowledge into practice, cannot be found equally as strong in more experienced new hires (Caballero & Walker, 2010; Hafeez & Farooq, 2017). These qualities prove to be advantageous for an increased efficiency in the corporate operations (McCracken et al., 2015). Especially in difficult times for the company due to a staff shortage or economic problems these new employees allow for a continuity in business operations and upholding of corporate standards (Caballero & Walker, 2010).

Moreover, not yet in the business world established but promising latest technology from university research is brought in with by the new recruits. Implementing technology and digital skills in their work leads to more productive workflows (McCracken et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, Rehman and Mazhar (2016) call for a considerate determination whether it is advisable to recruit recent graduates instead of experienced workers. Criteria like smaller risk tasks, limited budget and internal resources with capacity to train and accompany the new talent, argue in favor of (Rehman & Mazhar, 2016).

Despite many enticing advantages, practicing campus recruiting also comes with challenges and disadvantages, which we will present in the following.

The amortization of the promised benefits of campus recruits for the company can take some time and resources. It can be considered disadvantageous that in order to profit from the acquired talents of the new colleagues they need to settle in first, receive training and guidance before participating in important meetings and leading to increased productivity and efficiency (Tóth-Téglás et al., 2016; Plantilla, 2017).

Experienced candidates usually take less time to onboard and prove to be a valuable investment early on (Tóth-Téglás et al., 2016). Recent graduates, on the other hand, require a certain investment in training and close monitoring to help them improve their skills (Zarei & Wong, 2014). The lack in skills and the uncertainty, whether they will actually perform as well as planned and improve thanks to the training provided, is omnipresent and visible in low efficiency and little output. But not only hard skills but also soft skills have to be taught, e.g. workload management, corporate speech, labels and even punctuality (Serhan et al, 2016).

Zarei and Wong (2014) point out that recently graduated candidates more often show changing interests in different fields which can initially affect the spending of budget, due to recommended shift of departments. Unsure about their role in the organization and what

the job description entails in everyday work life, is seen as challenging and a consequence of insufficient self-knowledge regarding one's capabilities (Zarei & Wong, 2014).

In addition, attractive job offers from the competition to then recruit the young talent and “harvest” the investment made into human capital can be viewed as a potential threat to the organization (Zarei & Wong, 2014).

According to a study by Plantilla (2017) campus recruits nowadays have a different work mentality and want to work less hours for a higher salary, which would result in a financial loss for the organization. The researcher even discusses the so-called trap of campus recruitment including hiring, training and firing new candidates due to persistent low productivity and questions the in turn unnecessary costs for the organization (Plantilla, 2017).

After introducing the basics of campus recruitment and what potential advantages and disadvantages in recruiting students and recent graduates are, we will now have a look at the measures that campus recruitment entails. Entering into partnerships with universities and career centers is a strategic approach for companies aiming to enhance their EB campaigns and attract young talent through e.g., internship, traineeship, and mentorship programs (Holyoak, 2013). These collaborations serve multiple purposes, each with distinct intentions and strategies for engaging with students.

Internship programs are designed to provide students with a structured hands-on experience in a real work environment related to their field of study (Taylor, 1988). Companies benefit by identifying and nurturing potential future employees while showcasing their organizational culture, company values and career opportunities (Hurst & Good, 2010; Elarde & Chong, 2012; Maertz et al., 2014). Recruiters often contact students through university career fairs, online job portals, and on campus networking events. The practical experience can often not be fully simulated during university classes, which is why this practical experience (Elarde & Chong, 2012), on how to overcome different challenges in the real-life work environment, is important for a better job performance in their career (Maertz et al., 2014). As internships are often required and part of the program's curriculum, many companies offer internships and foster partnerships with universities (Hurst & Good, 2010). In Portugal some examples are the EDP Summer Internship (EDP Energias de Portugal., n.d.), the Nestlé Internship (Nestlé Global, n.d.), the RTP Professional Internship

(Rádio e Televisão de Portugal [RTP], 2024) or the Bosch Curricular Internship (Bosch in Portugal, n.d.).

Traineeship programs focus on developing specific skills or competencies in recent graduates or early-career professionals (Saier, 2008). Companies leverage these programs to groom talent for future leadership roles, to infuse fresh perspectives into their workforce and to find the best person-job-fit through elements like job rotation (Röcker & Körner, 2019; Batz, 2021). Contacting trainees typically involves targeted outreach through university partnerships, alumni networks, and social media (Saier, 2008; Röcker & Körner, 2019). For instance, there are NOS ALFA Biz and NOS ALFA Tech (NOS.PT, n.d.), the Junior Manager Program at Bosch (Bosch in Portugal, n.d.) or the BMW Group AcceleratiON (BMW Group, n.d.) trainee programs.

Another option to strengthen the employer brand among young talents are mentorship programs which pair experienced professionals with students or recent graduates to provide guidance, coaching, and career advice (Andreanoff, 2017). Companies use these programs to build relationships with emerging talent, offer mentorship opportunities to their employees, and demonstrate their commitment to employee development (Estevez, 2009). Contacting mentees often involves collaboration with university career centers, alumni associations, and professional networking platforms. It is a measure not as widely used but there are, for example, the IBM Pathfinder Mentoring Program (IBM, n.d.), the CS Research Mentorship Program (Google, n.d.) or the 10,000 Women Growth Fellowship (Goldman Sachs, n.d.).

For companies to establish successful partnerships with universities and career centers require clear communication, mutual benefit, and a strategic approach to engaging with students at various stages of their academic and professional journey. These initiatives not only contribute to a company's EB campaign but also cultivate a pipeline of skilled and motivated talent for future recruitment and retention efforts.

2.3 Corporate Attractiveness of Portugal

2.3.1 Macroeconomic Indicators of the Portuguese Economy

In the following subchapter we will take a look at several macroeconomic factors of the Portuguese economy that characterize the current situation for Portuguese and international workers and organizations. The first marker is the gross domestic product (GDP), the second one the public debt within the public finances of the Portuguese

government, followed by the third one the unemployment rate and the labor market situation. Additionally, the inflation rate and the development of consumer prices are highlighted, the trade balance of goods and services assessed and finally the innovative performance and environmental sustainability efforts of Portugal are explained.

In June 2023, the OECD published the annual “OECD Economic Survey: Portugal 2023” (OECD, 2023b). It deals with Portugal's economic situation, provides detailed analysis, statistics and policy recommendations to address the main challenges. Moreover, in the same month the OECD published a report titled “OECD Economic Outlook, Volume 2023 Issue 1” (OECD, 2023c), which provides a comprehensive analysis of the country's economic situation with a focus on recent developments in 2023, forecasts for 2024 and policy recommendations. The Banco de Portugal (2023) also published an extensive economic bulletin report which analyses the economic situation of Portugal in December 2023.

Despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Portugal's GDP saw a strong growth of 6.7% in 2022 (OECD, 2023c), respectively 6.8% according to Banco de Portugal (2023). In the following year the GDP dropped more than four percent points to 2.5% (OECD, 2023b) or, according to the Portuguese bank, to 2.1% (Banco de Portugal, 2023). For 2024 the predictions show another decrease in GDP, which is expected to drop to 1.5% (OECD, 2023b). With a 1.2% in GDP the Banco de Portugal (2023), estimates it to be even lower. While the predictions following the OECD survey stop in 2024, the Banco de Portugal (2023) expects a small growth of one percent point to a 2.2% in GDP in 2025. The year 2026 is expected to stay aligned with the numbers of the previous year, placing the GDP for 2026 at 2.0% (Banco de Portugal, 2023).

A continuously decreasing GDP as seen in recent years in Portugal indicates an economic slowdown, also called a regression, which results from different triggers and has effects on all the actors within an economy. Higher interest rates introduced in 2022 led to a decrease in private consumption and investment in the first half of 2023. Both recovered slightly in the second half of 2023, but because of a lower growth in foreign tourism and less exported goods, the net exports to growth also ended negative. For 2024 only a mild recovery is expected as many trading partners show a weak demand. Nevertheless, during 2024 and 2025 private consumption will probably profit from higher salaries and increased

employment. In the foreign trade sector, imports are likely to exceed exports (European Commission, 2024).

Public debt in Portugal remains high during and shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic with 112.4% of the GDP in 2022, which can pose a risk and a challenge to the long-term sustainability of public finances. In 2023 a significant decrease of eleven percent points was recorded as public debt fell to 101.4% of the GDP after several political measures were implemented. Another drop in the governmental debt is predicted in 2024, with 96.8% of the GDP, falling for the first time in over a decade under the 100% mark. For 2025 and 2026 further decreases are expected with 93.2% and 87.9% of the Portuguese GDP (Banco de Portugal, 2023).

To overcome the challenges of a decreasing but still high public debt, the OECD (2023b) study emphasizes the importance of fiscal consolidation and structural reforms. It recommends prioritizing the rationalization of spending, particularly in public administration and healthcare, in order to curb and reduce public debt. It also proposes measures to diversify revenues, such as broadening the tax base and improving tax compliance, in order to strengthen the resilience of public finances (OECD, 2023b).

Despite a nearly stable employment situation, the labor market continued to show favorable conditions according to the Banco de Portugal (2023), with an increase in real wages. In 2023, employment remained resilient, although signs of slowing appeared in the second half of the year. The employment dynamics were mainly driven by the services sector, which is more labor-intensive. Forecasts for 2023 anticipated a 0.8% increase in employment, followed by a slowdown to 0.1% in 2024 and 0.3% in the period 2025–26.

The unemployment rate has seen an increase from 6.1% in 2022 to 6.5% in 2023 and is expected to be relatively stable with a slight increase for at 7.1% in 2024, 7.3% in 2025, and 7.2% in 2026 (Banco de Portugal, 2023). Despite recent improvements, youth unemployment remained high at 20.30% in 2023, with an increase in the first quarter of 2024 to 23.20%. For 2025, the predictions foresee an unemployment rate of youth of about 23.00% (OECD, 2023b).

The average nominal wage in the economy is expected to have increased by 7.5% in 2023, followed by an increase of 4.4% in 2024 and 3.8% in the 2025–26 period. The economy stagnated in the second and third quarters of 2023 and grew only slowly in the fourth quarter, mainly due to weak external demand, the cumulative effects of inflation, and

more restrictive monetary policy. Despite these challenges, the services sector showed resilience, contributing to the maintenance of favorable conditions in the labor market, despite some recent slowing of employment (Banco de Portugal, 2023).

The OECD report analyzes that labor market dynamics are scrutinized, which highlights the persistent problems of youth unemployment and labor market segmentation. This is characterized by a dualistic employment structure with a high proportion of temporary and part-time employment (OECD, 2023b). As the low minimum wage has been seen to slow down labor market growth, the Portuguese government has increased it by 7.8% in 2023 and plans a further rise of 6.6% in 2024 (OECD, 2023c).

Addressing these problems, the OECD study calls for comprehensive labor market reforms aimed at improving skills development, promoting lifelong learning, and supporting inclusion in the labor market. Reducing labor market segmentation is expected to improve employment opportunities for young people (OECD, 2023c). In order to improve overall labor market outcomes and reduce inequality, measures to reduce duality in the labor market are recommended. These can be, for example, reforming employment protection laws and promoting wage convergence between permanent and temporary or contract employees (OECD, 2023b).

Inflation in Portugal is expected to continue to decline, according to the investigative report published by the Banco de Portugal (2023). The annual rate of change in the harmonized consumer price index (HICP) is projected to further decrease from a post-pandemic 8.1% in 2022 to a 5.3% in 2023. Another drop in HICP to 2.9% in 2024 and 2.0% from 2025 to 2026 is expected by analysts. Monitored economic developments indicated that the Portuguese economy stagnated in the second and third quarters of 2023 and while slowly growing in the fourth quarter. This slowdown can be attributed to weak external demand, inflation, and tighter monetary policy. In comparison, the service sector has shown greater resilience than the industrial sector (Banco de Portugal, 2023).

A very gradual recovery in quarterly economic growth is expected for 2024. This comeback will be supported by accelerated external demand, a decrease in inflation, and the expected impulse from European investment funds. In the medium term, growth will also benefit from the gradual easing of restrictive monetary policy. The described decline in inflation is reflected in consumer prices, which have decreased due to lower production costs and the effective transmission of monetary policy. Business surveys indicate a decrease in

demand pressure, with more companies reporting inadequate demand, which also affects pricing (Banco de Portugal, 2023).

For 2024 in general, inflation is expected to temporarily increase before stabilizing at 2% in 2025. This temporary increase is due to temporary effects on energy and food prices. Nevertheless, core inflation (excluding energy and food) is expected to continue to decline in 2024 before stabilizing in 2025 (Banco de Portugal, 2023).

The trade balance of goods and services in Portugal experienced a significant improvement, shifting from a deficit of 2.1% of GDP on average in the period 2020–22 to a surplus of 1.2% in 2023. This improvement was mainly driven by a positive volume effect in tourism flows and a recovery in trade conditions, particularly due to lower energy commodity prices. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the surplus is expected to remain close to or above pre-pandemic levels in the coming years, with forecasts indicating a surplus of 1.3% in 2024, 1.5% in 2025, and 1.8% in 2026. This improvement in the trade balance is expected to contribute to an average financing capacity of 3.6% of GDP during the period 2023–26, supporting the reduction of Portugal's external debtor position.

From the results of the OECD economic survey 2023, innovation and productivity are identified as the two key drivers of long-term economic growth. Portugal's innovation performance has improved in recent years, supported by investment in research and development (R&D) and digital infrastructure, such as high-speed internet. However, productivity growth remains modest and is hindered by structural barriers such as limited access to finance, regulatory burdens and skills mismatches (OECD, 2023b). To boost foreign trade, exports are to be supported economically and politically, particularly in the service sector, which in turn could have a positive impact on economic growth (OECD, 2023c).

To unlock Portugal's innovation potential and boost productivity, the OECD study advocates measures to overall strengthen the innovation ecosystem, improve access to finance for innovative start-ups and SMEs, and address skills shortages through targeted education of talent as well as training programs. It also recommends efforts to promote digitalization and the adoption of technology in all sectors in order to increase productivity and boost competitiveness (OECD, 2023b).

Given Portugal's vulnerability to climate change and environmental degradation (O'Riordan et al., 2014), environmental sustainability is identified as a key priority in the

economic survey of Portugal 2023. Especially the importance of accelerating the transition to a low-carbon economy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving energy efficiency is highlighted (OECD, 2023b). Policies to promote renewable energy sources, improve waste management and incentivize green investments are proposed to advance environmental sustainability goals and mitigate climate risks.

Shifting to a resource-efficient and low-carbon economy is seen as a key objective for Portugal to achieve its environmental goals and tackle climate change (OECD, 2023c). To this end, the Portuguese government drew up and in 2019 published the roadmap for achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 (RNC2050) (República Portuguesa et al., 2019). Its main objective is to identify and analyze the impact of technically feasible, economically viable and socially acceptable alternative pathways. Through novel and more environmentally friendly approaches committed to in the policy framework, the Portuguese economy plans on achieving the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.

Table 1

Macroeconomic Indicators for Portugal 2022-2026

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
GDP (%)	6.8	2.1	1.2	2.2	2.0
Public Debt (% GDP)	112.4	101.4	96.8	92.3	87.9
Unemployment Rate (%)	6.1	6.5	7.1	7.3	7.2
Youth Unemployment (%)	20.30	23.20	23.00	-	-
Inflation (HICP) (%)	8.1	5.3	2.9	2.0	2.0
Trade balance (goods and services) (%)	-1.9	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.8

Note. The data for GDP, Public Debt, Unemployment Rate, Inflation (HICP), Trade balance (goods and services) are from the *Boletín Económico*, by Banco de Portugal, 2023 (https://www.bportugal.pt/sites/default/files/documents/2024-01/be_dez23_p.pdf). Copyright 2023 by Banco de Portugal. The data for Youth Unemployment is from the *OECD Economic Surveys: Portugal 2023*, by oecd-library.org, 2023 (<https://doi.org/10.1787/2b8ee40a-en>). Copyright 2023 by OECD Library.

2.3.2 Portugal's regional attractiveness for investments and business operations

When companies are looking to invest in Portugal or start a business, there are several arguments in favor and against doing so. First, different observations derived from multiple studies are presented. Second, the OECD regional attractiveness compass is introduced, followed by a specific report on the regional attractiveness of the greater Lisbon area. Third, the accounting firm Ernest & Young (EY) conducted research to assess the attractiveness of Portugal regarding the country's qualities as a place to invest and operate a business. Derived from the recommendations given in the EY report, different variables influencing investment decisions in Portugal will be discussed. And fourth, the current state of different industries and companies on the Portuguese market is highlighted based on international statistics.

Portugal offers several compelling arguments for companies to invest and do business based on a number of favorable factors. One pull-factor is its geographically strategic location serves as a central gateway to key global markets, offering unrivalled access to Europe, Africa and the Americas (OECD, 2023b). As a member of the European Union (EU) Portugal enables access to more than 500 million consumers for businesses located outside of the EU (Góis, 2023). This strategic advantage increases the country's attractiveness for companies looking to expand their reach internationally.

Coupled with a skilled and well-educated labor force in various sectors, including technology, engineering and tourism, Portugal provides a solid foundation for businesses to succeed (OECD, 2023b). High-ranking universities offer English-language programs for Portuguese and international students and have affiliated innovation and research centers. There is a high proficiency of the English language, especially in the bigger cities, which allows international business operations to take place. In addition, the country's competitive operating costs, which include low labor costs, favorable tax incentives – especially for non-habitual residents – and relatively affordable real estate, further enhance the country's attractiveness to investors. The country is also on the same latitude as the UK and Ireland and therefore has the same time zone as London and Dublin, where many international companies have their headquarters.

Portugal's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment is evident through ongoing reforms aimed at simplifying bureaucratic procedures, reducing administrative burdens and strengthening the legal and regulatory framework (OECD, 2023b). These efforts facilitate business activity and reduce barriers for domestic and foreign investors. Especially

for start-ups Portugal proves to be a friendly ecosystem with different support programs for entrepreneurs and facilities like co-working spaces to be used. In addition, the country's robust infrastructure, which includes modern transport networks, advanced telecommunications systems and high-speed internet, ensures seamless connectivity and logistical support for companies operating within its borders. It has already become an international technology hub as many international companies have set up IT centers and international business operation units (OECD, 2023b).

Furthermore, Portugal's exceptional quality of life, characterized by soft factors such as a favorable climate, picturesque landscapes, a rich cultural heritage and a relaxed lifestyle, contributes to its appeal as a destination for (remote) workers and their families. This combination of factors, including innovation and research initiatives, government support and renewable energy potential, makes Portugal a dynamic and attractive region for investment and business growth, promoting long-term economic prosperity and sustainable development (OECD, 2020).

The OECD regional attractiveness compass (OECD, 2022) is used to identify Portugal's economic potential, its strengths and regional development strategies which are used to attract talent, investors and business operators alike. Therefore, the measurement framework names six different variables to determine the regional attractiveness: economic attractiveness, connectedness, visitor appeal, natural environment, resident well-being and land use and housing (as visualized in figure 12).

Figure 12

Regional Attractiveness Indicators (OECD, 2022)



The insight gathered in the OECD (2022) working paper on regional attractiveness has then been applied to the Metropolitan area of Lisbon (AML), which examines in detail the regional attractiveness of this area within Portugal (OECD, 2023a). Based on the attractiveness compass model introduced in figure 1, the OECD report used the innovative and multidimensional approach in order to investigate the reality of the six variables of regional attractiveness of AML named prior.

Greater Lisbon has a relatively high economic attractiveness compared to other EU regions and Portuguese regions. In particular, it outperforms other Portuguese regions in terms of GDP per capita, gross value added per employee and the percentage of employment in research and development. However, the employment rate, especially youth employment, is below the EU average (OECD, 2023a).

The high visitor appeal can be seen in the tourism sector which is an important and growing part of the region's economy. In comparison to other EU and Portuguese regions, the AML is performing very well. Nevertheless, the high number of international visitors and the country's dependency on the tourism industry makes the Portuguese economy vulnerable to pandemic impacts, as seen during Covid-19. The AML has a rich cultural

heritage, several UNESCO world heritage sights, and a significant share of the cultural and creative industries, which play in favor of the region's visitor appeal (OECD, 2023a).

The AML clearly excels in transport and digitalization. Lisbon airport is growing and offering more flights and destinations every year than ever before, which is a favorable indicator of the region's connectedness. Although rail and road transport performance is above the EU average, statistics have shown that only 56.8% of the population are satisfied with public transport. Initiatives such as the Lisbon Social Transport Pass aim to improve the quality and accessibility of public transport. In terms of digital transformation, AML is also above the EU average, with over 88% of households having a broadband connection (OECD, 2023a).

As mentioned before, tourism has become a leading industry in the region, which has since led to a sharp rise in property prices. The growing demand from foreigners for second homes in the AML region, encouraged by government incentives such as the Golden Visa, has been a key driver of this trend. In Greater Lisbon, 13% of the population feel they do not have enough money to buy a home. Less than a third (32%) are satisfied with the affordability of housing. This trend in land and housing has influenced the dynamics of urban development to some extent negatively as neighborhoods are being gentrified and the housing crisis is getting worse. Moreover, the consolidation of the urban fabric could potentially have environmental consequences, like soil sealing (OECD, 2023a).

In regard to the resident well-being, the AML region has an above-average level of education, with good access to primary and secondary schools and three universities among the top 500 in the world. Greater Lisbon has a high proportion of foreign students (approximately 12%) and a high rate of citizens with a tertiary higher education degree (41.3%). Even though healthcare is accessible and inexpensive, the overall satisfaction is below the EU and OECD average of 65%. Social cohesion and political participation are also challenges, as voter turnout is low (~56%) (OECD, 2023a).

For the indicator of natural environment, AML's environmental policy presents some challenges, as only around 49% of the population are satisfied with efforts to protect the environment, which is below the EU average. Nevertheless, the region has important natural assets such as estuaries and nature parks open to the public. The tree cover rate remains below the EU average (22%), but has improved between 2004 and 2019. Greenhouse gas

emissions from the transport sector are comparatively low (0.65 tons of CO₂ equivalent per capita) (OECD, 2023a).

In September 2023 the consulting firm Ernest & Young (EY) published a report on the “EY Attractiveness Survey” for Portugal as a destination for investment and business operations (EY, 2023). It reveals several key insights and developments, which will be summarized in the following.

Portugal witnessed a significant surge in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects, reaching a record of 248 projects in 2022, marking a 24% increase from the previous year. Notably, Germany, the USA, France, the UK, and Spain emerged as prominent investors in Portugal, particularly in sectors such as Software and IT Services, Business Services, and Sales & Marketing. This reflects Portugal's focus on digitalization and service-oriented industries (EY, 2023).

The report underscores Portugal's ascent in Europe's FDI rankings, with the country climbing two places to reach the 6th position as an FDI destination. This upward trajectory is indicative of Portugal's growing appeal to foreign investors, driven by factors such as its strategic location, skilled workforce, competitive operating costs, and favorable business environment. Moreover, Portugal's relative weight in total European FDI projects has increased significantly, rising from 1.2% to 4.2% between 2018 and 2022 (EY, 2023).

According to the EY Attractiveness Survey Portugal, Germany has overtaken the United States in terms of the number of FDI projects targeting Portugal. Individually, with 36 projects, Germany has reached first place as the main investor in Portuguese territory. Investments from Germany, the United States, and France primarily targeted the Software and IT Services sector, with these three nations contributing 39.4% of all projects in the sector (EY, 2023).

Most of the FDI was directed towards the software and IT services sector, comprising 99 projects. Of these, 76 were new companies establishing operations in Portugal, further enhancing its appeal in the digital economy. According to the EY Attractiveness Survey, consistent with prior years, 59% of investors surveyed anticipate an increase in Portugal's attractiveness over the next three years, leading up to 2025 (EY, 2023).

Despite these positive developments, the report also highlights areas for improvement and current challenges that it faces. While Portugal excels in talent availability compared to other European countries, there is a need to enhance innovation awareness and regulatory

frameworks to foster a conducive environment for investment and entrepreneurship. Additionally, investors emphasize the importance of addressing competitiveness issues, promoting growth drivers, and implementing supportive policies for SMEs to sustain Portugal's competitive position (EY, 2023).

In terms of sustainability, Portugal has made commendable progress towards achieving the 2030 climate goals, demonstrating its commitment to tackling the pressing issue of climate change. Under the umbrella of the Portugal 2030 program in partnership with the European Commission, one of the five strategic objectives is a greener Portugal, which the government named “Sustentável 2030” (Portugal 2030, 2023). There is also a positive mindset among Portugal’s citizens towards accelerating the energy transition in order to gain competitive advantage (EY, 2023).

The survey, encompassing a diverse panel of participants from Western Europe, North America, Asia, Brazil, and Eastern Europe, reflects a strong inclination among investors to continue investing in Portugal over the next three years, particularly in sectors such as sales and marketing, research and development (R&D), and business services. Underscoring Portugal's growing attractiveness as a safe and innovative destination for foreign investment, the report poised to capitalize on its strengths and address areas for improvement to maintain its competitive edge in the global market (EY, 2023).

Moving on from the attractiveness survey, the industry breakdown and statistics on operating companies in Portugal, allow a differentiated look at the country’s economy. When examining the composition of industries in Portugal, the services sector holds the largest share, accounting for 38.1% of the market, followed by the retail trade sector at 16.5% and finance, insurance, and real estate at 11.2% (HitHorizons, 2024).

Portugal hosts 592,292 companies out of a total of 44.22 million registered businesses in Europe, which is approximately 1.3% of the European market as of February 2024. According to the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code, 5.63% of businesses in Portugal are involved in subdivision or development, while 5.61% are categorized as eating places, and 5.24% are considered operative builders (HitHorizons, 2024).

When analyzing the sales volume of the largest companies operating in Portugal, “Petrogal” leads with 14.86 billion euros, constituting 2.74% of all national sales, followed by “Energias de Portugal (EDP)” with 9.084 billion euros and a market share of 1.67%. Other significant companies include “Modelo Continente Hipermercados” with sales of

5.045 billion euros (0.93%) and “Pingo Doce Distribuição Alimentar” with 4.93 billion euros (0.91%). These figures demonstrate the dominance of a few major players in the Portuguese market, particularly in the energy and retail sectors (HitHorizons, 2024).

2.3.3 Governmental Policies and Political Implications for Foreign Workers

For non-Portuguese wanting to move to Portugal for higher education or work, there are several different policies and regulations. We will be looking at international students moving to Portugal to do their Bachelor or Master program, the different Visa options for foreign workers in general, the situation of remote workers, the Golden Visa program and its criticism.

As Portuguese universities offer several bachelor and master programs in English-language, studying in Portugal either during an Erasmus-semester or as a full-time student has become increasingly popular (Governo da República Portuguesa, 2023a). For EU and European Economic Area (EEA) students there is no visa required. Nevertheless, if they are staying in Portugal for more than 90 days, they must apply for a residence card (Autorização de Residência) at the local town hall upon arrival. Moreover, EU/EEA-students are allowed to work without restrictions during their stay in Portugal.

For non-European students the policies and regulations are different. They need a residence permit and a student visa to enter Portugal (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Portugal, n.d.). The type C visa is a short-stay visa and is intended for non-EU students or researchers who wish to complete a course or research project in Portugal lasting less than 90 days. The type D visa is for all non-EU students or researchers who are studying in Portugal for longer than 90 days. Both have to be applied for in the country of residence in advance of their stay. In addition, non-EU students in Portugal are permitted to work part-time, up to 20 hours per week during the academic semester, and full-time during official holidays or periods without academic obligations (AIMA, 2024a; AIMA, 2024f).

If non-EU/EEA students wish to stay and work in Portugal after graduating from a Portuguese university, they must apply for a postgraduate work permit (AIMA, 2024g). Portuguese language skills at intermediate level (B1) or higher must be certified. After completing their studies, they have up to six months to find a job that corresponds to their previous field of study. However, the company must prove that no EU citizen can fill the position instead. A visa application is usually made after a job offer has been made. With

this, it is possible to work in Portugal for one year, while proof of employment must be submitted in order to extend the visa for a further two years. After three years of work, employees can usually apply for permanent residence in Portugal.

There are several options for international students to obtain a visa after completing their studies and starting work in Portugal. One is the classic work visa, which requires a job offer related to the field of study (AIMA, 2024c). The second option is the entrepreneur visa, which can be used to set up a company in Portugal (AIMA, 2024d). And the third option is the visa for freelancers who carry out self-employed work for domestic and foreign clients (AIMA, 2024b).

The D8 digital nomad visa was introduced in October 2022 and allows remote workers to legally reside in Portugal while pursuing their professional activities online (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Portugal, 2024). Eligible applicants include freelancers, entrepreneurs and employees working for foreign companies or their own business.

To qualify for the digital nomad visa, applicants must prove that they have a stable income of at least €3,280 per month from remote work and have sufficient financial resources of €9,840 to cover their living expenses during their stay in Portugal. Health insurance cover and a clean criminal record are also required.

There are two different forms of this D8 visa, the long-term residency visa and the temporary stay visa (Turismo de Portugal, 2022). With the former, you must apply for a residency permit for two years after four months and may be able to acquire citizenship after five years, while the latter is suitable for shorter stays. The holder of the visa can travel freely within the Schengen area and bring family members as dependents.

The Golden Visa is an immigration program in Portugal launched in October 2012 that offers third-country nationals (non-Portuguese and non-EU/EFTA citizens) the opportunity to obtain a residence permit if they make a certain investment in the country (AIMA, 2024e). Typically, the investment of minimum 250,000 euros can be done in the form of real estate purchases (only possible until October 2023), capital investments or job creation. It must be kept for minimum 5 years, while this does not require a permanent stay in Portugal, but only seven days in the first and fourteen days in the following four years. The Golden Visa is based on the article 90A, a law called residence permit for investment activity (ARI). The Golden Visa gives holders and their family members the right to live and work in Portugal and to travel visa-free through the Schengen area (Get Golden Visa, 2024).

The main purpose of this program is to attract foreign capital and promote the economic development of Portugal. Benefits for Portugal include the attraction of foreign investment, job creation and the growth of the real estate industry. For immigrants, the Golden Visa offers access to the EU, free travel through the Schengen-area, a safe political environment, access to healthcare services, and many soft factors attributed to the quality of life (Portugal-Golden-Visa.Pt, 2021).

However, there are also criticisms regarding the Golden Visa (Greenwald, 2023), such as the potential impact on the real estate market, dependence on foreign investment and possible effects on social integration. It is also argued that the program does not contribute sufficiently to the economic development of Portugal's less developed regions. Answering to some of the criticism in the housing market, in October 2023 the Portuguese Government passed the “Mais Habitação” Law, which revoked the option of real-estate investment in order to apply for a Golden Visa (Governo da República Portuguesa, 2023b).

As of October 2023, around 1.09 million expats with residence permits (Marcelino, 2023) live in Portugal among 10.23 million Portuguese. In comparison, 12,718 Golden Visa holders have been registered in the last decade alongside 20,424 accompanying family members. About two thirds are from China, in second place is Brazil, followed by USA, Turkey and South Africa (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF), 2024).

3. Research Methodology

Following the literature review, we will now outline the methodology adopted for this research. For the scientific investigation of the research question, the subsequent steps are described below: research question, research approach and design, as well as the data collection methods, consisting of sampling, interview, survey and data analysis method which will be content analysis. Finally, we will look at ethical implications and possible limitations to this research.

3.1 Research question and objectives

The origin of this research lies in the much discussed but so far little researched topic of Master student emigration after graduating university and how companies in Portugal are employing EB to attract them (Associação Business Roundtable Portugal, 2024). Especially

the case of international¹ students in Portuguese Master programs is still unexplored in-depth as of June 2024. It is aimed to contribute to the body of scientific knowledge in this area to ultimately result in value for the research fields in question. After reviewing the existing literature on different topics such as EB, talent attraction and retention, graduate migration and the Portuguese economy, three research questions (RQ) were developed specifically to answer it:

RQ1. *What EB strategies are being implemented by Portuguese companies and how do Portuguese companies use them to attract international Master students and recent graduates?*

RQ2. *How are the EB strategies perceived by international Master students at Portuguese universities and how successful are they?*

The research object of this study is to analyze the EB efforts of Portuguese companies and how they are aimed at attracting international Master students and recent graduates from Portuguese universities. Following this general research object, four specific objectives are set for the study: (1) to identify the employer branding strategies currently being employed by Portuguese companies; (2) to examine how these companies tailor their employer branding strategies to attract international Master students and recent graduates; (3) to assess the perceptions of international Master students at Portuguese universities regarding the effectiveness and appeal of these strategies; and (4) to determine how successful the current employer branding efforts are in meeting the expectations of international Master students.

3.2 Research approach

The present research draws on a constructivist approach focusing in epistemology on the fact that knowledge is shaped by the subjective construction of actors. In this framework, it is assumed that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and that the relationship between international master's students and Portuguese companies is influenced by the actors' interactions and interpretations. The individual perception is an essential factor to understand the underlying motivations and strategies behind employer-branding relationships. The social constructivist approach in ontology defines that reality is socially formed and depends on the interactions of the actors (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, both the knowledge and the reality of the participating actors are socially constructed and are

¹ All foreign and non-Portuguese students, excluding Erasmus students.

influenced by the groups under investigation. This study not only asks about the "what" of EB strategies, but also the "why" and "how".

Which research approach is most suitable for this study can therefore be justified by exploring the objectives, the advantages and disadvantages, as well as the general practicability of a quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method methodology (Creswell, 1994). In the initial stages of planning this study, a methodological orientation had to be found and defined that would create a framework that would allow deep insights into the subjective aspects of the relationship between international Master's students and Portuguese companies.

It is apparent that the present research approach is inherently qualitative in nature. The focus on the subjective construction of knowledge, the social construction of reality and the detailed recording of individual perspectives emphasize the qualitative dimension. The integration of quantitative elements in the form of mixed methods approaches complements this qualitative focus by making it possible to identify more general patterns and trends without losing focus on the individual, subjective aspects.

3.3 Research design

As Creswell (2007) has stated, a mixed-method approach combines the best parts of quantitative and qualitative research. Due to the complexity of many social and economic problems, using merely a single method cannot be considered sufficient. The integration and synergistic use of multiple data sources in mixed-methods design can be helpful in investigating multi-layered problems (Poth & Munce, 2020).

Creswell and Plano-Clarke (2011) describe four mixed methods designs: convergent parallel design, explanatory sequential design, exploratory sequential design and embedded design. The convergent parallel design collects and analyzes qualitative and quantitative data separately before merging the results. In an explanatory sequential design, researchers begin by collecting quantitative data, which is then followed by qualitative data to clarify and explain the quantitative results. Conversely, an exploratory sequential design starts with qualitative data collection to explore ideas or phenomena, and then integrates quantitative methods to further test or generalize the findings. The embedded design features one dominant method (qualitative or quantitative) with the other nested within, both conducted

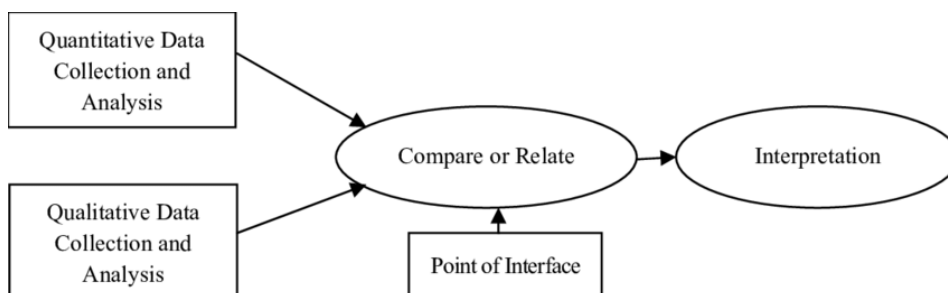
at the same time yet maintaining relative autonomy. These designs give researchers organized ways to blend different research methods for a fuller picture.

For this research study, a mixed methodology, consisting of expert interviews and a questionnaire, is used to effectively address the various research objectives. In this study we will use a convergent parallel design (as illustrated in figure 13), which is discussed and used in scientific research since the 1970s (Jick, 1979; Morse, 1991; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell, 1999; Creswell et al., 2003). First, the qualitative and quantitative data collection will take place simultaneously but independently. Second, both data sets obtained will be analyzed and visualized separately. And third, both data sets will be linked, and different methods of data analysis used to integrate and merge novel results.

Using this research design increases the comprehensive understanding of the research topic from a qualitative and quantitative point of view. Morse (1991) describes it as obtaining “different but complementary data on the same topic” (p. 122). While qualitative data provides context and depth in a small sample, quantitative data allows for generalizability with a larger sample size (Patton, 1990). Findings from one method can be used to validate or explain findings from the other method, for example through triangulation, which increases the overall validity of the study. Moreover, this approach leads to more reliable results as the researcher can mitigate each method’s weaknesses, while taking advantage of its relative strengths (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Figure 13

Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011)



First, interviews with EB specialist were conducted. Different methods of interviews serve different aims. Qualitative interviews can be either structured (fixed set of questions), semi-structured (few predetermined questions with individual follow-up questions) or unstructured (unplanned and free-flowing conversation) (Flick, 2018). Each type enables an

in-depth collection of individual perspectives and insights into the specific experiences of the protagonists. For exploratory purposes, they serve to reveal the practices of a social field, a group or an organization (Schirmer, 2009). For this research study, the semi-structured interview method will be used. It provides a framework for consistency while allowing for individual exploration of topics and participants expressing themselves freely. This is particularly relevant in order to understand the approach, effort and complexity of EB strategies from an organizational perspective. This interview technique is specifically designed for engaging with experts as the target group. The emphasis is placed on exploring the perspectives and actions of these experts, with less attention directed towards the interviewee as an individual (Flick, 2016).

Second, a questionnaire among international Master students was conducted. Creswell (1994) defines quantitative research as the study of social or human problems that consist of several numerically measurable variables. The aim is to validate theories. The most common method for quantitative data collection is the survey, especially through questionnaires. Information from a representative sample can be obtained and, in the analysis, deductively drawn conclusions about the population as a whole (Bell, 2006). The advantages are the relatively quick and inexpensive data collection and processing, precision, comparability and high reliability (Sreejesh et al., 2014). In order to fulfill the latter, surveys must meet certain conditions, including strict sample selection, clear wording of questions and consistency between interviewer and respondent populations (Bell, 2006). Factors such as the field background knowledge of the interviewer and respondent, a trusting interview atmosphere, honesty and professional awareness also contribute to the quality of the survey (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2005). It offers the opportunity to collect comprehensive data from a representative sample, which enables quantitative analysis to identify trends and patterns regarding career plans after graduation from a Portuguese university.

3.4 Data collection methods

3.4.1 Sampling

In the first step, for the interviews with corporate experts, a non-random purposive sampling approach was adopted, aiming to engage the maximum possible participants within the given timeframe, ideally. The interviews were targeted at individuals with expertise in EB. Therefore, participants with job titles such as Employer Brand Manager, Head of Human

Resources, Talent Management, Employee Experience Manager, Corporate Communication, Public Relations Manager and their selection follow strict criteria. To receive the best insights and examples relevant for this study and maintain comparability, only large companies with more than 250 employees were considered. Moreover, criteria included having business operations spanning at least two other countries, while they have an operational base and the majority (>50%) of capital is located in Portugal. This choice has been made due to the international target group and investigation of English-speaking EB efforts.

Due to personal interest, ease of contact and relevance in the Portuguese labor market, the researcher contacted at first only professionals from the information and communications technology sector, as this sector is highly innovative and dynamic in Portugal, contributing nearly 10% to the country's GDP and generating almost USD 20 billion in total turnover (*Portugal - Information and Communications Technology, 2024*). Nevertheless, after facing many difficulties in recruiting a significant number of EB specialists within this particular industry, it was decided to disregard this criterion and contact also potential candidates from different industries.

Starting on the 4th of February until the 31st of July the researcher contacted 79 people from 63 companies that met the required criteria for interview participants. After multiple attempts of contacting and requesting an interview, 6 EB professionals agreed to be interviewed. Several others did either not reply at all, stated limited available time or an exclusive focus on recruiting only Portuguese nationals. The sampling strategy involved leveraging personal contacts and informants, including networks through friends, roommates and contacts established via LinkedIn. In doing so, the success rate of interview partners recruited was higher via private contacts and email or WhatsApp, with 4 out of 13 experts approached. This contrasts with the outreach via LinkedIn messages, where the success rate of recruited interview partners was 2 out of 46 experts approached. In order to stay within the available time frame for this Master thesis, the data collection period was closed on the 31st of July, in order to allow for sufficient time to describe and analyze the results.

Second, for the questionnaire targeting international Master students and graduates at a Portuguese university, a non-random sample strategy involving voluntary response and snowball sampling within specified criteria was employed. The participant recruitment

strategy included various tools and mediums such as WhatsApp private and group chats, Instagram story and direct messages, E-Mail, and in person outreach, followed by the online link distribution. A 3-year timeframe, aligning with September 2023, was established. The sourcing criteria included enrollment in international Master's programs at a public or private university in Portugal during the 1st and 2nd year, recent Master graduates, and individuals up to 1 year post-graduation (September 2022).

In order to identify the targeted sample size, we contacted the Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência via email to request more detailed information on the percentage of international Master students, excluding Erasmus students within Portuguese higher education. The researcher was sent two links² to access the detailed statistics in Excel, which showed the number of students in higher education enrolled in the 2022/2023 school year and a preliminary overview statistic on the numbers for the 2023/2024 year (final statistics to be published at the end of September). Calculations based on the Ministry of Education's data indicated a population of 11,456 international Master students enrolled in full-time two-year programs (1st and 2nd year students) as of the academic year 2022/2023, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2023). Therefore, a minimum of 372 participants (Huot, 1999) was aimed to recruit for the survey.

3.4.2 Interview

As qualitative expert interviews are “conversations with a purpose” (Burgess, 2002, n/p) they have to be well prepared and thought through. According to Turner (2010) there are three different types of interviews in qualitative research: the informal conversation, the general interview guide and the standardized open-ended interview. All three types are exploratory tools with the aim to collect data to eventually be able to answer the research question. In this research the general interview guide, also known as a semi-structured interview, is chosen.

The aim of the interviews conducted was to ask corporate experts from Portuguese companies in the field of brand management, human resources, marketing, communication or comparable, what their companies' approach to EB was. We wanted to understand in-

² <https://www.dgeec.medu.pt/art/ensino-superior/bases-de-dados/todas/652ff89abd5c2b00958292d7>;
<https://www.dgeec.medu.pt/art/ensino-superior/estatisticas/vagas-e-inscritos/652fba6bbd5c2b00958292c4>

depth which efforts are being undertaken from an employer’s point of view to position their company as an attractive employer. Therefore, the 15 questions developed for the semi-structured interview guide were based on the EB roadmap model by Minchington (2006). The four phases described by the author – concept, design, integration and evaluation – were addressed in the interview to learn more about the practices of EB in the respective companies (see table 2). For each phase of the interview several questions were set, but, due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, the questions asked during the interview varied individually.

Table 2

Semi-structured interview guide developed based on Employer Branding Roadmap Model (Minchington, 2006)

Introduction
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you provide an overview of your organization's current Employer Branding project and its scope? 2. Who are the key stakeholders involved in the development, approval and execution of your Employer Branding initiatives?
Concept Phase
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. In the initial stages of the concept phase, how does your organization define the scope of its Employer Branding projects? 4. How is internal and external research conducted to gather insights for the Employer Branding project? 5. Can you elaborate on the criteria used to identify the targeted talent during the assessment phase?
Design Phase
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. How is the employer brand identity and image defined within your organization and especially your corporate culture? 7. Could you share insights on the involvement of senior management in reviewing and shaping the employer brand during the design phase?
Integration Phase
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. In the integration phase, how does HR align the employer brand management system with people management policies and practices? 9. Can you provide examples of how your organization integrates Employer Branding into its communication plan? Which channels and tools are being used and why?
Evaluation Phase

<p>10. How does your HR function define metrics to measure the success of Employer Branding initiatives?</p> <p>11. What methods are employed to measure the return on investment in Employer Branding?</p> <p>12. How does your organization review and communicate the results of Employer Branding initiatives with senior management and what is the organization’s long-term goal in Employer Branding?</p> <p>13. To better understand Employer Branding at your company – Can you share a case where you implemented a successful Employer Branding campaign? Take us through the entire process, covering the goals, intended audience, communication channels employed, and the resulting impact.</p>
<p>Final Questions</p>
<p>14. Since this study covers Employer Branding targeted at international Master students: How many non-Portuguese Master students and graduates did you recruit in the last 12 months?</p> <p>15. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your organization's approach and efforts in Employer Branding that we haven't covered?</p>

In total six interviews took place with a medium duration of 40:34 minutes. The job titles of the interviewed professionals varied from Head of Human Resources, Assistant Marketing and Employer Branding, Internal Communication & Employer Branding, Employer Branding & Talent Sourcing Analytics Senior Manager, Head of Culture & Engagement, and People Branding & Communication. As the interview participants chose to stay anonymous aside from sharing their job titles, we replaced the interviewee’s name with the codes “Interviewee A-F”, which will later be used in the result description and data analysis part. Moreover, for data protection and confidentiality all the interviewees did not agree to disclose the company’s name. Therefore, each company received a code, namely “Company A-F”. In table 3 all information is listed in detail.

Table 3

Overview conducted interviews

Name	Code	Job Title	Interview date	Interview duration
Interviewee A	Company A <i>Aeronautical</i>	Head of Human Resources	20.03.2024	49:45 min
Interviewee B	Company B <i>Hospitality</i>	Assistant Marketing and Employer Branding	27.03.2024	58:33 min

Interviewee C	Company C <i>Automobile</i>	Internal Communication & Employer Branding	08.04.2024	33:12 min
Interviewee D	Company D <i>Retail</i>	Employer Branding & Talent Sourcing Analytics Senior Manager	29.05.2024	33:45 min
Interviewee E	Company E <i>Insurance</i>	Head of Culture & Engagement	15.06.2024	28:56 min
Interviewee F	Company F <i>Energy</i>	People Branding & Communication	31.07.2024	39:14 min

After having scheduled at date and time the interviews took place online via MS Teams, as this program allows meetings without time limitation. Before the start of the official part of the interview a short welcome and warm-up conversation was held. In advance, each interviewee had signed a declaration of consent which includes the permission to record, to use the information given as part of this research and the degree of anonymization requested. Before the start of the recording the interviewee was asked once more by the interviewer if the audio recording is consented. Then each interview, following the semi-structured guideline, took place. Research on every company was conducted prior to the interviews, which allowed for individual follow-up questions and variations in the structure.

Please see annex A for the template of declaration of consent signed by every participant.

3.4.3 Survey

Parallel to the first phase of the study – the expert interviews – the second phase started, which also attempted to find answers to the research questions. An online questionnaire was chosen to collect quantitative data. This survey, which contains 25 questions, aimed to collect data from international Master's students who are graduating or have graduated latest in 2023 from Portuguese universities (for criteria, see the "Sampling" chapter). The survey was divided into six sections:

- (A) *Demographics* with three questions,
- (B) *Language Proficiency* with four questions (English and Portuguese language skills, willingness to start a job in each language at a Portuguese company),
- (C) *Academic Background* with four questions (enrollment, study field, university in Portugal),

- (D) *Employment Status* with four questions and three dependent questions (employment status, current employer, recommendation of current employer, years of professional experience, application to a Portuguese company, company in Portugal already applied to, remote work),
- (E) *EB Experiences and Opinion* with seven questions (attractive employer, experiences with EB efforts on-campus, corporate identity, organizational culture, jobs search channels, impact on loyalty to employer on employee motivation and productivity, most important EVPs), and
- (F) *Future Plans and Motives of decision-making* with four questions (future plans, impact of personal relations, motives to stay in Portugal, motives to leave Portugal).

Most of the questions were based on the following two models: The first one was the Theoretic Framework Model of Employer Branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and the second one the TPB model (Ajzen, 1991). The survey questions were tailored to capture insights into how international non-Portuguese Master students and recent graduates perceive and interact with both the external (attraction) and internal (loyalty) aspects of EB strategies employed by Portuguese companies, as outlined in the Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) model. Moreover, it was aimed to gauge respondents' attitudes, perceptions of social influences, and their perceived control over engaging with EB strategies in the context of Portuguese organizations.

Please see annex B for the detailed survey questions.

In this survey a mix of both open-ended and closed-ended responses were asked for, as we wanted to capture both quantitative data for statistical analysis and qualitative data for richer insights. The different response scale types depended on the question's underlying theory and the intended analysis of the answers' question:

- (I) *Dichotomous* on a nominal scale for a clear and binary response, e.g. the Yes/No question.
- (II) *Multiple choice* on a nominal scale for a closed-ended response, where respondents select one (single choice) or more options (sometimes for a more precise analysis with a required and/or maximum number) from a list. This is

used when the researcher wants to quantify data or when the possible answers are known and limited. No ranking or order among the answers is possible.

- (III) *3- or 5-item Likert scale* on an ordinal scale for a nuanced measurement of respondents' attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. Its ordinal structure allows for a graded response and nuanced variations in participant sentiments can be detected. Nevertheless, for analysis purposes, the Likert scale answers are often treated as interval data.
- (IV) *Ranking* a certain number of answers means placing items in order of preference or importance on an ordinal scale.
- (V) *Short answer* for an open-ended response, as the free text allows for exploring complex issues or when seeking specific details. The numerical open-ended response on a ratio scale applies to the questions regarding the participant's age and work experience, both measured in years.

The survey was created online in Qualtrics, then pre-tested with 14 participants for technological and logical functioning. Feedback was collected, reviewed and then the survey modified again. After consulting with the research study's supervisor, the survey was published on the 9th of April 2024. The survey was distributed by sharing the access link via WhatsApp direct messages, via WhatsApp group messages, in the researcher's Instagram story, via LinkedIn and via E-Mail. In the course of this study, final 108 responses were collected for the questionnaire. The questionnaire was accessible from 09.04.2024 to 23.05.2024.

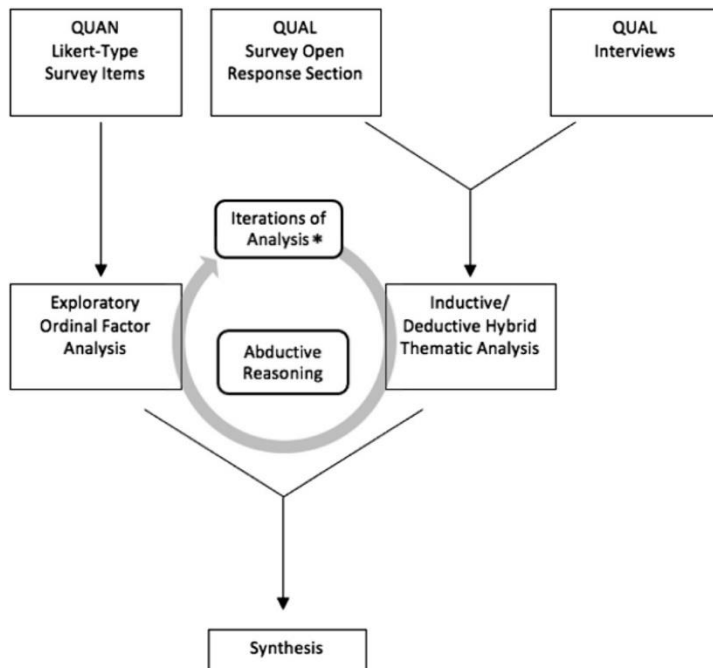
3.5 Data Analysis Method

After having finalized the data collection phase, the research study entered the subsequent phase of data analysis. The different steps in this research study are visualized in figure 14 outlining the procedural structure applying to this work (Proudfoot, 2023). In a vertical progress, the flow-chart first describes the different types of data collection (quantitative and qualitative) and their origin (survey and interviews), as explained in detail in chapter 3.3 and 3.4. Second, the data analysis approach of both the quantitative and qualitative data collected is displayed; initially performing an individual analysis of both data strands. Details of the different analyses took place are described below. This was followed by and joined together through abductive reasoning and multiple iterations of

analysis. And third, the key findings from different parts of the study were combined and integrated, to perform a comprehensive understanding of the research questions in place.

Figure 14

Procedural diagram of mixed-method research study design (adapted from Proudfoot, 2023)



In the following, the separate qualitative and quantitative data analyses approaches are explained in detail. The qualitative data obtained from expert interviews underwent a rigorous and systematic process. Initially, the generated mp4-file was exported to a mp3-file and then manually transcribed in Word. In order to enhance clarity repetitions and filler words were removed from the transcribed document. Moreover, each interview was meticulously read and reviewed multiple times to identify and mitigate possible biases that could impact the results. Transcripts were annotated informally to reveal recurring patterns and key messages in the data.

The formal qualitative analysis process of the collected data was performed using the software MAXQDA. Therefore, the interviews transcripts were individually uploaded to the program after creating a project folder. The researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading and reviewing the information given in each interview.

For this study the interview transcripts were analyzed using the hybrid thematic analysis, including both inductive and deductive coding in MAXQDA (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Deductive coding allows for the application of pre-existing theoretical frameworks to the data. By first establishing deductive codes from the Employer Branding Roadmap model (Minchington, 2006), the analysis ensures alignment with established concepts and theories, facilitating a structured and theory-driven examination of the data. This helps in validating or refining the theoretical model through empirical evidence. Inductive coding, on the other hand, allows for the emergence of new themes and patterns directly from the data without the constraints of predefined codes. This approach is essential for uncovering insights that may not be captured by the theoretical model, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the data (Mayring, 2014). Combining both approaches enhances the validity and richness of the analysis, as the mixed approach ensures a balanced and thorough analysis by leveraging the strengths of each. The following themes and codes were established and used to analyze the interview transcripts (see table 4 & 5): *Please see annex C for the detailed codebook.*

Table 4

Deductive Codes derived from the Employer Brand Roadmap Model (Minchington, 2006)

Theme	Concept Phase EB	Design Phase EB	Integration Phase EB	Evaluation Phase EB
<i>Code 1</i>	Vision and Mission	Recruitment Strategies	Employee Engagement Initiatives	Continuous Improvement
<i>Code 2</i>	Identity, Image and Values	EB Campaigns and Initiatives	External Communication Channels and Messaging	Feedback Mechanisms
<i>Code 3</i>	Employer Value Proposition	Leadership Involvement	Internal Communication Channels and Messaging	Internal Reporting
<i>Code 4</i>	Target Audience Analysis		Cultural Integration	Metrics and KPIs
<i>Code 5</i>	EB Team and Stakeholder			ROI Analysis
<i>Code 6</i>	Internal Research			
<i>Code 7</i>	External Research			

Table 5*Inductive Codes derived from the qualitative data in the form of interview transcripts*

Theme	On-Campus Recruiting	Ad-hoc codes
<i>Code 1</i>	University Partnerships	Language
<i>Code 2</i>	EB Activities at Universities	Nationality
<i>Code 3</i>	Student and Graduates Programs	CPLP Employees
<i>Code 4</i>	International student and graduate recruits	Further remarks about EB

In the final analysis, connections between the results and theories from the literature review will be established. The findings will be scrutinized to potentially support or counterargue existing theories and conclusions in the literature. This comprehensive and structured approach ensures a thorough exploration of the expert interview data, contributing to the robustness and validity of the research outcomes.

Second, the quantitative data analysis for the survey followed a systematic process. To start, the gathered survey data was exported from Qualtrics in CVS format and imported to the software SPSS for statistical analysis. Then all the data was sorted and cleaned. Typos were eliminated and the data set was checked for any missing values and outliers. Missing values were addressed appropriately by replacement or by imputation, and outliers were carefully examined to determine their inclusion based on their potential impact on the analysis. Moreover, some variables, like open-ended answers, were categorized and recoded to ensure they were in a suitable format for analysis.

Once the data was prepared, the descriptive analysis in SPSS took place. Frequency tables were generated for all categorical variables to understand the distribution of responses (e.g., countries of origin). Additionally, descriptive statistics, including mean, median, mode, variance and standard deviation, were calculated for continuous variables. This provides a clear overview of the central tendencies and variability within the collected data. To further illustrate the findings from the descriptive statistical analysis, various graphs and charts, including bar charts, histograms, and pie charts, were created to be included in the presentation of the results. These visualizations support the identification of patterns and trends within the data, to enhance the accessibility and interpretability of the results.

For question 13b the 30 participants who responded the question 13a affirmatively, the free-text answers were analyzed establishing inductive categories by mention counting of

company names. All companies from each respondent were coded (N=32 due to multiple mentions) and then the codes were counted for the most mentioned names.

Based on the obtained results and their utility, questions 11a, 11b, 24 and 25 underwent an inferential analysis. Cross-tabulations, Pearson Chi-Square, Likelihood Ratio, Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test and Linear-by-Linear Association were tested to explore relationships and statistically significant correlations.

The final step involved connecting the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data analysis with theoretical insights from the literature review, either supporting, contradicting, or proposing new insights based on the obtained results. This methodical approach ensures a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the survey data, aligning with the study's research objectives and theoretical framework.

3.6 Ethical Implications

No major or significant ethical implications were identified in the conduct of this research study. Nevertheless, the mixed-methodology approach, which included expert interviews and a student questionnaire, required careful consideration of potential ethical concerns.

Participant confidentiality and privacy were of paramount importance and were ensured from the outset of the interviews. All data were anonymized, including company names, participants' names, and any other identifiable information, to protect the integrity and confidentiality of the individuals involved. The researcher was only granted permission to share the participants' job titles. Informed and legal consent was obtained from all interviewees via a signed form prior to the start of the interviews, which clearly outlined the research's purpose, methods, and potential outcomes.

In the case of international Master students participating in the survey, ethical considerations included ensuring voluntary and informed participation. All respondents were fully informed of their rights, the anonymization of their data, the exclusive use of the data for research purposes, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences.

Additionally, data was securely stored with access restricted to the researcher to maintain confidentiality throughout the data analysis process. Consideration was also given to potential power dynamics, especially with student participants, to ensure there was no undue pressure to participate. Cultural sensitivity was observed in the design of both the

survey and interview questions to respect the diverse backgrounds of participants. Finally, all participants were debriefed after their involvement to clarify any remaining questions and to reinforce the voluntary nature of their participation.

3.7 Limitations

While this study's mixed-methodology approach offers valuable insights into Employer Branding (EB) practices, several limitations must be acknowledged to provide context and understanding of the findings.

One significant limitation lies in the sample size for both the qualitative and quantitative data collection. The qualitative interviews, although rich in detail, involved only six participants, limiting the generalizability of the findings. This small sample size, though somewhat expected given the interpretative nature of the research, restricts the diversity of perspectives on EB among Portuguese companies. Additionally, the selection of participants based on availability and willingness to participate may have introduced sampling bias, reducing the range of viewpoints. While the data remains substantial, given the strict sampling criteria, the findings are indicative rather than definitive.

On the quantitative side, the survey aimed to reach a sample size of 372 international Master students or recent graduates but received only 108 responses. This lower response rate reduces the significance and representativeness of the results, making it challenging to generalize the findings. Non-response bias and the potential impact of attrition may have also influenced the reliability of the data. Furthermore, the survey design, with its reliance on mostly closed-ended questions, may have limited the depth of insights compared to open-ended responses, thus restricting the nuances that could have emerged in the findings.

Moreover, some survey questions presented challenges for statistical analysis. The design and phrasing of particular questions made it difficult to perform robust statistical tests, leading to missed opportunities for identifying significant correlations. With more refined survey design, the analysis could have produced stronger statistical outcomes.

The sampling process for survey participants also poses limitations. The non-random sampling, which largely relied on the researcher's personal contacts and fellow students, affected the breadth of responses. Aside from the governmental data on 1st and 2nd year students, it was not possible to find reliable data for the number of international graduates between September 2022 and September 2023, as intended to include in the sample size calculation. Moreover, the survey primarily reflects the experiences and opinions of second-

year international Master students from a few academic programs, most of whom were enrolled in universities based in Lisbon (86.8%). This geographic focus limits the ability to generalize the findings to the broader population of international students in Portugal and could have been more representative had the survey been made compulsory across various universities and programs.

Additionally, data collection challenges arose from limited access to detailed company-specific EB strategies, as some companies were reluctant to share proprietary information. International students' responses may have been influenced by their individual circumstances, introducing further variability to the data.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative data presented another challenge. Ensuring coherence between these two approaches required careful consideration, and there remains a risk of researcher bias in deciding which data points to emphasize in the results and discussion sections.

From a methodological perspective, the study's cross-sectional design provides only a one-time snapshot of EB practices, limiting the ability to observe changes over time. A longitudinal approach would offer deeper insights into how EB strategies evolve in response to shifting market and organizational conditions. Furthermore, EB itself is an evolving field, and the frameworks used in this study may not fully capture the dynamic and rapidly changing nature of global EB practices.

Another limitation stems from a slight structural issue in the study's research design. The selected research questions focus on the EB strategies of Portuguese companies to attract international Master students. However, during the interviews, it became clear that most of these companies do not actively recruit international Master students and graduates or have EB strategies targeted at them. This misalignment between the research focus and the actual practices of the companies being studied was an unforeseen gap that could have been anticipated with prior research.

Finally, geographical and temporal constraints also limit the applicability of the findings. While the research provides a detailed understanding of EB practices within Portugal, its conclusions may not be applicable to other countries with different economic, cultural, and labor market conditions. Additionally, as the data collection was time-bound, any changes in the economic environment or corporate strategies occurring after the study period are not captured, further limiting the study's long-term relevance.

Despite these limitations, this study offers meaningful insights into EB strategies in Portuguese companies and highlights key areas for future research and practice. Recognizing these constraints is essential for framing the context and reliability of the findings, and for guiding further inquiry into this evolving field.

4. Data Results

4.1 Quantitative Results from Survey

The survey results are being presented in the following chapter. In total 108 participants took part in the survey, with 91 participants being eligible for analysis as they meet the target group's criteria and finished the survey until the end. The first part of the survey is demographic questions to better understand the target audience and creating a profile of the participants.

First, the nationality of each person was asked. The results show that participants from 30 different countries filled out the survey and contributed to the investigation (see figures 15 & 16). Three nationalities stand out from the sample, with Germans on the first place (20.9%), Brazilians in second place (13.2%) and Spaniards on position three (7.7%). Ranking between 4.0% to 6.0% are students from Austria, Belgium, Ecuador, Italy and the Netherlands. In the following we will look at different groups of countries, that share a common denominator each: The community of Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP) – which is represented in this sample by Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde and Mozambique – makes up 17.6% of all participants. Countries that are part of the European Union add up to 59.4% of this sample of international full-time Master students at a Portuguese University. And about a fourth of all participants (26.4%) are from a country in Latin America, namely Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico.

Figure 15

Q1 – Frequency of Nationalities on a world map

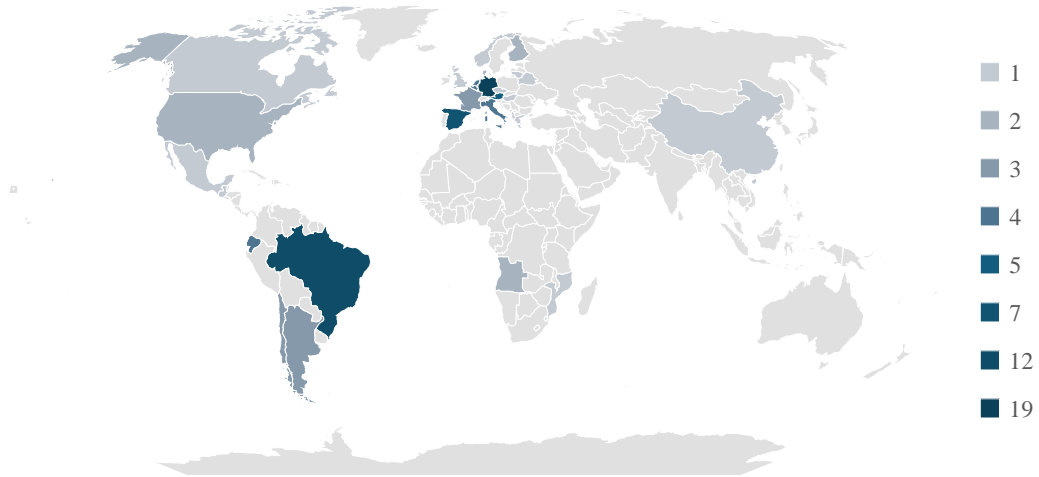
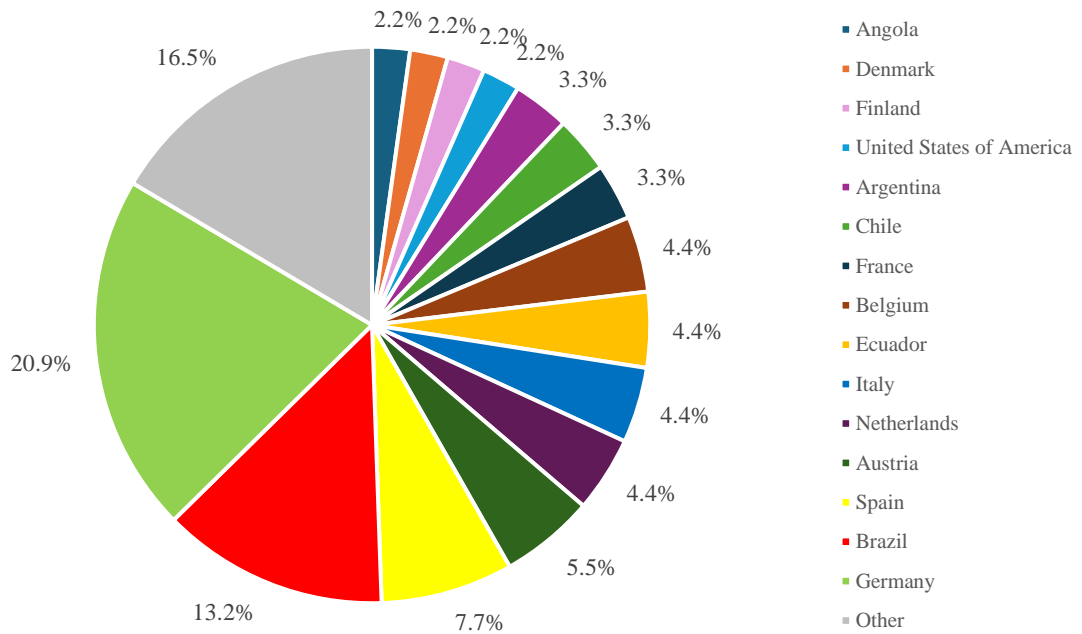


Figure 16

Q1 – Distribution of Nationalities

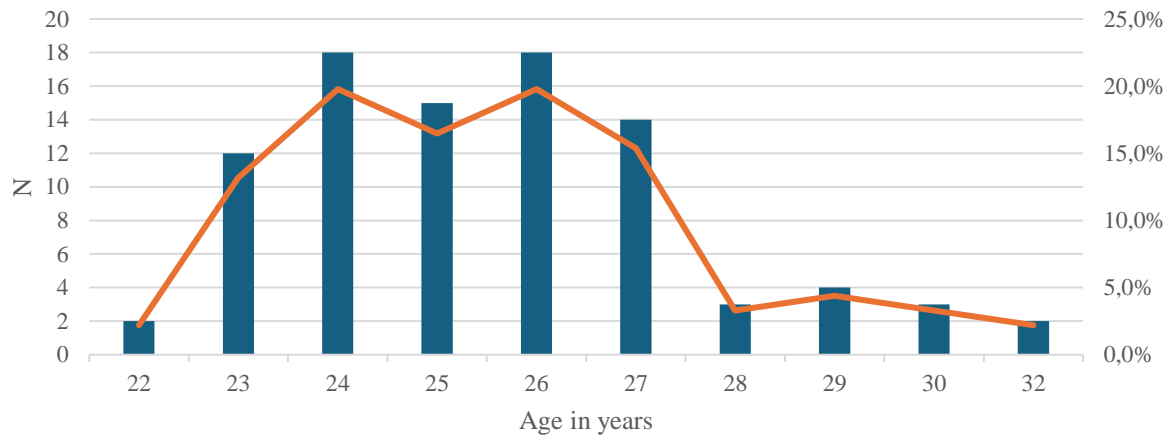


Second, all participants were asked to indicate their age. The minimum age is 22 years and the maximum age 32 years, which leads to a range of 10 years. On average participants are 25.57 years old (mean) and most participants stated an age of 24 or 26 years (two modes

in this sample). The variance is calculated to be 4.359 with a standard deviation of 2.088. In figure 17 the exact age distribution is visualized in a graph.

Figure 17

Q2 – Age distribution in survey

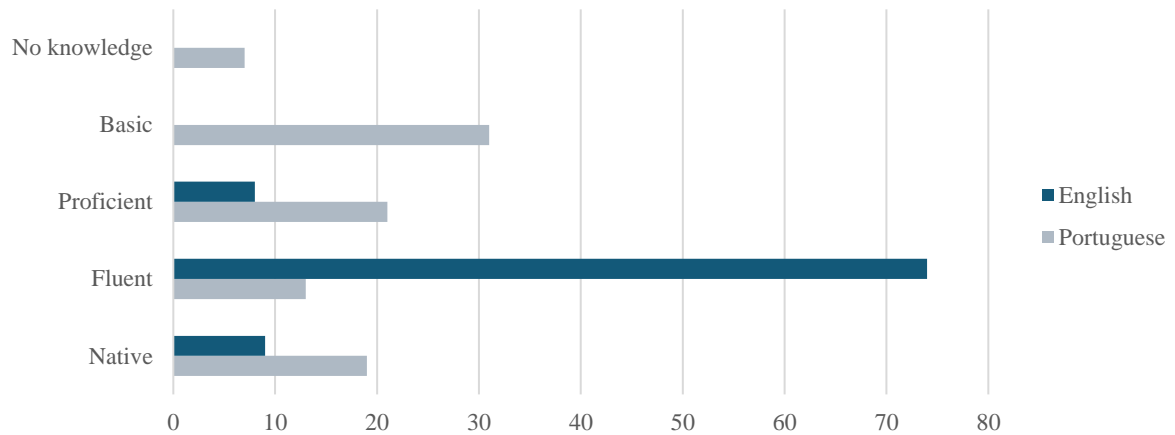


And third, a question regarding the time each participant lived in Portugal was asked. A majority of 58.2% lived between 1 and 2 years in Portugal, 9.9% called Portugal between 2 to 5 years their home and 3.3% are or were living in the country for more than 5 years. And about a fourth of all participants (28.6%) stayed in Portugal for 6 months to a year.

In the second part of the survey the topic revolved around language proficiency, more specifically regarding the English and Portuguese language (see figure 18). For English on the one hand, a large majority of 81.3% stated that they are fluent speakers and 9.9% identified themselves as native speakers. Only 8.8% described their proficiency in English as proficient, which was for the English language the lowest ranking category of the Likert scale. For Portuguese on the other hand, a majority of about one third of all respondents (34.1%) stated to have basic knowledge, while 7.7% indicated no knowledge at all. About a fourth of the participants described their Portuguese skills as proficient (23.1%), followed by 14.3% indicating fluency and 20.9% native language skills in Portuguese.

Figure 18

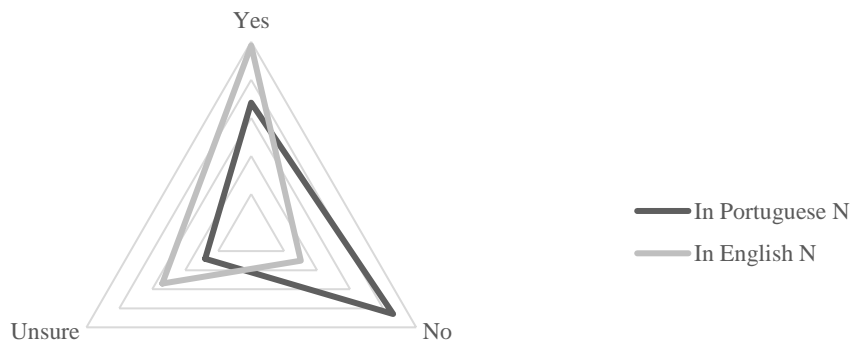
Q3 & Q4 – Language Proficiency in English vs. Portuguese



The more general questions on English and Portuguese proficiency were followed by a three-option question on the participant’s willingness to start a Portuguese respectively English-language job at a company in Portugal. With Portuguese being the prospective working language about half of the participants (47.3%) responded with a “No”, 15.4% with “Unsure” and only about one third (37.4%) with a “Yes”. Looking at the results of the same question but with the theoretical option of English as the main language at work, the affirmative tendency is much higher. More than half (53.8%) stated their willingness to start an English-speaking job in Portugal with a “Yes”, followed by 29.7% with an “Unsure”. Only about a sixth (16.5%) would not consider this a viable option for them.

Figure 19

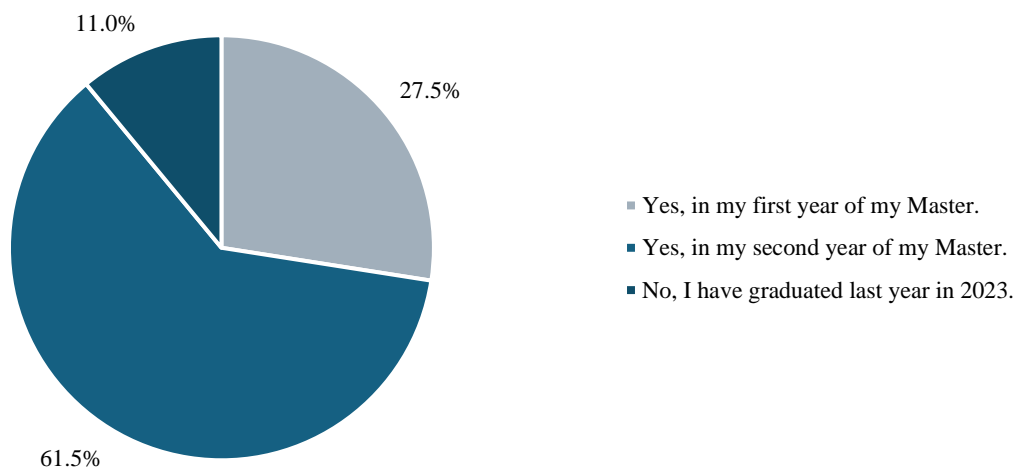
Q5 & Q6 – Willingness to start a job in Portugal in Portuguese vs. English



After asking respondents about their demographics and language skills, the following questions asked aimed at exploring their individual academic background. To ensure that only people belonging to the desired target group completed the survey, the question number 8 was decisive in eliminating irrelevant answers. Therefore, only 91 valid answers were counted in this question. The results show that 89.0% are students, with two-third being in the second year (61.5%) and one-third in the first year (27.5%) of their Master program. As this research study is investigating a three-year timespan as of April 2024, the third part of the target group are recent Master graduates from 2023, who make up 11.0% of the study's sample (see figure 20). Therefore, the results are mainly guided by the experiences and opinions of second year Master students.

Figure 20

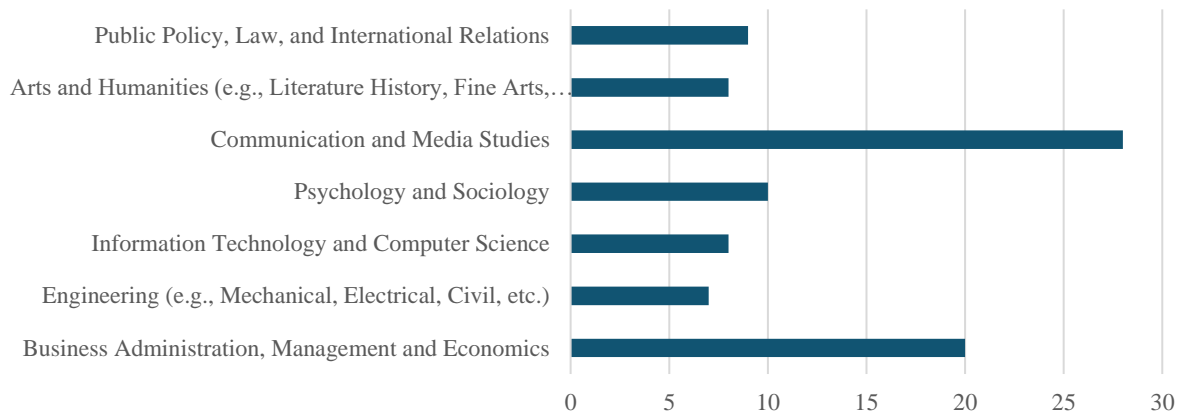
Q8 – Status of Enrollment at a University in Portugal



In the next question exploring the academic background, all current and former Master students were asked about the study field of their Master program (see figure 21). A majority of about a third of all participants are from Communication and Media Studies (30.8%), followed on second place by Business Administration, Management and Economics (22.0%). Furthermore, five other study fields of Master programs were registered, namely Psychology and Sociology (11.0%), Public Policy, Law, and International Relations (9.9%), Arts and Humanities (8.8%), Information Technology and Computer Science (8.8%) and Engineering (7.7%).

Figure 21

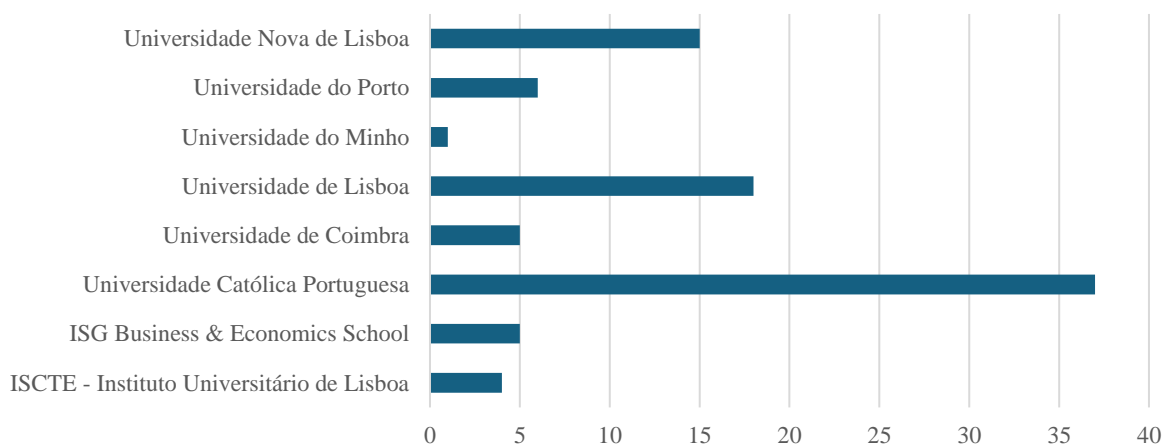
Q9 – Study Fields



The survey's respondents mainly are from the Universidade Católica Portuguesa (40.7%), followed by Universidade de Lisboa (19.8%) and Universidade Nova de Lisboa (16.5%). The majority of the sample is/was enrolled at a university located in Lisbon (86.8%), while a minority of 13.2% are from either Universidade de Coimbra, Universidade do Minho or Universidade do Porto (see figure 22).

Figure 22

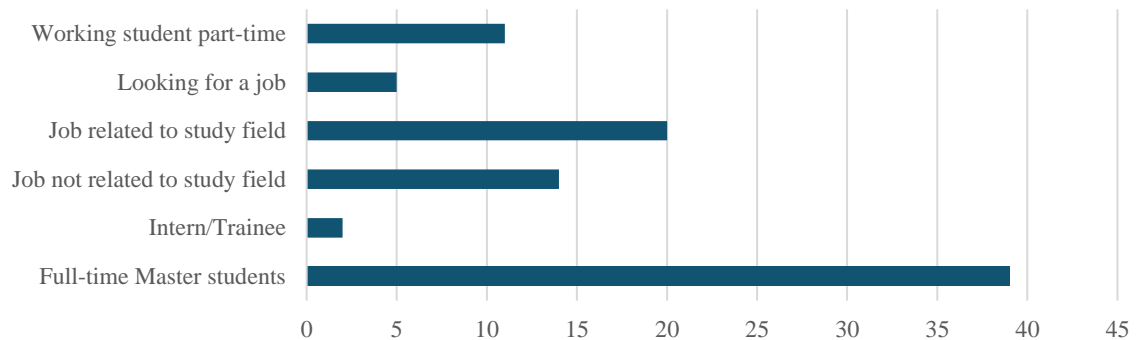
Q10 – Attended Universities



About half of the respondents stated that they are currently unemployed, with 42.9% being full-time Master students. The other half that is working while being a Master student or already graduate work either in a job related to their study field (22.0%), not related to their study field (15.4%), as a part-time working student (12.1%) or as an intern or trainee (2.2%) (see figure 23).

Figure 23

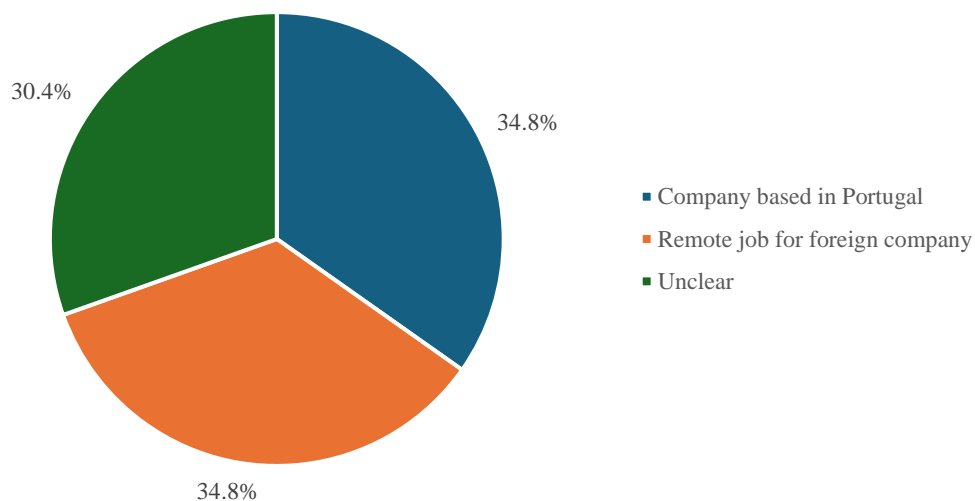
Q11 – Employment Status



The 46 respondents who stated that they are currently employed, were asked to name their current employer. In order to structure the free-text answers, four categories were set to later better compare the individual answers (see figure 24). The largest number of responses, a total of 34.8%, could be categorized as a remote job for a foreign company. As a Portuguese company or a company with a business location in Portugal could be identified 34.7% of all answers. For about 30.4% of the answers, no specific category could be determined, as both a remote and an office job in Portugal would be an option, which is why a fourth category with all unclear answers was established.

Figure 24

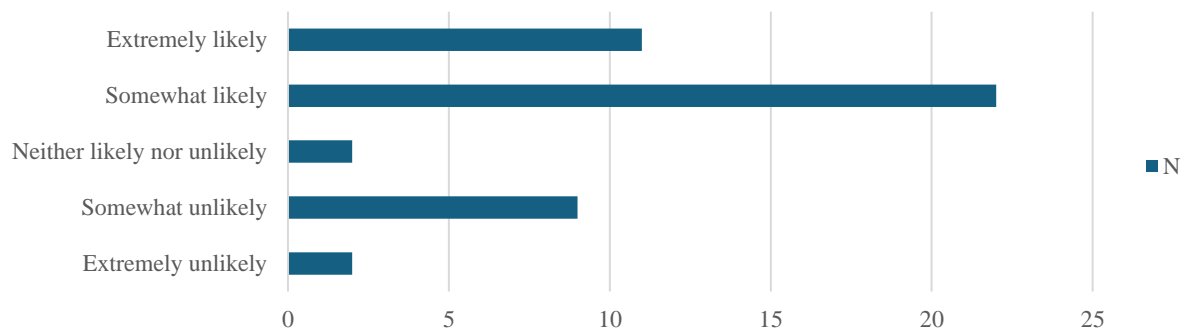
Q11a – Current employer



The participants' satisfaction with their current employer and therefore recommendation for others to start a job there shows a clear tendency towards a positive evaluation (see figure 25). A recommendation is rather likely than unlikely as about three quarters are either extremely (23.9%) or somewhat (47.8%) likely to suggest the current employer to others. 4.4% are undecided and about a fourth rather unlikely to recommend their current employer, with 19.6% stating a somewhat and 4.4% stating an extreme unlikeliness to speak about and refer to their employer positively.

Figure 25

Q11b – Recommendation of current employer and job satisfaction



In order to better understand the relation between the results from question 11a and 11b a cross tabulation was created (see table 6) and also a Chi-square-test (see table 7) done to determine the correlation between a nominal and ordinal variable.

The comparison between observed and expected counts helps highlight where actual employee satisfaction differs from what might be expected by chance, shedding light on the unique satisfaction profiles within each employment category. Comparing both response sets in a cross tabulation allows for the following interpretation of the results: Employees working at a Portuguese Company tend to be less satisfied than expected, particularly with notable dissatisfaction in the "somewhat unlikely" and "extremely unlikely" categories. Remote workers for a foreign company show a higher-than-expected job satisfaction, with many remote workers reporting "extremely likely" levels of satisfaction and few reporting dissatisfaction. The "Unclear" category presents a mixed picture, with a concentration in the "somewhat likely" satisfaction category but also some signs of dissatisfaction.

Table 6*Cross tabulation between current employer and job satisfaction*

		PT company	Remote work	Unclear	Total
Extremely likely	<i>Count</i>	2	7	2	11
	<i>Expected Count</i>	3.8	3.8	3.3	11.0
Somewhat likely	<i>Count</i>	6	7	9	22
	<i>Expected Count</i>	7.7	7.7	6.7	22.0
Neither likely nor unlikely	<i>Count</i>	1	0	1	2
	<i>Expected Count</i>	.7	.7	.6	2.0
Somewhat unlikely	<i>Count</i>	6	2	1	9
	<i>Expected Count</i>	3.1	3.1	2.7	9.0
Extremely unlikely	<i>Count</i>	1	0	1	2
	<i>Expected Count</i>	.7	.7	.6	2.0
Total	<i>Count</i>	16	16	14	46
	<i>Expected Count</i>	10.0	16.0	14.0	46.0

In order to test whether there is a statistically significant association between the two categorical variables a chi-square test was performed (see figure X). There is no statistically significant association between the "current employer" and "job satisfaction" as indicated by the non-significant p-values greater than 0.05 (0.172 for Pearson Chi-Square and 0.134 for the Likelihood Ratio). The absence of a significant linear trend further supports the conclusion that there is no straightforward relationship between the employer type and job satisfaction levels. Moreover, the reliability of these results is questionable due to the high number of cells with expected counts less than 5, suggesting that the test might not be fully appropriate for this dataset. After obtaining these results the Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test was run, which is usually more reliable with small sample sizes. Nevertheless, as the tests before, no evidence of a statistically significant association could be found.

Table 7*Chi-Square-test between current employer and job satisfaction*

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	11.556 ^a	8	.172	.159		
Likelihood Ratio	12.396	8	.134	.196		

Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	10.708			.132		
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.034 ^b	1	.309	.335	.170	.025
N of Valid Cases	46					
a. 12 cells (80.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .61.						
b. The standardized statistic is -1,017.						

When asked to indicate in a number of years their professional experience, including internships, trainees and working student jobs, related to the field of study, the results show a high range of 11 years, with a variance of 5.176 and a standard deviation of 2.2751. The mean however is at 2.657 and therefore a bit more than 2.5 years of professional experience (see table 8).

Table 8

Q12 – Years of professional experience

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
<i>Years</i>	91	11.0	.0	11.0	2.657	.2385	2.2751	5.176

In question number 13a the study participants were asked whether they had already applied to a company based in Portugal. While one-third (33.0%) stated that they already did apply, two-thirds (67.0%) did not confirm any application taking place. Those respondents who did already apply were asked to specify their answer in the following question 13b by naming one or more employer brands. The five most named employer brand names are on first place Accenture, McKinsey and Deloitte with 8.57% each, followed by EDP and Teleperformance with 5.71% each on second place (see table 9).

Table 9

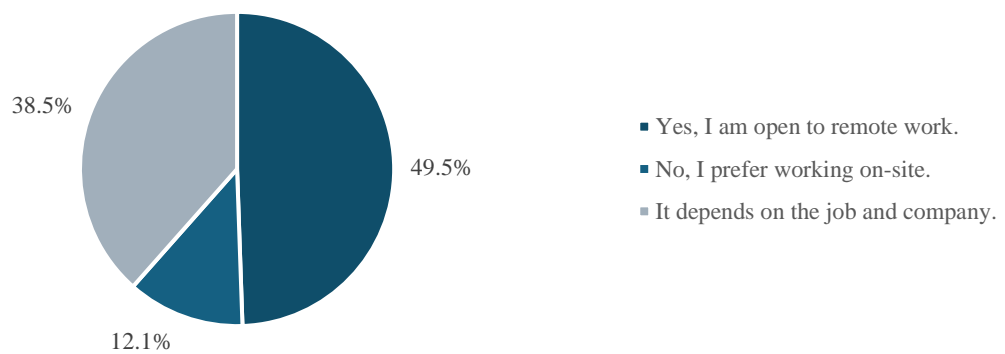
Q13b – Top 5 Employer Brand Names

Rank	Brand	N	% Mentions
1	Accenture	3	8.57%
1	McKinsey	3	8.57%
1	Deloitte	3	8.57%
2	EDP	2	5.71%
2	Teleperformance	2	5.71%

When asked regarding remote work, half of all participants (49.5%) indicated their willingness to work from home or mobile office, potentially for a company located in another country. On the contrary, 12.1% stated their preference to work on-site in an office with other colleagues. More than a third (38.5%) would decide on their openness to work remotely depending on the job and company (see figure 26).

Figure 26

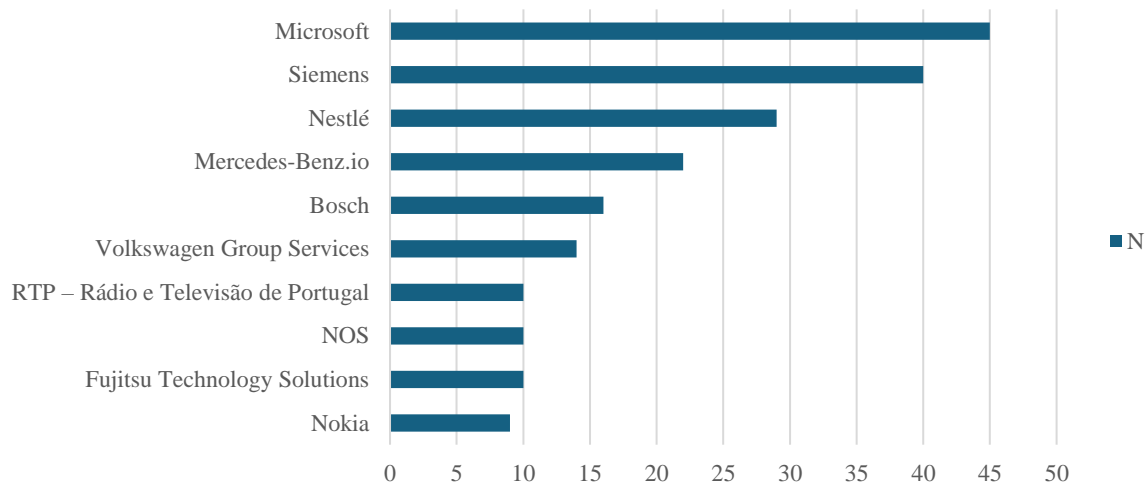
Q14 – Remote Work



After asking about the participants' own experience, they were then asked to choose the 3 most attractive employer brands from a selection of companies considered by Randstad as the most attractive places to work (see figure 27). Microsoft on first place scored a 16.5%, followed by Siemens with 14.7% and Nestlé on third place with 10.6%. Mercedes-Benz.io ranks on 4th place with 8.1% and completing the Top 5 mentions is Bosch with 5.9%.

Figure 27

Q15 – Top 10 most attractive Employer Brands in Portugal

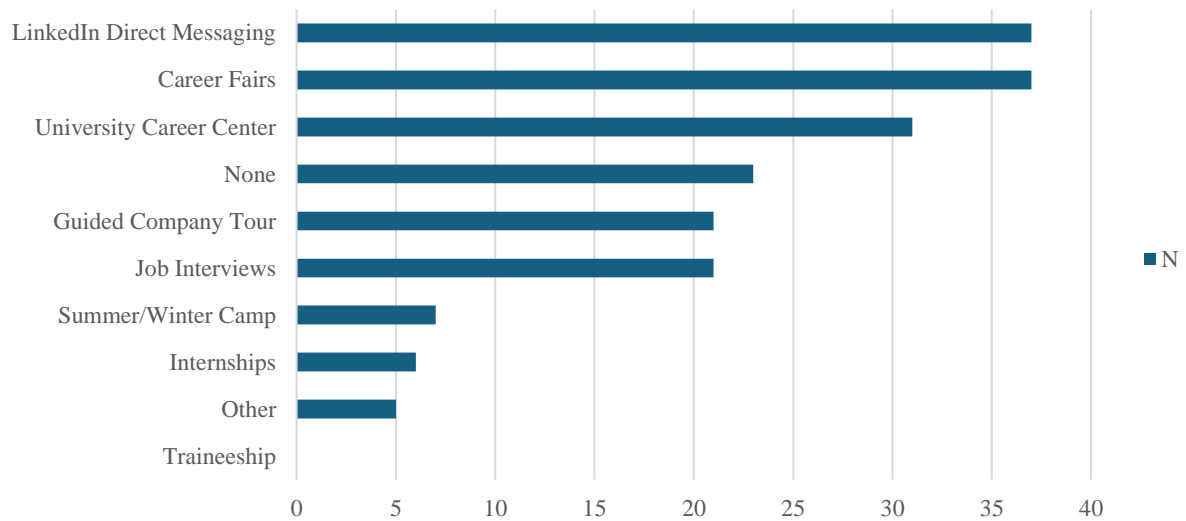


In question number 16 all participants were asked regarding their experience with on-campus or university related active recruiting programs or initiatives by companies (see figure 28). Most often students experienced LinkedIn direct messaging (19.7%) and career or job fairs (19.7%). Moreover, trainings, workshops or lectures organized by university career center were named by 16.5% of students as an experience linked to on-campus active recruiting measures. 11.2% each indicated that guided company tours and job interviews were two points of contact with a possible employer during their time at university. Only a low number of participants (3.7%) indicated their involvement in summer or winter camps offered by a university in cooperation with one or multiple companies.

Internships at Portuguese companies organized by the university career center or initiated through an active recruiting on-campus action by companies were completed by 3.2% of participants. As “other” measures (2.7%) were named “breakfast with Deloitte”, “breakfast with L’Oréal”, “company presentations at uni”, “meet-up with Altice professionals” and “mentoring”. A total of 23 respondents (12.2%) stated that they had not experienced any active recruitment program at university. One participant specified his or her motives to not take part in anything offered, writing “I wasn’t interested because for artists there were just few options”.

Figure 28

Q16 – Experience with active on-campus recruiting measures by companies



In order to establish a rating of importance on what builds and maintains a consistent and recognizable identity of a company, the respondents were asked to indicate the elements that, in their opinion, contribute most to creating a strong corporate identity. The responses show that especially three factors are important. First, organizational culture and work environment, which 70.3% ranked as most important element to contribute to a strong corporate identity. Second, the participants value a lot their peers’ recommendations, as employee experiences and testimonials was named by 63.7% as second most important factor. And third, the company values and ethics were considered important by 48.4% of respondents of the survey, when rating the influence and importance of elements which shape a corporate identity. For the complete overview, please see table 10.

Table 10

Q17 – Strong contributors to corporate identity

Rank	Elements of Corporate Identity	N Responses	% Responses	Percent of Cases
1	Organizational culture and work environment	64	19.0%	70.3%
2	Employee experiences and testimonials	58	17.3%	63.7%
3	Company values and ethics	44	13.1%	48.4%
4	Visual identity elements (logo, color scheme, design elements)	38	11.3%	41.8%

5	Community engagement and outreach efforts	35	10.4%	38.5%
6	Consistency in brand communication and messaging	34	10.1%	37.4%
7	Corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts	32	9.5%	35.2%
8	Mission statement and vision for the future	31	9.2%	34.1%

For the following question, the students and graduates were asked to rate the importance of organizational culture, specifically shared values, practices and expectations, of a company in relation to an employer brand (see figure 29). The results show that for about three quarters the organizational culture either significantly influences (40.7%) or plays a substantial role (33.0%) in shaping the perception of an organization as an employer. 16.5% consider organizational culture as one of several factors when evaluating an employer brand and 9.9% attribute organizational culture only minimal influence on their decision to consider an employer brand. The answer option of no influence of corporate culture on an employer brand was not chosen by participants.

Figure 29

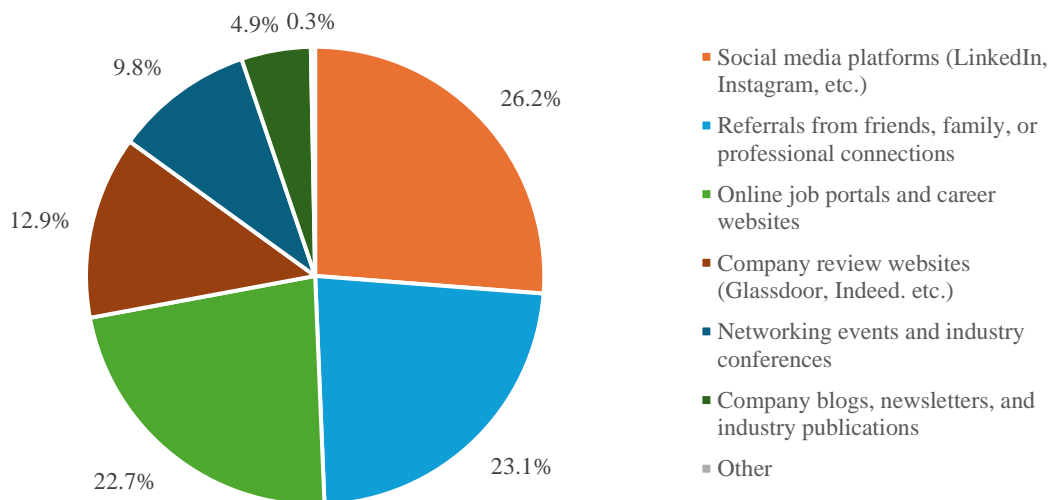
Q18 – Organizational Culture and Perception of Employer Brand



Next up in the survey the participants were asked to indicate the channels which they primarily use to search for and evaluate attractive employers and companies when in the process of applying for jobs. The results in figure 30 show that there are three main channels: First, an overall share of 26.2% for social media platforms as a channel to look for jobs and attractive employers was chosen by 82.4% of students and graduates on job search. Second, 72.5% named personal connections through family and friends or professional contacts as an important channel (a share of 23.1%) to form their opinion on an employer brand and look for a job. This is followed on a strong third place by online job portals and career websites (22.7%) which in 71.4% of all cases was indicated as a helpful channel. Furthermore, company review websites are used by 40.7% of the participants, about a third (30.8%) also stated networking events and industry conferences as important channels, while only about a sixth (15.4%) consider company blogs, newsletters and industry publications as a useful source of information and channel. One participant stated in “other”, that “the lack of interesting job offers made me my own boss”, indicating that he or she decided to work self-employed.

Figure 30

Q19 – Channels for job search

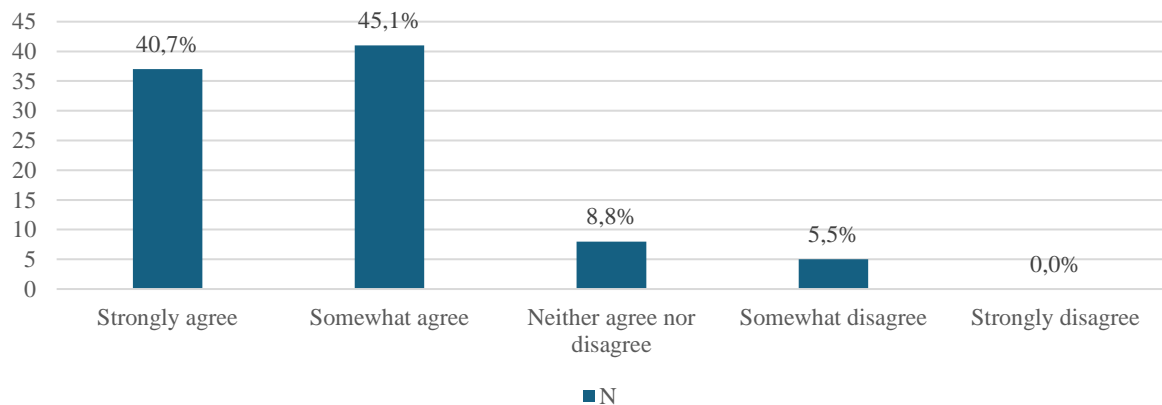


The statement “A strong sense of loyalty to the employer does significantly influence my motivation to be productive and show effort in my role” received a high number of affirmative responses, as 40.7% strongly agree and 45.1% somewhat agree with the present

assertion. 8.8% chose to neither agree nor disagree and therefore a neutral stance, while 5.5% do somewhat disagree with the influence of loyalty to the employer on their motivation regarding productivity and effort. No answers were counted for the response item of “strongly disagree”. The figure 31 allows for an overview in the response distribution of this question.

Figure 31

Q20 – Loyalty to employer and productivity at work



In question 21 of this research study survey, the participants were asked to choose a top 5 out of 10 possible answers on the most important and non-negotiable job characteristics (see table 11). Among all answers there is a clear top 3, which the respondents consider as especially important job characteristics. On first place, there is competitive salary and bonuses (74.7%), followed by flexibility in work hours and remote work options (73.6%) and opportunities for career advancement and professional development (71.4%) on position three. About two-thirds (64.8%) of all respondents also chose comprehensive benefits package (healthcare, retirement plans, etc.) as one of their five most important job characteristics. The fifth place is a close race between supportive work environment and company culture (48.4%) and meaningful work and opportunities to make an impact (47.3%). As least important and only chosen by 16.5% in their top 5 is the commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility by an employer.

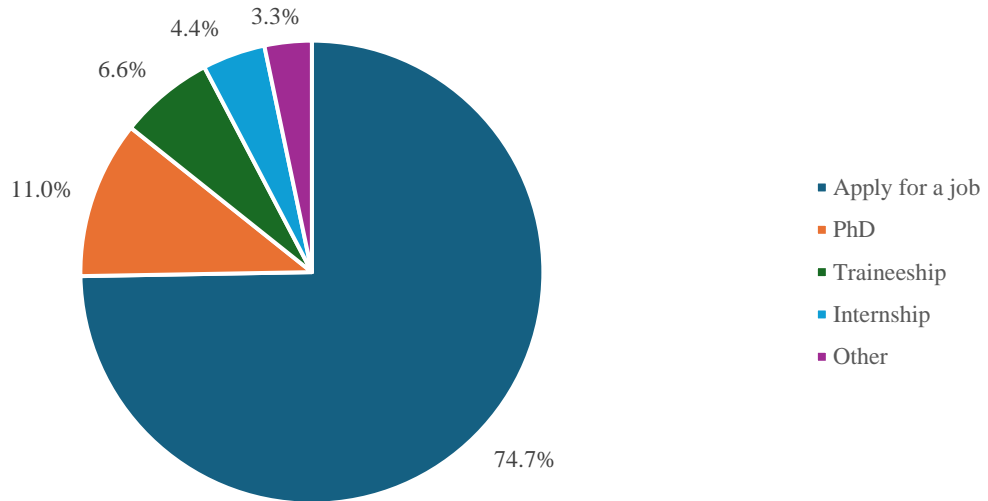
Table 11*Q21 – Job characteristics Top 5*

Job characteristics	N Responses	% Responses	Percent of Cases
Competitive salary and bonuses	68	14.9%	74.7%
Flexibility in work hours and remote work options	67	14.7%	73.6%
Opportunities for career advancement and professional development	65	14.3%	71.4%
Comprehensive benefits package (healthcare, retirement plans, etc.)	59	13.0%	64.8%
Supportive work environment and company culture	44	9.7%	48.4%
Meaningful work and opportunities to make an impact	43	9.5%	47.3%
Opportunities for mentorship and learning from experienced professionals	37	8.1%	40.7%
Recognition and rewards for performance	32	7.0%	35.2%
Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives	25	5.5%	27.5%
Commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility	15	3.3%	16.5%

In the last part of the survey the participants were asked to indicate their future academic or career plan after completing the Master’s degree (see answers in figure 32). A majority of 74.7% of respondents chose to apply for a job after graduation, followed by 11.0% of respondents who plan to do a PhD. A small percentage of respondents also opted for a traineeship (6.6%), an internship (4.4%) or stated other reasons and plans. These were “no idea” (1.1%), “self-employment in Berlin” (1.1%) and “continue working at my job, maybe at a higher level” (1.1%).

Figure 32

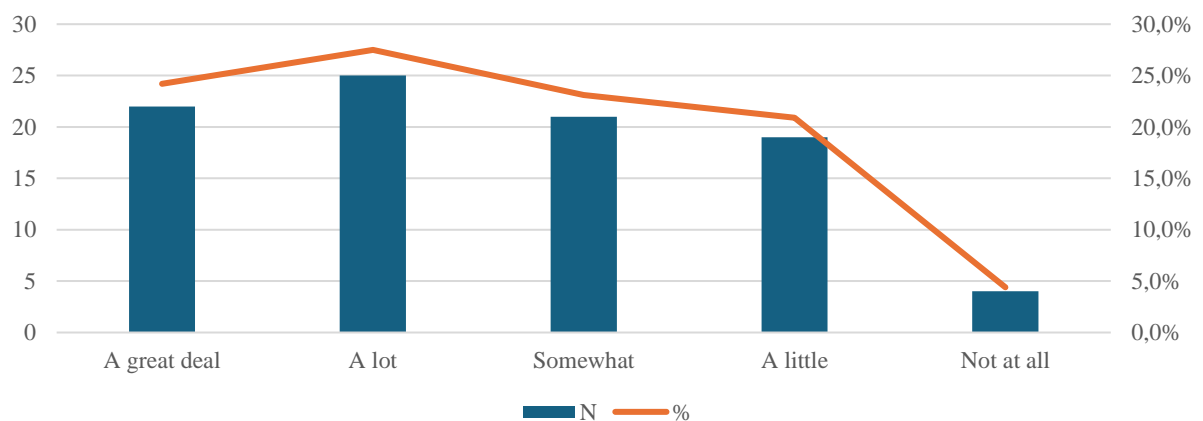
Q22 – Future career and academic plans



In question number 23 the current students and recent graduates partaking in this study’s survey were asked to specify the influence of their friends’ family’s career choices on their own decision to stay in or leave Portugal after graduating (see figure 33). The responses showed a high variation and diversity, with a tendency to a higher influence of the variable personal relations. 27.5% rated the effect on their decision-making as “a lot”, 24.2% even stated it as “a great deal” and 23.1% still indicated it as “somewhat” influential. Only a fifth with 20.9% rate it as “a little” and very few (4.4%) did “not at all” consider the decision of friends and family as decisive.

Figure 33

Q23 – Impact of personal relations on decision-making



The last two questions aimed to explore the principal motives to stay or respectively leave Portugal after graduating from university. Therefore, six possible factors and motivations were proposed with the option to specify another individual factor. All seven options had to be ranked from most to least important on a scale from 1 to 7 through drag and drop.

The first question asked the participants about their main factors or motivations that would influence their decision to stay in Portugal after graduation. In figure 34 a heat map visualizes the ranking. The results show a relatively diverse distribution of the factors that would incentivize students or recent graduates to stay in Portugal. A majority of respondents, 17 each, chose “Political stability” and “Career prospects” as the most important motive to stay in Portugal after graduation. Ranking in second place is “Personal affairs” with 17 answers, followed by “Cost of living” and “Work-life-balance” with 16 answers each. In third place the same three motives as for 2nd choice are in the top three spots, with “work-life-balance” in the lead. The 4th choice shows a more diverse distribution of the individual motives to stay in Portugal, with “Salary” being chosen by 30 participants and “Career prospects” by 4 participants. This reverses as ranking in 5th position is “Career prospects” with 27 answers and “Salary” with only 9 answers. And on the last place the distribution is slightly more equal, with “Work-life-balance” and “Political stability” as the primary motive chosen with 18 answers each. Looking on the distribution of votes within one motive, the answers indicate that “Salary” and “Career Prospects” seem to have the highest impact on influencing the decision-making of the participants due to a high variance among the answers.

Figure 34

Q24 – Motives to stay in Portugal after graduation on a scale from 1 to 7

	Salary	Personal affairs	Costs of living	Work-life-balance	Political stability	Career prospects
1st choice	14	11	11	15	17	17
2nd choice	12	17	16	16	12	15
3rd choice	4	19	17	20	14	13
4th choice	30	21	15	9	12	4
5th choice	9	6	14	13	18	27
6th choice	14	11	14	18	18	14

“Other” factors which motivate graduates to stay in Portugal were specified by the respondents in the following way: Four participants each named “safety/security”, “the Portuguese citizenship”, “surfing” and “sun/good weather” as their main reason to stay in Portugal. Two participants each named “beach”, the “job/work” and “staying is not an option” as motives to continue staying in Portugal. And one participant each named the “location of Portugal” and “good food” as their principal motivators to stay.

“Other” factors to stay in Portugal included

Coding Frame by establishing categories	
Safety/Security	4
Surfing	4
Sun/good weather	4
Portuguese Citizenship	4
Beach	2
The job/work	2
Staying is no option	2
Location of Portugal	1
Good Food	1

And the second question of this section, and the last of the survey, asked participants about their motives to leave Portugal after graduating from their Master’s program. The numbers and the heat map based on them integrated in figure 35 show a few clear tendencies. “Salary” was chosen by 41.8% of respondents as the primary motive, by 19.8% as the second most important and by 27.5% as the third most important factor in the decision to leave Portugal after graduation. Therefore, “salary” is in the top 3 decisive motives for 89.0% of the participants. Moreover, “personal affairs” and “cost of living” have been chosen disproportionately often as the three most important factors why they would leave Portugal after graduation. “Career prospects” and “Political stability” on the contrary, have been chosen by a majority as less important in the present question, ranking mainly between 4th and 6th place. “Work-life-balance” is relatively wide-spread among the ranking, with a tendency to rank most often between 2nd and 4th place.

Figure 35

Q25 – Coding Frame – Motives to leave Portugal

	Salary	Personal affairs	Costs of living	Work-life-balance	Political stability	Career prospects
1st choice	38	32	14	5	2	0
2nd choice	18	13	20	26	5	9
3rd choice	25	22	19	18	4	3
4th choice	0	6	11	18	40	14
5th choice	0	0	2	9	26	53
6th choice	10	17	25	14	13	10

“Other” factors to leave Portugal, which were named by the participants, included “safety”, “weather and access to nature”, “quality of life and healthcare” and “my girlfriend in Brasil”.

“Other” factors to leave Portugal included:

Answers	N
Safety	1
Weather and access to nature	1
Quality of life and healthcare	1
My girlfriend in Brasil	1

In this study, we aimed to investigate the potential relationship between participants' nationality and their ranking of six motives influencing their decision to remain in or leave Portugal after graduation. Participants were asked to rank these motives from most to least important. To analyze this relationship, we restructured the data in SPSS into a long format, where each participant's rankings were recorded for each motive. We planned to use crosstabulation with a Chi-Square test to identify any significant associations between nationality and the ranking of motives. Additionally, we considered Ordinal Logistic Regression as an alternative method to assess the relationship between the ordinal rankings and nationality, accounting for the rank order of each motive. Unfortunately, the results in the output window did neither confirm nor deny a correlation between the two variables, presumably due to a data set that is too small.

Therefore, we decided to look at the distribution of stay and leave motives after establishing the new variable continents. Both Europe and Latin America showed the biggest shares in nationality and therefore both results of the heat maps, will be investigated in a

linear comparison. While the sample sizes differ, the distribution of the frequencies and therefore importance attributed to a motive will be under research. Using this method, no direct correlation between nationalities and motives for graduate migration, but a tendency will give hints on what might be detectable when working with a bigger sample.

The distribution of motives to stay in Portugal, differs on the first look, when comparing the heatmaps in figure 36 and figure 37. Ranking first, for European students there is no clear preference distinguishable, with “Career prospects”, “Political stability” and “Salary” being named almost evenly the most important motive. For Latin American students on the other side, they ranked first “Work-life-balance”, followed by “Personal affairs” and “Cost of living”. Ranking second, for European students there is again a relatively even distribution, with “Personal affairs” and “Cost of living” being the most often named motives to stay in Portugal. “Work-life-balance” is also the most important motive ranking second among Latin American students, followed by “Political stability” and “Career prospects”. Ranking third as motives to stay in Portugal, for European students “Personal affairs” was chosen most often, followed closely by “Work-life-balance” and “Cost of living”. However, Latin American students chose on third rank majoritarian “Career prospects” and “Political stability”. The biggest differences when comparing the motives to stay is that “Salary” does not play a significant role for Latin Americans, while Europeans attribute more importance to it, ranking between first and fourth place. “Cost of living” was overall more important to Europeans as a motive to stay, as opposed to Latin Americans. The opposite could be observed for “Work-life-balance”, which is ranking higher in motives to stay for Latin Americans than for Europeans. And “Political stability”, although considered important by some, is ranking generally higher in the importance for Latin Americans than for Europeans.

Figure 36*European Countries – Motives to Stay in Portugal*

	Salary	Personal affairs	Cost of living	Work-life-balance	Political stability	Career prospects
Rank 1	11	4	6	7	11	13
Rank 2	10	14	13	7	7	7
Rank 3	2	17	13	15	8	3
Rank 4	26	17	7	5	2	1
Rank 5	2	1	7	8	15	22
Rank 6	3	2	10	16	15	11

Figure 37*Latin American Countries – Motives to Stay in Portugal*

	Salary	Personal affairs	Cost of living	Work-life-balance	Political stability	Career prospects
Rank 1	1	6	4	7	3	3
Rank 2	1	2	1	7	5	5
Rank 3	0	1	2	4	5	8
Rank 4	3	4	5	2	7	3
Rank 5	7	2	6	3	2	3
Rank 6	8	7	4	1	2	2

Now coming to the motives importance to leave Portugal after graduation, the overall distribution of frequency based on the heatmap pattern is relatively comparable (see figure 38 & 39). For European Students the motive “Salary” is the most named reason to leave, while for Latin American it is the “Cost of Living”. “Personal Affairs” are for both group the second most important motive to leave the country after graduation on the first rank. On the second rank, Europeans chose majoritarian “Work-life-balance”, followed by “Cost of Living”. Latin American opted on second rank for “Personal affairs”, closely followed by “Salary” and “Cost of Living” as motives to leave Portugal. Ranking third, the distribution of motives from European students is relatively the same as on the second rank with “Work-life-balance” leading before “Cost of living” and “Personal affairs”. However, the largest number of participants choosing “Salary” as a motive to leave is by Latin Americans on the third rank. “Career prospects” did not seem to be a decisive motive amongst both groups as they rank very low, as equally “Political stability”. A striking difference can be observed,

when comparing at the importance of “Cost of Living”, which for a majority of Europeans ranked only sixth, while Latin Americans ranked it on first.

Figure 38

European Countries – Motives to Leave Portugal

	Salary	Personal affairs	Cost of living	Work-life-balance	Political stability	Career prospects
Rank 1	31	21	5	1	0	0
Rank 2	9	5	12	20	5	7
Rank 3	9	14	15	16	2	2
Rank 4	0	3	6	7	28	12
Rank 5	0	0	1	6	17	33
Rank 6	9	15	19	7	5	2

Figure 39

Latin American Countries – Motives to Leave Portugal

	Salary	Personal Affairs	Cost of Living	Work-life-balance	Political stability	Career prospects
Rank 1	5	6	7	4	2	0
Rank 2	7	8	6	3	0	0
Rank 3	12	6	2	2	1	1
Rank 4	0	2	4	8	9	1
Rank 5	0	0	1	2	6	15
Rank 6	0	1	4	5	6	7

4.2 Qualitative Results from Expert Interviews

Based on the model Employer Branding Roadmap by Brett Minchington (2006) the first four deductively generated categories (concept phase, design phase, integration phase, evaluation phase) were established prior to the start of the coding process in MAXQDA, with each their own subcategories. Moreover, two inductive categories (on-campus recruiting, other) and subcategories were derived from the analysis of the transcripts themselves. In the following chapter, first, all results from the deductive coding are presented, the main findings from each interview paraphrased, and the most important direct quotes listed. Afterwards, all results collected with inductive coding are being explained,

paraphrased and partially also directly quoted. In this format, the researcher allows for a structured and selective presentation of the findings from the qualitative part of the study, the six expert interviews that were conducted. All literal transcripts of the interviews can be found in annex E.

Concept Phase

- EB Team and Stakeholders –

In this subcategory all parts of the interview were coded in which the interviewee spoke about the people and department involved in the EB process internally and also external stakeholders. To better understand how EB concepts are developed, it is important to know about the contributors.

The department involved in EB is mainly human resources at Company A, with some support from legal, audit and compliance, if necessary. External stakeholders are a legal advisor from a law firm and an unnamed company that, together with the department of Audit and Compliance, is realizing internal audits.

At Company B the Department of Culture and Communication (DCC), as the EB department is called, and the marketing department are mainly responsible for EB strategy. The EB department is the driving force behind the ideation, planning, communication and execution of EB actions. Internally, the directors, the operation managers, the administration board and ultimately also the CEO of the group are part of the final process, as they can contribute ideas and have veto power to influence the EB initiatives. The interviewee also stated that “everyone is (...) involved” (IN2_Par.5) as it’s a group effort of more than 500 employees. Externally, they work with an agency, especially at the beginning of the EB department, which helped and at times still helps to come up with a better structure for the department. For example, recently this stakeholder is described to guide the restructuring of the evaluation process of their employees during the employee life cycle. But in the future, the company of the interviewee is planning to do most of the work independently without external stakeholders.

At Company C four main groups are part of the EB Team and responsible for an EB campaign. It is led by the People Experience and Rewards team. The communication department is also involved, as well as the recruitment department and the talent development and learning department. Additionally, so called contributors take part as

“helpers” and facilitators, by implementing EB measures, without being involved in the EB strategic planning process. These contributors are team leaders, managers and office managers. Their task is then to deliver, reinforce and implement the EB messages, ideas and actions internally among the company’s employees.

The main EB Team led by Interviewee D is located internally within the human resources department at Company D. As it operates internationally and manages several subcompanies, the EB department at the parent company is mainly responsible for the overarching concepts, which it then distributes to the different brands and their EB teams. In a sense “Company D is the employer for the individual employer brands, for the young talent” (IN4_ Par.9). In total about 20 people are involved in EB at Company D, with five people being directly responsible for it. One team member working on attraction mainly, takes care of the academic partnerships, including protocols with universities, and managing the company’s ambassadors. Interviewee D works more on the conceptual part, after a restructuring measure at the beginning of the year. In general, everyone at Company D is somehow engaged in the EB effort, as Interviewee D stated. Aside from the main team, the business unit takes care of the project-based learning programs for and with students. For EB initiatives and events within academia, the talent programs team and the recruitment team also support the efforts.

The human resources department is responsible for EB at Company E, with the Head of HR, and above all, the CEO, being the key decision makers. At Company E their goal is to create a collaborative approach to EB, especially with the departments of marketing and external relations who are intricately linked with the EB work. Although Interviewee E spoke of the challenges involved in it, it proved to be most successful with marketing. Its importance was argued as there is a big overlap of EB and “just branding”, which is why the individual impact on a certain outcome can often not be distinguished and a collaborative work approach could facilitate the overall branding success. Moreover, Company E has a partnership with Escola 42, which offers training to people with little or no work experience.

At Company F the EB responsibility lies with the talent attraction team within the People and Organization department. Additionally, they work closely with the brand global unit and the communication global unit as key stakeholders in EB. The talent attraction team of Interviewee F at Company F in Portugal defines the global EB strategy for more than 30

other markets in which they are operating. The local teams that lead the business operations in each country then implement the predefined strategy.

- Internal Research –

Internal research in the concept phase is vital for understanding the company's identity and employee perceptions, ensuring the employer brand is authentic and aligned with organizational values. This approach of each company described in the following helps pinpoint strengths and improvement areas, making the strategy more effective.

At Company A they do an employee satisfaction survey every two years. Moreover, by their clients' request, they regularly assess each worker, which they will evaluate from both HR and the training department. Additionally, they work with another company, which supports the department of audit and compliance at Company A in doing internal audits.

At Company B there is only a little internal research conducted before planning a new EB campaign. After offered trainings or other measures and events, a Google Forms feedback survey is sent out. But with most communication measures the most feedback is collected in an informal way over personal conversation in the company. However, it is planned to initiate a regular formal but short employee sentiment survey to obtain feedback on their overall satisfaction and perception of different measures. Exit interviews are also conducted and at times serve to do internal research.

Interviewee C states that they focus more on internal research as opposed to external research. The experience gained at EB jobs at previous employers inspired the internal research approach and actions taken. At Company C they have done focus groups to better understand which teams are missing which competencies and which job positions. Additionally, they have already mapped the entire employee life cycle. To collect more in-depth information, at Company C workshops are being organized with key departments that are directly involved with certain touchpoints within the employee life cycle journey.

In 2018 they did an internal global survey at Company D in cooperation with Universum Global to understand the employees' drivers and their perception of the employer brand. About every three years an employee engagement survey specifically for EB is conducted to provide some insights on the different employer brands and the overall temperature at Company D. If needed for new campaigns or particular needs that they want to explore, further internal surveys are distributed. Moreover, for certain EB campaigns and

the ongoing redefinition of the employer brand for the talent, internal focus groups are conducted with the employees that were attracted in the last few years.

“So they give us insights onto why they chose our company, what keeps them from not leaving the company so that we can look at those insights and broadcast them externally so that other people can relate to them, and maybe join the company as well.” (IN4_Par.15).

Interviewee D also stated that the first steps when approaching new EB initiatives is always to conduct internal research by identifying a need, a problem to solve, establishing goals to achieve and from that devise a strategy on how to reach the aim and who is involved: “But the first step is what does the business need? And that's how employer branding should work because we don't work disconnected from the business. We work for the business, for the company. So it's all about where the business is going and what the company needs” (IN4_Par.14).

At Company E internal research is gathered parallel with external research in a market study that Interviewee E initiated after entering the company in 2020. A quantitative and qualitative study was conducted to better understand how both the brand and the employer brand are perceived. The internal sample consisted of employees in general and recruiters specifically, as they experience the perception firsthand.

An annual internal climate survey designed to understand the perception of the employees and what they value in the company and what not, helped define the EVP and the EB approach at Company F. Moreover, the results of the annual climate survey were taken into account. After drafting the EVPs and the EB strategy Interviewee F organized internal focus groups with employees and additional interviews with executive managers and team leads. Their aim was to “complete the picture of the different needs and perspectives” (IN6_Par.9) at Company F.

- External Research –

External and market research in the concept phase is crucial for understanding the competitive landscape and potential talent pool, helping to position the company uniquely. It also identifies industry trends and candidate expectations, ensuring the employer brand is relevant and attractive. Each of the five people interviewed shared the individual approaches of their company.

At Company A no regular or sporadic external analyses take place, but HR is currently undergoing a restructuring process and is planning to include further research in the future.

At Company B the EB responsible regularly screens online what the competitive companies are doing regarding EB and other initiatives, to always be aware of current trends in the sector and get inspired.

Interviewee C reports that at Company C they do yearly SWOT analyses to strengthen the companies positioning amongst other employer brands. Moreover, in-depth social media monitoring takes place on a regular basis, to understand the sentiment of stakeholders and the general public towards Company C.

Aside from the internal sample, at Company D also an external sample was involved in the global study in 2018. The perception of the brand as an employer was investigated by gathering feedback from many different stakeholder groups.

Before starting a new EB initiative, the first steps at Company E include doing a both quantitative and qualitative market study aiming to understand how the brand and the employer brand are perceived. Additionally, getting a feeling on how directly competitive brands are perceived. Competitors are regarded as companies working in the same sector or that are competing for the same kind of talent. According to Interviewee E the market study should be conducted with a higher frequency than is the case currently:

And this gives us, on the one hand, what we are perceived as from the outside, but also what is perceived within. And this allows us to match. I think one thing that is very important as well is when you're talking about employer brand, there isn't a single perception, an external perception. There's a perception of recruiters. There's a perception of those that work in other companies. There's a perception of students and as well as teachers of students. They have very different perceptions that need to be taken into account. (IN5_Par.7)

Company F did extensive external research to understand the perception and reputation of the organization as an employer by potential candidates and what they generally value in companies as great employers. Moreover, after launching specific campaigns, they sometimes do research to receive direct feedback from the targeted audience when they see the campaign. As another channel of external research, they frequently apply to awards and certifications recognizing top employers, they receive many market insights and benchmarks, that are used to improve and update the EB strategy of Company F.

- Target Audience Analysis -

A target audience analysis is essential for tailoring the EB strategy to attract and engage the right talent, ensuring the messaging resonates with their values, needs, and expectations. This boosts recruitment effectiveness and employee retention. Different business goals and portfolios require a different profile of students and graduates that companies are looking for, which is why they individually focus more on certain degrees and subjects.

At Company A for each job function or each vacancy a job profile is created. For certain positions a generic profile exists, which is adapted to match the specifications of the role in each region and at each airport. This is important as the legislation, the procedures and the salaries are slightly different in each country. Interviewee A stated that, for the office jobs in Portugal, they mainly recruit candidates with Bachelor degree from various programs.

The proximity of potential candidates to the location of the place to work is given importance when planning recruitment and EB measures for the desired target audience of Company B. This factor is highly relevant, according to Interviewee B, in the attraction and long-term retention of employees. Moreover, the right cultural fit is important because Company B is a family business. Most recruits at Company B have a Bachelor degree as well, with a few coming from the Master level.

The personas developed at Company C are not yet being used in recruitment, but they support the target audience analysis for EB initiatives and campaigns. According to Interviewee C, the targeting of people is currently happening in an organic way, supported by a strong social media and a strong external communications department. Their focus at Company C is on software developing and data analytics graduates, as they are primarily looking for IT profiles. Interviewee C stated that:

We have mapped our personas that we will be using not only externally but also internally as well. They are motivational personas instead of like the typical ones where you see per role or per department. For us it's more about motivation. And we will use those personas externally to attract people and segment our communication, but also internally to understand how well we hope that this is possible. But the goal to use the personas internally is to understand how those personas are distributed, amongst the teams, and use that to understand if there is a specific profile matching each persona. Which, based on focus groups, we can already tell there is, and also understand which teams are missing which type of persona. So that when we track people for certain job positions, then we already attract those specific personas. So this is one part of the project. And then the other part of the project is that we've mapped the entire employee life cycle. That's the entire journey, as I was saying, from the first moment that people

hear about the company until the moment that they leave, become alumni or even return to the company. (IN3_Par.5)

At Company D knowing about the target audience is key for EB attraction campaigns. Therefore, personas are defined, the best channels are identified and knowledge about the drivers for them is collected. But in the end, “business needs create those profiles” (IN4_Par.14). According to Interviewee D it is all “about where the business is going and what the company needs. That is the first step to find the target we want to attract. And then we’ve characterized that target according to personas” (IN4_Par.14). When looking at the market and Company D’s competitors “all the companies are fighting for tech, data and IT profiles. Because data is the new currency. And so everyone is looking for those data talents” (IN4_Par.14). And in order to reach said talent, Company D believes that the social media generation is most successfully attracted by engaging with the target group on social networking platforms and in person. Interviewee D says that “we think what your peers will say is much more valued by students than what a company says” (IN4_Par.5), which is why they created a company ambassador program.

At Company E they decided against the use of personas but went instead to define the most important criteria of talent that they want to attract and require at different departments. These characteristics are mainly academic, as in certain schools, universities and degrees and experience background as in a set of soft and hard skills the sought-after talent requires. For internal use Interviewee E explained that they tried using personas but then being truly representative of the diverse job profiles within the company has proven to be difficult. At Company E they “are present in, I would say roughly all the universities in which there is, either IT, data science and actuarial studies. [...] So there's a big focus on public universities, mostly, a big focus on management, IT, data science, tech universities” (IN5_Par.17). For the specific education programs Company E works mainly with Data Science and Programming students from IST Lisboa and Nova ISM.

The workforce planning at Company F is the basis to define the EB target audience and analyze their needs. It is part of the business plan 2026 and specifies the different global and local needs for the company. Key areas to recruit are identified and desired profiles they want to attract are defined, in order to build a customized strategy to attract the target group they need. They identified six main personas and therefore six main target audiences, which are students and graduates, young talents, experienced professionals, STEM profiles, women

and people with disabilities. Over the past years they did a generational renewal at Company F and targeted mainly students, graduates and young talent. In 2024 they now aim for a more balanced workforce and focus on recruiting experienced workers.

- Employer Value Proposition -

A strong EVP guides all branding efforts, ensuring consistency and helping to attract and retain top talent. Therefore, having a precise, fitting and updated EVP is important to argue being a unique and attractive employer to potential employees.

At Company A there are no direct EVPs in place or communicated but within the process of restructuring the recruitment and EB approach it is planned to be defined in writing.

At Company B the EVP is mirrored in their slogan called “embrace, connect and grow” (IN2_Par.3). Being embraced with open arms at the company, providing the best onboarding and giving the best experience to every employee, especially during the attraction process. Connecting with other employees, the supervisor, clients and the group’s identity is also part of the EVP. And finally, growth is reflected in the training provided and the entire employee life cycle while at Company B.

Currently the EVP is undergoing a process of transformation and Company C aims to solidify exactly what makes them different as an employer. Based on the newly in 2024 defined five values “collaboration, customer-centric, excellence, impact and tribe” (IN3_Par.14), they chose to use these values as their internal and external EVP.

At Company D they derived insights from their internal global study and developed their EVP based on them. It was revised and rewritten in 2020, defining four EVP pillars for Company D: everyone counts, true care for people, explore your potential and work that matters. Depending on the target they want to attract and the target’s drivers, each one is individually given more focus, while still covering all four. “For example, for young talent, we highlight a lot more the “explore your potential” and “work that matters”, because of the [work’s] purpose and the ability to grow at Company D” (IN4_Par.32).

Currently in 2024, at Company E they are building a new EVP included in the updated EB approach. Before, according to Interviewee E, EB was still at very early stages. Due to internal and external research they came to the conclusion that the EVP in place was not strong enough to serve the company’s mission and vision. Going back and revising the EVP

takes a lot of time and effort, as incentives such as benefits, rewards and career prospects have to be redefined.

The EVP at Company F is highly aligned with their narrative, purpose, and core values. Derived from three values, each EVP pillar emphasizes specific human skills that the company seeks to develop in its employees and attract in potential candidates.

In the pillar associated with Value 1, the EVP emphasizes empowering employees to be autonomous in decision-making, working within an agile ecosystem, and performing at their best with all necessary tools and resources. This pillar also promotes a culture of collaboration, both digitally and globally, recognizing the company's global presence and the need for close cooperation across different locations. The second pillar, linked to Value 2, focuses on providing employees with well-being, a balanced workplace, a diverse workforce, and attractive benefits. Finally, the pillar associated with Value 3 highlights the promotion of employee development through worldwide opportunities, supported by the company's internal mobility policy.

- Identity, Image and Values -

Defining a company's identity, brand image, and values in the concept phase is vital as it ensures the employer brand is authentic and aligns with organizational culture. This foundation helps create consistent, compelling messaging that attracts candidates who resonate with the company's core principles.

At Company A there is little hierarchy lived, as, according to Interviewee A, everyone from employee to the board of directors and the CEO are very easy going and approachable to contact. This company's culture and identity built their values and brand image, which are both currently unwritten and exist only informally. According to Interviewee A, the company's website is undergoing construction and therefore, as of July 2024, cannot be accessed to display the company's identity, image and values.

During the rebranding at Company B at the beginning of 2024, the new identity and values of the employer was introduced: "embrace, connect and grow" (IN2_Par.3). Moreover, the group's name Noun B³ became the new identity of the EB team, now called Noun B Department of Culture and Communication, and EB strategy. Regarding the company's values, Interviewee B reported that every employee and candidate has to live the

³ The real name is not disclosed due to the confidentiality imposed by the interviewee.

values of teamwork, honesty and family-orientation. Due to many different nationalities working at Company B, a very inclusive and diverse corporate culture is central.

At Company C five different values are guiding the employees and incentivized to be lived every day: “collaboration, customer-centric, excellence, impact and tribe” (IN3_ Par. 14). In 2023 the values were defined in workshops with employees, the EB team and senior management. Already during the job interviews with potential candidates, they look for these values in a person to guarantee a good person-organization-fit. Diversity plays a huge focus as well, but rather than comply with quotas, it’s highly valued at Company C and they try to be as little biased as possible. Topics like neurodivergence, mental health and LGBTQ are present and visible. According to Interviewee C, every employee would answer the question about the most important asset of the company with its “people”.

At Company D the visual identity of the different employer brands was defined based on the EVP pillars. As of May 2024, the current big projects to strengthen external EB are “defining the employer brand identity and narrative for the end talent, the target group” (IN4_Par.3). The main target group is young talent, which is why the EB image for external attraction is being designed and defined according to their needs. Internally at Company D, the brand image is used as the employer image. “So at the end of the day the company image is everything. Every action is employer branding” (IN4_Par.16). While there is no specific EB image, Company D does have a specific EB signature which is being used both internally and externally.

At Company E the difficulty is that it is a group of 11 companies in Portugal and there is no official legal and external identity of the group. Even though Interviewee E reports a felt common identity and that in the group’s external communication it often seems like one company. Conflicting interests may arise, but they try to work together on a constant basis and reinforce their principles of EB. Mainly, it’s the communication of the group’s purpose, reinforcing the corporate culture, living the values as role models and having a clear expectation management.

The purpose of Company F mirrors their three core values. Everything at Company F revolves around these three key words, as they represent the narrative, EVP and brand signature. Therefore, Interviewee F reported that the employer brand needs to be and feel “real” to potential candidates but especially to the employees. Having a strong corporate culture based on shared values strengthens the corporate identity externally as well.

Additionally, there is a huge overlap between branding and EB, as they both influence each other and in turn the company's employees. The same counts for linking the people, brand and business narrative as to share one common purpose. Moreover, they have a diversity and inclusion policy and want to build a diverse workforce. Interviewee F stated that "we believe that in diversity, we have our main asset to promote the innovation that we need to continue being a leader in the energy transition" (IN6_Par.35).

- Vision and Mission -

A clearly defined vision and mission provides direction and purpose for the EB strategy, ensuring alignment with the company's goals and attracting talent that shares the company's aspirations and values. All six interviewees shared their company's take on it.

As Company A is growing in March 2024, they are trying to keep the company's identity and values as before, while including flexibility for change withing a strengthened structure. As the market is changing, they are required to adjust their communication, the employer identity and have the best and necessary people to provide the quality of services that are a valued standard. They aim to create the best functional structure to be able to reply to all the demands in the best way possible.

As the hospitality sector is, according to Interviewee B, a sector with a high rotation of employees and sometimes a bad reputation for working conditions, at Company B it has become the aim and necessity to focus on a high retention rate. Being better and offering better EVPs within the group's structure than the competing employers is crucial. At the moment, the main focus is on embrace and growth of employees by introducing new internal EB initiatives and benefits with the mission to retain as many employees as possible. And only if each employee individually is happy and satisfied with their work and work environment, they consider Company B as a good place to work. Different and rotating shifts as well as physically demanding jobs outside the offices have to be reviewed individually to create a positive working experience and facilitate employee retention. Every year the department of Interviewee B develops a plan for the entire month, where important dates to celebrate are included. To sum it up "You have happier customers, and you also have happier employees" (IN2_Par.39).

The long-term planning at Company C is done in 3 to 5 year cycles, while currently undergoing short-term adaptation. The results of the SWOT analysis are included in the

planning of the EB strategy every year. It includes the current year and usually a rough outline for future goals. Interviewee C explained that usually three stages for EB in the long-term are defined and every year smaller aims are set to achieve the new stage.

The target group of young talent in the attraction and recruitment process is central to Company D's future vision. Therefore, the different programs for students and graduates that are offered are aimed to be more cohesive and connected to each other. Establishing formal protocols instead of existing informal relationships with universities is a mission to strengthen the partnership of Company D with their partner universities.

Interviewee E stated that they defined their ambition at Company E to be "one of the best places in Portugal to grow" (IN5_Par.14) personally and professionally while working at. They are looking less at employee retention and more on "a valuable relationship between employer and employee during the span of time that makes sense for both" (IN5_Par.14). They are currently implementing a five-year plan from July 2020 regarding the company's future EB approach and establishing their updated employer brand by 2025.

The vision and mission of Company F is to be a leader in energy transition worldwide. Therefore, they develop business plans, always spanning five years, which are updated frequently throughout. The current 2026 business plan was the basis for the long-term EB strategy of becoming the employer of choice in every country they are operating in.

Design Phase

- Recruitment Strategies -

For every HR department a recruitment strategy is central to their work and also EB responsables require them to consider and know it to better define their strategy creating an attractive employer brand.

At Company A there are two focuses in recruiting, one of which is the ground personnel jobs at airports and one of which is the back-office jobs. Recruitment for, among others, aircraft cleaners is seasonal from March to October, is often based on recommendations by the station managers and is followed after a clearing safety background check by appropriate training. Recruitment for the office jobs, works with profiles created for vacancies, and external recruiting support by Robert Walters recruitment and SmartAvia. In his position as the Head of HR Interviewee A also talked about the focus on internal recruitment, as first, they always try to find people inside the company first, as they are

familiar with the processes and already live the company's culture. Depending on the requirements of the new position, at Company A they look for matching degrees, while they are aware of an always required and thorough onboarding and training process. Moreover, the national employment center has, according to Interviewee A, certain certification programs for graduate students in place, which are also a source of recruiting new and young talent.

The recruitment at Company B is reported to be very organic based on recommendations for the lower qualified positions and with job advertisements on different online platforms for office jobs. As they focus a lot on retention, despite the reality of high turnover rates, they are aiming to improve also the attraction and recruitment part. For the level of qualification of the office staff, the majority of recruits are candidates with a Bachelor certificate, although Interviewee B herself graduated from Master level and another new colleague in the events team also joined as a graduate recruit at the beginning of 2024.

Interviewee C characterized recruitment at Company C as a mix of organic and internal recruiting, in addition to attracting talent through a strong external communication, especially thanks to a strong social media presence. After the initial attraction, which is a mix of marketing, branding and EB, the talent acquisition team takes over for the application and recruitment processes. As previously mentioned, at Company C the company's values are both communicated from the start and also looked for during the search for new employees. As job portals to post open positions they use Teamlyzer in Portugal, and additionally, kununu in Germany for company reviews.

For the Portuguese part of the business at Company D their strongest recruitment channel are the talent programs, especially the graduate programs. Every year, according to Interviewee D, a group of the best students from the universities they work with are recruited. An early attraction is especially relevant for young talent in STEM, as these profiles are sought after a lot. And to strengthen the brand engagement and corporate identity of new recruits early on, the student ambassador program has resulted in many natural ambassadors, with extensive knowledge about and a strong engagement with Company D, which often leads to an application afterwards.

At Company E the recruitment strategy is stated to be average as to filling vacancies with matching candidate profiles, which can be recent graduates as well as experienced

managers. The manager responsible for an open post is directly involved with HR during the recruitment process to ensure a good overall fit.

The workforce planning is integrated into the 2026 business plan at Company F, which aims at attracting the right talent to achieve the predicted business growth needs. Therefore, specific personas out of the main six categories are targeted more than others, which is in 2024 the experienced professionals and STEM profiles to create a well-balanced workforce while following the mission of becoming a leader in energy transition. Together with local business partners in the different markets they identify key interests, needs and values for the relevant target audiences to build tailored initiatives.

- EB Campaign and Initiatives -

During the interviews the researcher asked the EB experts about specific and memorable EB campaigns and initiatives which they did in the last years. The actual campaign design visualizes one or more focusses of the company's EB approach, which is why each company does it differently.

No specific EB campaigns or initiatives were carried out at Company A, but EB is indirectly always involved in the company's recruitment approach and external attraction.

Every month at Company B there is a smaller celebration of important dates, like for example, the spring lunch, and then one bigger EB initiative per month. Two recent examples Interviewee B shared were the "Christmas around the world" themed party to strengthen cultural integration and a self-defense class on International Women's Day.

One internal and external EB initiative at Company C was the launch campaign of the updates company values, where the team of Interviewee C created a game that was played with all employees, aiming at incorporating lived values, memorizing them and understand how they are to be used internally. As every value has certain behaviors attached to it and the employees were engaged by gamifying the new internal EB initiative. Moreover, office managers are responsible for initiative engagement, especially regarding inclusion, belonging, learning and development, as career growth was one of the main reasons for employees to leave the company in the past. As an external EB initiative Interviewee C talked about an EB campaign which was developed by a colleague of hers in communication. It was run on YouTube and is a set of videos focusing on different types of diversity within Company C. Topics like neurodivergence, mental health and LGBTQ were covered. The

statistics proved it to be an internal and external great success, which is why for 2024 they have started working on a second season of the EB campaign.

At Company D EB initiatives were mainly general EB measures conducted externally. As in establishing formal protocols with universities to further attract young talent through job fairs, classes and project-based learning and thereby strengthening the connection between the universities, the university career centers, the students, the professors and the Company D.

Interviewee E stated that, regarding EB initiatives, it is very hard to separate EB from company or product branding. While not specifically designed for EB, they often contribute to it and the company's attractiveness as an employer. As of May 2024, there were no EB initiatives planned on the EB roadmap to directly attract Master students and graduates from Portugal and foreign countries. As Interviewee E stated to be aware of the untapped potential in this regard, they are planning on creating a more precisely targeted initiative in 2025, after bridging the challenge of non-English speaking employees.

A recent example that Interviewee F shared during the interview took place at the beginning of 2024, when the renewed EVPs were communicated to all stakeholders internally and externally through a manifesto video. Company F's employees took part in the making-of as actors. It was shared on social media as an awareness campaign, which also included a call to action to people to apply to work at Company F. This EB campaign was created to attract the targeted talent, which is necessary to meet the recruitment needs for 2024.

- Leadership Involvement -

The role of senior managers and directors at each company and their level of involvement within the EB design phase is crucial to understanding the internal processes and influences of EB.

Senior Management is involved in all important decisions at Company A, including the topics of recruitment and EB.

The department of Interviewee B works mostly independently on EB initiatives and campaigns. Nevertheless, at Company B they discuss plans with the operations manager, who sometimes provides additional input which is then considered. After finishing a concept, the department manager signs it off and informs the board of directors via email. The rule is

that if they do not reply with constructive criticism within 24 hours, the new concept is officially approved and ready to be implemented.

At Company C senior managers are very involved in the EB projects. Often directly during the development stage of projects and always at the end for final validation. For example, Interviewee C talked about their passionate and serious involvement in the workshops to define the new values.

HR top management is indirectly involved in the EB process at Company D. Interviewee D develops the new concepts together with the senior manager of the EB department, who accompanies every step of the process before giving final approval and reporting back their supervisor. Presentations on the current status of EB projects are created for senior management to keep them informed.

The development of EB concepts lies with Interviewee E and her colleagues, but the key decision makers are both the Head of HR who directly reports to and consults with the CEO of Company E.

Leadership Involvement in EB at Company F is low during the concept, design and integration phase and only present through feedback during the evaluation phase, when the EB responsables report on the success of EB campaigns and discuss the future EB strategy.

Integration Phase

- Employee Engagement Initiatives –

Employee Engagement Initiatives aim to foster a positive, motivating, and satisfying work environment for current employees. The focus is on improving the internal experience to boost productivity, loyalty, and overall job satisfaction, which are vital for a successful design of the EB strategy.

At Company A they have employee recognition programs to reward excelling employees with bonuses such as additional paid time off or financial compensation. Interviewee A phrases it in the following way: “This shows that great work is worth it and that if you have capacity to do it, you will always have a chance to go higher on the ranks and to get another job inside the company” (IN1_Par.31).

In the past, Interviewee B explained that the “group’s employee of the month” award was a great success but eventually led to controversies among the employees at Company B and it was decided to stop it. Nevertheless, they decided about two years ago to always award

the best colleague per company unit at the Christmas party, to incentivize exceptional work. Long-term employment is also awarded with a gift, for example a watch. For professional development they do apprentices training sessions and events, where they invite external speakers on different work related topics. To strengthen the team building a general culture of engaging with each other on different levels is encouraged.

At Company C, the employee engagement initiatives are centered around their company's five values. The big launch campaign for the redefined values supported team building efforts, as they want:

[...] to make sure that they were truly lived within the company and [are] not just words on a wall [...]. We played, we created this game. It was amazing, actually, and everyone had a lot of fun to memorize the values, to understand how the values are to be used. So we have the values, but then per value, we have behaviors attached to each value so that people understand what they mean. (IN3_Par.14)

The feedback and performance review are also done following the values, which are aimed to have a positive impact on the employees' work motivation. The office managers at Company C do a lot of initiative engagement on inclusion and belonging, as a higher identification with the company and feeling part of the tribe of Company C, strengthening the individual's loyalty and job satisfaction, according to Interviewee C. Moreover, so called communities exist in which the employees can organize themselves and discuss different topics of interest. The department of learning and development plays an important role in internal EB and employee engagement, as they create professional growth opportunities for every employee.

At Company D an employee engagement survey is sent out regularly, at least every three years. Further employee engagement measures could not be specified by Interviewee D.

Incentives at Company E to strengthen employee engagement are to participate in external events, where only the best internal people are chosen as a way of recognizing great work and offering professional development.

Employee Engagement at Company F is highly valued according to Interviewee F, as they aim for a strong corporate culture and satisfied employees. The employees' journey is mapped, daily news about the organization and potential development opportunities are shared in the intranet and employee brand ambassadors encouraged. On the internal advocacy platform called "storytellers" they provide ideas for content to share, which is then adapted by the employee to match their personal tone of voice and shared online. At

Company F they aim to encourage employees to share their experiences at work and their pride of working in a company leading the energy transition.

- External Communication Channels and Messaging -

Which external communication channels are used to communicate the brand's messaging on their products but also their employer identity, have to be chosen carefully, in order to attract clients and the targeted talent to become future employees? Depending on the EB campaign's nature the external channels vary from company to company.

For external communication at Company A, they advertise job openings on posters at airports, on their company's website, further employment websites and on social media, especially Facebook for advertising and LinkedIn to hire qualified people for the office jobs.

Interviewee B reported that they publish job advertisements on the career page on Company B's website, although these are not frequently updated. SAPO Emprego is also used as a job portal within Portugal, as well as different social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Instagram and TikTok. As the management of the social media accounts lies with the commercial team, they also define most of the content around talent attraction, EB and recruiting, sometimes though in cooperation with the EB department of Interviewee B. TikTok was stated to have been outsourced to another person, which is currently under review as the content and outcome do not align.

At Company C the EB and the communication department developed a strategy of external communication throughout the year. For attraction purposes, every year they define the social media content between marketing and EB. Externally, they use the company's websites, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube channels, on which they post regularly to engage with the target audience. Regarding the communicative approach, Interviewee C explained:

We are in a way, our own company. But we don't have different types of communication. We are a subsidiary of Parent Company C, which means that we work solely for them, all our products and services we sell to them. So we don't have services that we sell externally, which means that all of our communication is like at Parent Company C. It's just us. We just sell the company. In terms of specific communication, design, branding or anything. We are very consistent in the sense of that we try to be as real or at least as consistent as we are internally, externally as well. (IN3_Par.12)

As the recruitment strategy at Company D mainly targets a younger audience, they focus a lot on social media and direct advertising at universities. The main social media

channels are LinkedIn and Instagram, while LinkedIn is especially important for EB campaigns and to reach older students and graduates. For younger students and young talent in general, Instagram has proven to be a more successful channel, although Interviewee D reported a dissatisfaction about the current running of the company's Instagram channel. Furthermore, they work closely with career offices within the different schools and faculties at Portuguese universities. This includes physical posters at universities, some press events and a newsletter in the making for interested students in the company's database. The latest project for enhanced external communication at Company D with the young target group in mind is to produce a podcast with EB content and also play advertisement on Spotify for unpaid subscribers.

LinkedIn is the main external communication channel at Company E but is not managed by the EB team of Interviewee E. Instagram and other social media channels are not frequently used, only selectively for specific talent attraction and training programs targeted at a very young audience. Articles and interviews with the Human Resources Portugal online magazine and a participation of Interviewee E in international HR and EB conferences are other channels of external communication.

Moreover, Interviewee E reported that in external communication at Company E, repeatedly conflicting interests arise, as the brand has the same name as the company. As a group with 11 companies in Portugal they do not have one legal or external identity but multiple. Nevertheless, external communication often talks as a group, and social media channels led by the marketing department also promote a variety of products, which sometimes leads to internal and external confusion about the company's identity.

However, the focus in 2024 is on podcasts as part of external EB. Podcast E is in season three and is being produced once a year with about ten episodes:

It has nothing to do with Company E. It has to do with the challenges in managing people and working with people and just working. So, for example, this year, we had things like, we had a comedian talk about mental health. We had two people that do social integration of people with disability and to train them to go into the marketplace. What is the importance of actually training these people and giving them the opportunities? We talked about people who had serious accidents and then their life just completely changes. And how do you go back into finding your focus? So it has nothing to do with the company. Sometimes we have examples in the company. We had one, in the first year, which was really nice. We picked the oldest person and the youngest person in the company. They actually could be grandmother and grandson. And to actually talk about what are the challenges. So we use this to talk about topics. Not about us. (IN5_Par.20)

External communication at Company F uses the website including the career menu, social media with a focus on LinkedIn and Instagram, and for specific campaigns targeting a young audience paid advertising on TikTok. Moreover, they increase the reach of big EB campaigns by Google advertising and being active on Glassdoor and Indeed.

- Internal Communication Channels and Messaging –

The same approach as with external communication counts for internal communication and the choice of the best fitting channels to steer internal EB at each company.

Internally, at Company A the communication is done, among other things, in Facebook groups of the company and on LinkedIn. There, Interviewee A reported, that memos to the stations across Europe are sent by HR and communications, regarding open positions and changes within the company. Until the pandemic there was a weekly newsletter to share the latest information with all employees, but Interviewee A stated that they are planning to restart it. Moreover, at Company A the culture of communication is very open, approachable and informed among colleagues.

At Company B WhatsApp groups that were created for every business unit are mainly used for internal communication, with individual messaging. They still continue to use emails, but mainly for the office employees, as they experienced that many others do not access their email inbox very often. No intranet is used but Interviewee B is working on a regular newsletter format to be introduced in the near future. With the aim of generational inclusivity in mind, at Company B they still use an information board with all the latest information, which is strategically located close to the canteen.

The company's intranet, MS Teams and email are Company C's main internal communication channels. Moreover, they send out weekly updates in a newsletter by email to all employees and use Confluence for the exchange of knowledge among different departments.

At Company D they use a multitude of internal communication channels and means, with the main one being an internal portal. On their work phones every employee has a set of work-related apps, including email. Interviewee D also talked about both physical and virtual magazines, the different websites of the subcompanies, billboards and in retail also store sound.

The intranet is the main communication channel at Company E. Additionally, they use MS Teams channels, Yammer and webinars. Non-digital internal communication includes posters and office decoration. For further insights into general work-related topics for all employees at Company E they produce Podcast E.

Internally, they use an intranet at Company F, which updates all employees with daily company news and a people menu to find out more about the employees' journey and internal development opportunities. Moreover, they send a newsletter by email, they use Viva Engage comparable to an internal Facebook with specific groups for each business platform and a general group sharing information on employee experience.

- Cultural Integration -

The EB values of the company only work as intended if they are intricately linked within the corporate culture. Therefore, fostering lived values and an attractive culture within the company helps the internal and external success of EB.

Both, during recruitment and reevaluation of employees at Company A, their person-corporate culture-fit is an important factor looked at. As the corporate identity grows over time, every new vacancy is first tried to fill with someone who already works at the company, as the integration and onboarding is much easier and works favorably for the lived EB values at Company A.

For all approximately 500 employees at Company B cultural integration is key to a successful EB and a lived corporate culture. The department managers communicate the EB actions to their teams, in order to get everyone involved and really live the original family company culture.

At Company C “Employer branding is intrinsic within the company” (IN3_Par.16), since many teams are doing EB and living the values without realizing their impact. The previously mentioned value workshop with behaviors attached to each value helps each employee to understand in a playful approach the significance and intention of the EB values.

Due to many subsidiaries of Company D there is an umbrella of corporate culture, defined by the EVP pillars used during talent attraction. The different student programs help foster the cultural integration early on and communicate what it means to work for Company D, according to Interviewee D.

Interviewee E explained the cultural integration of the EB values at Company E as follows:

We work on a constant basis to keep what we know are the principles of our employer branding alive. So communicating our purpose, reinforcing what our culture is, our values, what we expect from each person, ensuring that, for example, when we participate in external events that we take the best internal people that we have that represent this culture. So we try to make this, this connection. (IN5_Par.9)

Podcast E is also an indirect facilitator of cultural integration as the company's values and beliefs are discussed without direct reference to the company.

Company F lays a huge focus on an integrated workforce with a strong and lived corporate culture. The EVP pillars guide the human skills aimed for amongst their employees, which are reinforced and encouraged regularly by managers and especially the people and organization department.

Evaluation Phase

- Continuous Improvement -

In order to keep the EB strategy dynamic and responsive, it is imperative to continuously look into ways to improve it. Regular updates based on feedback and performance metrics, allow for effectively attracting and retaining top talent.

As of March 2024, at Company A there are no specific EB related metrics in place or KPIs set to help track and evaluate the development of EB at the company and the success of campaigns. Interviewee A is planning on restructuring this part and improving the internal statistics.

At Company B they plan on improving the employee feedback on their EB measures and sending out formal surveys on a regular basis to obtain information, additionally to the informal feedback collection already in place.

Interviewee C repeatedly talked about the opportunities and the untapped potential with EB at Company C. Therefore, continuous efforts to improve the status quo of tracking progress, updating the candidate experience and doing internal workshops are on the future agenda.

At Company D they are currently redefining the messaging and channel usage to communicate with their main target, which is young talent. As they offer a variety of programs for students, Interviewee D reported that they started to standardize the different programs, make them more cohesive and related with each other and set up formal contracts with the different universities.

According to Interviewee E the majority of the EB work at Company E had been done since July 2020. “Back then part of the challenge was to rethink how we would position ourselves as employer and an employer brand” (IN5_Par.3). This included a rethinking of the company’s EVPs, how to better live the corporate culture, which new metrics to implement, and for the future to have English as the company’s main language. Moreover, they are working on a slogan on who they are as a company during the second and third quarter of 2024.

To be able to keep up with the competition Interviewee F reports that their EB strategy is reviewed on a regular basis to meet the changing needs of their employees and hire the best talent on the market. Winning more awards for Company F as an employer of choice and the company as a great place to work in all the different markets is important to improve. Internationally, they aim to make the company well known as an attractive employer also outside of Portugal.

- Feedback Mechanisms -

Effective feedback mechanisms are crucial during the evaluation phase of EB because they provide insights into employee perceptions and experiences. This information helps identify areas for improvement, ensuring the employer brand remains relevant and aligned with employee expectations and organizational goals.

At Company A exit interviews are conducted to understand why an employee left and what could be improved at Company A to become a more attractive employer.

For some EB measures like training for professional development the EB department at Company B sends out Google Form surveys to ask for feedback. But for most EB measures informal feedback through private and professional conversations is collected. Additionally, the directors conduct exit interviews with every employee, to understand what the motives are of them leaving the company, their overall opinion and experiences regarding working at Company B. Afterwards, the results are discussed internally and, if possible and feasible, changes to the EVPs are initiated.

At Company C feedback was reported to not be collected systematically or through specific channels, other than in internal EB measures, like the value workshop. There, employees could voice their feedback directly to the EB team. Further opinions on the matter of EB are collected in a more informal way.

At Company D internal focus groups were used to collect feedback on EB initiatives, which also helped with the internal research during the concept phase. Part of the employee engagement survey also covers EB measures.

The previously mentioned market study with an internal and external sample at Company E collected extensive feedback on the perception of and information from employees and many other stakeholders.

Employees at Company F can share their feedback on their employer through the annual climate survey, through focus groups and indirectly also as an employee ambassador online. On Viva Engage they exchange their ideas and their employee experience with others and the team responsible for EB.

- Internal Reporting -

For internal clearance and to receive feedback on the EB processes by the EB supervisor, the interviewees were asked how often, and in which form they report to their supervisors and other higher-ranking employees.

Senior Management at Company A receives a brief daily report with statistics on current employees, the number of vacancies and the recruitment's current state.

For internal feedback from senior management, Interviewee B regularly reports to her supervisor. Presentations about the status quo of the company's EB, current projects and next year's goals are held by the DCC department at Company B a few times per year.

Interviewee C regularly reports to both the communication and EB manager the ongoing state of every project and its results afterwards. A presentation to the managers or HR is only necessary at Company C, if it is a big project.

With colleagues and superiors within the team, Interviewee D usually shares and presents information in informal business meetings. On a regular basis, presentations for top management are done to inform them, receive clearance and gather feedback.

At Company E the interviewee shares important updates on EB measures with the Head of HR who then reports directly to the CEO.

At the end of the year Company F reports to the executive board of directors and key stakeholders presenting the people and organization strategy, including future talent attraction goals, the ROI so far and their achievements in EB. At the beginning of each year, they publish a people and organization report for their employees and potential candidates

about employees' experiences, achievements in the past year regarding talent attraction and their future goals.

- Metrics and KPIs -

Actively using KPIs and metrics to measure the success of EB initiatives is important, to provide clear, objective data to assess performance, guide strategic adjustments, and ensure alignment with overall organizational goals.

At Company A they do not measure EB initiatives directly but the success of recruitment. Interviewee A calculates the applicant-to-hire ratio, the time spent on recruitment at each station and the turnover of employees. As part of the employees have seasonal contracts, the evaluation usually takes place in autumn after the end of the season. For office employees it happens on a regular basis throughout the year. The successful integration of new workers is also analyzed by a performance and cultural integration evaluation of every superior on his team members.

In Company B the implementation of metrics is part of the restructuring and improving of the EB and recruitment approach. Interviewee B explained that due to the family business structure, the company's good reputation and prominence in the industry, they had not paid great attention to measuring EB. In 2023 they started to informally collect numbers, do statistics and define KPIs. The HR department looks into the turnover rate, while the EB and marketing department of Interviewee B receives the statistics on social media performance.

According to Interviewee C many metrics are still being defined, especially regarding the recently implemented employee life cycle and how to measure its success. The employees at Company C are also reviewed in their work performance, which includes how well they live by company's values as individual KPI guides. An in-depth social media monitoring is done to analyze all social media activities on Company C's accounts.

At Company D they measure the performance of social media campaigns and track clicks of advertised and sponsored posts. The quality of hire and applicant-to-hire ratio are analyzed as well. Regarding the success of talent attraction, the target group of STEM candidates and their applications are tracked in individual statistics.

At Company E they have several metrics in place to constantly improve their EB. First, they:

[...] redo the employer branding study in a shorter version, what we call "atracking". And so, we do that about every two years to understand how this is evolving. And

probably this is the most relevant metric that we have, because not only allows us to see how we are positioned and whether we have improved or not, but also how direct and indirect competitors have improved. (IN5_Par.12)

Moreover, Interviewee E reported that they started to look into the effort of conversion in talent attraction, the exit rate and the attraction rate of sought-after profiles in the market.

Internally, in Company F, they do a climate survey every year trying to understand whether their employees are proud of working at Company F and if they would recommend it as a great place to work to a friend or a family member. Externally, they track their career page traffic, the conversion rates applicant to hire and for EB campaigns they do social media monitoring. The focus hereby differs between awareness campaigns, where they look specifically at impressions and the conversion rate, and conversion campaigns, where they track the number of applications generated through the campaign.

- ROI Analysis -

To quantify the financial benefits, demonstrating the tangible value and impact of EB initiatives on the organization, the use and analysis of ROI as a measure of evaluation was asked.

At Company A they measure the ROI only in a very rudimentary, according to Interviewee A “archaic” (IN1_Par.63) way. Interviewee B did not recall the ROI being used by her at Company B to measure the success of EB but argued that the HR department and her manager keep track of the relevant numbers that define EB success. The ROI at Company C is measured at the HR department, but Interviewee C could not share more information on it. During the interview with Interviewee D no comment on the use of ROI at Company D was made. Interviewee E reported that at Company E they do not look at or measure ROI, arguing that they do not yet invest enough to even consider it at this early stage of EB at the company. At Company F they do calculate the ROI based on the invested EB budget and the metrics after an EB campaign, as they also present it to top management.

On-Campus Recruiting

- University Partnerships -

University partnerships start the company to academia relationship early on and facilitate to find young talent among students who fit their profile. Investing early in greater visibility as an attractive employer can help to recruit the best future employees.

Both Company A and Company B have no direct university partnership in place but do receive applications from students and graduates regarding internships and jobs.

A partnership of Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) Lisboa and Universidade do Minho with Company C was established a few years ago.

At Company D they collaborate with Nova SBE and Nova IMS, as well as IST Lisboa. Smaller scale collaborations also exist outside of Lisbon with other universities. They have opened some stores and technical stores on the campuses and offer different activities and programs. Additionally, they cooperate with Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP) – currently still with an informal protocol – and plan to strengthen their partnership with a formal protocol to improve student attraction in executive education.

Interviewee E talked about their specific education programs, which are currently being developed, and collaboration with both IST Lisboa and Nova university in Lisbon. It is a direct relationship with the deans and professors from each university. The main collaboration does not work through the career offices at the universities. Nevertheless, this is planned to change in the future by establishing a direct connection. The Traineeship E is run by an external agency who supports Company E, and they work with both with the career offices and student associations.

At Company F university partnerships are an integral part of their EB strategy through participation in on-campus events and building a relation with student unions. Among other universities, they partner with UCP and IST Lisboa, with the aim to form a close relationship to students during their time at university.

- EB Activities at Universities -

Directly executed EB activities on campus and with the students support the company's effort of convincing the young talent of especially sought-after profiles to consider them as an attractive employer.

Neither Company A nor Company B offer any direct EB activities at and with universities. During the interview with Interviewee C the topic of EB activities was not addressed, however in a further online search, the researcher found out that Company C participated with tribe ambassadors at SINFO, which is a technology event at IST Lisboa (Fernandes, 2024).

At Company D they participate in job fairs around the country, give workshops to students, offer project-based learning and interact with students and universities in many ways. Moreover, Interviewee D reported that they “have started and opened some stores and some more technological stores in some universities such as Técnico and Nova” (IN4_Par.3). Especially for the campus ambassadors the students participating in this program are provided a “development initiative for them, either just a visit to the business, or talks, workshops, etc.” (IN4_Par.5).

Interviewee E stated that they participate in workshops, in student fairs and many more initiatives with universities, representing Company E.

Company F participates in career fairs, workshops or presentations at different universities, they offer job shadowing, they manage business cases together with selected students and generally are open to respond to needs and suggestions brought forward by universities.

- Student and Graduate Programs -

Different types of student and graduate programs are offered by the different companies, to allow the students getting an insight perspective.

At Company A they receive university graduates as trainees for nine months. They are sent from the Portuguese employment institute which also co-finances the costs of the program. Interviewee A reported that all trainees so far have been hired afterwards and still work for the company. This is due to a successful cultural integration, acquired knowledge about the position and internal procedures and a learned responsible mindset. According to Interviewee A the traineeship is successful because “it's a good way to groom people to be able to stay with us and to have a cultural fit. In those nine months they probably understand the cultural identity and the corporate identity” (IN1_Par.21).

They offer different internships at Company B, but Interviewee B reported that she has limited knowledge on the matter, as HR takes care of internships. One university student or

graduate from Mozambique is interning every year at Company B through the Girl MOVE Program.

At Company C they offer a summer internship with a duration of three months, open to students from the second year of university and older. Sought-after profiles are software developers, data analysts and other IT profiles. In 2023 they had around 15 interns but for 2024 the focus of recruitment has shifted, which is why there will be fewer summer interns compared to the year before.

At Company D they offer a summer internship for Bachelor students, a professional internship for Bachelor graduates, a trainee program for Master graduates and a campus ambassador program for all students enrolled, although mainly from Bachelor level. As the different programs and internships were not within a structured framework, Interviewee D reported that in 2024 they did a restructuring and received proof of concept for the latest program, which is the professional internship, and will only start for the first time in September 2024. For that the focus is on gathering first professional experience in their area or field of study, without moving on to a Master's right away.

The summer internship at Company D is two months long and is a first short-term professional experience for students who want to seize their summer semester break. They receive a formal work contract, including a fixed salary and benefits.

All Master graduates who want to start working with Company D can apply for the traineeship to potentially build a future career. As the traineeship encourages trying out different departments, it is required to be comfortable with the idea of working in a job that is different than the original field of study. Interviewee D described it as “an acceleration program for future leaders” (IN4_Par.7).

Regarding the campus ambassador program, Interviewee D stated that “the idea behind the program is that, you know, we believe that we're in the social media generation (...). We think what your peers will say is much more valued by students” (IN4_Par.5) than what a company says. Therefore, Company D recruits a group of Bachelor students – in the last academic year it was 39 students – from universities that offer programs for attractive potential candidates. It is an informal relationship from October to May, being the company's on-campus ambassadors and allowing for a closer proximity to students and academia itself. They have to fulfill certain challenges to win prizes like fast-track access to internships, they receive development initiatives, for example, a company visit, industry talks or workshops,

and they are guided by the program coordinator throughout the year. Some are reported to drop out of the program during the year, which is why from the 39 students who entered the program, 25 finished it, and two of them started their summer internship immediately afterwards. Apart from the students graduates who later apply at Company D, most participants in the ambassador program become “natural [brand] ambassadors” (IN4_Par.6) even after the program, are more engaged with the brand, have acquired much additional knowledge and often end up applying in the future.

At Company E they offer a summer internship, a professional internship and the Traineeship E. The professional internship offers are published on the company’s career website on a rolling basis and interested students and graduates can apply any time. Bachelor students can apply for the month-long summer internship which will take place for the second time in 2024. Traineeship E is a talent program with a duration of 10 months and with five different focus fields, which Company E runs together with an external agency.

Company F offers a variety of programs for students to experience or enter the company. A curricular internship over three months, a summer internship, a professional internship, a trainee program and a student ambassador program, where interesting students become Company’s F campus ambassadors in exchange for individual sponsorship.

- International students and graduate recruits -

How many international Bachelor and Master students and graduates from Portuguese universities were recruited during the last year was another factor investigated during the qualitative part.

Upon being asked, Interviewee A could not specify a number of international recruits, but due to operations at Spanish airports, a significant number of Spaniards work in the Portuguese office.

At Company B they did not recruit any international students, but Interviewee B reported that a Spanish student will do an internship in the offices later in 2024. Moreover, every year they receive an international intern from the Girl MOVE Academy, which are female Mozambican university students or graduates.

Although the official language at Company C is English, Interviewee C did not recall any direct recruits from university partnerships. Overall, she estimated that about 40 nationalities work at Company C.

At Company D they recruited about 40 to 50 candidates from university, around 30 to 35 trainees and around 15 professional interns. Additionally, there are around 30 summer interns, but, as Interviewee D stated, the summer internship is “a two-month experience and not a recruitment” (IN4_Par.30). Regardless, all recent recruits were Portuguese, and no foreigners.

Interviewee E reported that they have not recruited any international student or graduate at Company E, neither through the different programs, nor by direct application.

At Company F in Portugal the majority of student applications for the talent programs are Portuguese students but international students also apply for internships, trainee programs or campus ambassadors and are being recruited. Nevertheless, Interviewee F was unable to provide any numbers or percentages regarding the researcher’s questions. At the offices in Portugal, they work in international teams, while many colleagues of Interviewee F are Portuguese nonetheless.

Ad-hoc Codes

- Languages –

Due to the location of this research study in Portugal and interviewing Portuguese professionals, the spoken language inside the company is relevant. Are there only Portuguese or only English-speaking position and which language requirements are defined?

At Company A the language depends a lot on the region. As English is the official for civil aviation every employee is required to have basic English skills. In the Portuguese offices the majority of communication takes place in Portuguese and in Spain in Spanish. The local station managers in Poland communicate both in Polish and English, in Austria in German and English and in the UK, it is mainly English as well. Nevertheless, Interviewee A talked about frequent difficulties in communication due to a lack of comprehension in English amongst the non-office workers.

As Company B is a Portuguese business, Interviewee B shared that everyone in the offices speaks Portuguese, which is also an employment requirement to ensure efficient internal communication. Nevertheless, this does not require being Portuguese, as the previously mentioned intern from Spain spoke Portuguese, which suffices as a qualification. For the non-office jobs English is a must and Portuguese important, if the position requires a client interaction. The most important internal communication is additionally translated

into English to ensure that everyone, especially the non-Portuguese employees, receive the message. The group's external communication, including social media takes place in English, as the company welcomes many international clients.

At Company C all internal and external communication is in English and English-language fluency is required for all employees, regardless of their background.

Due to international operations the official group language at Company D is English, but within the Portuguese structure all employees are required to speak Portuguese. Interviewee D stated that in retail and on store level many only speak Portuguese, and since many clients are also Portuguese, the language requirement is a must.

Interviewee E stated that Company E's language depends on the individual offices' location. Outside Portugal, the most spoken language at Company E is Spanish. Within Portugal all internal communication is in Portuguese, since many older employees have no or little English skills. And, according to Interviewee E, it is highly unlikely that an only Portuguese speaking manager will hire someone with only English skills. She said, that "(...) sometimes it's not so much about communication actually. I think it's more about the confidence of having somebody that works with you that you don't understand entirely what they speak" (IN5_Par.24).

The official language at Company F is English, which is spoken by all 13,000 employees worldwide. Additionally, in each country they use the local language informally, while all documents are in English.

- Nationality -

The employee's nationality and the internal outlook of a company significantly influences its field of impact and the comparison of Portuguese versus foreign nationals is of interest.

At the offices of Company A, the majority of employees are Portuguese, followed by some Spanish and a few British. The employees working at the airports are mainly Spanish as 14 out of 28 stations are at Spanish airports. Furthermore, a mix of Brazilian, Argentinian and Italian workers and in the UK a lot of people from India and Pakistan. About two thirds of all employees at Company B are Portuguese and one third is international. Person C could not say how many Portuguese versus international employees work at Company C but stated a diverse range of about 40 nationalities overall. At Company D there are no statistics on the

different nationalities but according to Person D the majority within Portugal is Portuguese. Within Portugal at Company E there are around 6 to 9% of international employees, according to Interviewee E. The 13,000 employees working at Company F come from 70 different nationalities.

- CPLP Employees -

As Portuguese is a language spoken in several countries around the world and being a non-Portuguese national but Portuguese speaker from, among other, Brazil, Mozambique or Angola, offers, solely considering the language aspect, additional opportunities when applying for a job with Portuguese as a language requirement. The role of CPLP students and graduates is investigated.

At Company A some Brazilians work at the airports. As mentioned before, due to the participation in the Girl MOVE program, Company B receives an intern from Mozambique every year. At Company C there were no statistics available for Interviewee C to report on CPLP employees. Due to English as the only language of internal and external communication, the Portuguese language is of little importance at Company C. No differentiation between Portuguese nationals and people from Brazil, Angola or other Portuguese speaking countries is made upon application at Company D, which is why Interviewee D was unable to share more details on the matter.

Interviewee E stated that at Company E there are no or only a few people from CPLP countries. This is due to recruiting students and graduates with a specific profile. She argued that “(...) when you tend to go to the same universities, you tend to always to have the same kind of personas. So they are white, they are Portuguese, they tend to be middle class. And when you go to universities where this is predominant, then the applications are predominantly these. So there's a simple cause and effect” (IN5_Par.19).

At Company F they do not track specifically candidates or employees from Portuguese speaking countries, but there are people from the CPLP in the company's workforce.

- Further remarks about EB -

As the last question asked was whether the interviews would like to add something to the conversation just taken place, a few of the interviewees took the opportunity to strengthen their perspective and opinion on EB, its overall importance and journey over the last years:

Before you had to push employer branding, really push it throughout the company. Here it is so intrinsic, as I mentioned before. That's quite helpful because I don't know everything. I don't, at least in depth, and it's great to have stakeholders who are doing an amazing job in their respective areas. (IN3_Par.32)

But from the conferences that I go to and the conversations that I have, I do feel that employer branding is evolving more and more, especially with Covid. I think it gave a huge push to employer branding. But I do feel that it's still not yet to its full potential, especially because we always hear about attraction and attraction and attraction. But employer branding is so much more than that. But I think it's growing. I can see a lot of importance given to it. (IN3_Par.33)

What I would say is that a lot of the times companies, and I presume you're looking into companies in Portugal, a lot of the times there is a very big overlap between employer branding and just branding. And when that happens, it's really hard to separate who does what within. What is the impact of something that is done on one side to another? (IN5_Par.25)

Our biggest challenge now is to position Company F and consolidate our image as a top employer in the other countries, because here in Portugal, we already have a solid reputation as a great place to work that we want to maintain, and we keep working hard to keep that position. But we are also trying to replicate and position Company F in the other markets where we are present worldwide. We are already certified as a top employer, which is a key recognition that we have to gain some credibility in those markets where people don't know us. So we are trying to expand this certification and win other local awards and things. (IN6_Par.36)

5. Discussion

The findings presented in the results section provide an overview of the current state of EB practices in Portugal. In this chapter, we will first discuss the findings of EB strategies in Portuguese Companies in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Second, we will focus on the perceptions of EB Strategies by International Master Students. Third, we will connect the alignments and discrepancies in findings from both data sources. What this implies for both academia and industry will be discussed. By analyzing these elements, this chapter aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in current EB practices and their perception by international Master students.

5.1 Employer Branding Strategies in Portuguese Companies

To better understand the EB strategies that are implemented by companies in Portugal, we will revisit the main results generated from the six interviews with EB specialists. While HR is universally recognized as the leader of EB efforts, the success of these efforts often depends on the collaborative integration of various departments and the level of leadership

involvement. Companies are at different stages of balancing internal versus external resources, reflecting varying levels of maturity and strategic focus in their EB processes. The approach to EB is also influenced by company size, global presence, and organizational structure, resulting in a diverse range of practices tailored to each company's specific needs and goals.

Thus, the qualitative results confirm the work of Ahmed et al. (2003), in which three main groups are part of all levels of EB strategy development: At the basis, there is usually HR, internal communication, corporate communications, and marketing, followed by the business processing group and finally top management with leading efforts.

Despite many differences, a common thread emerges: All companies recognize the importance of leadership alignment with EB efforts, even if the level of involvement varies. Whether through hands-on participation, like at Company C, or more of an oversight role, as seen at Company D, leadership's role is critical in ensuring that EB strategies are consistent with broader organizational goals. Factors like company size, industry, and organizational culture seem to impact the level of leadership involvement. Engaged management in the development of an EB strategy was argued by Ahmed et al. (2003) as beneficial for guidance, support, encouragement, and an overall vision.

While all companies acknowledge the importance of EB, their initiatives vary greatly in execution. There is a shared understanding that EB must resonate with both internal and external audiences, whether through cultural initiatives, strategic partnerships, or creative campaigns. Company A embeds EB within its broader recruitment strategy, while Company B blends cultural and employee engagement through monthly events, emphasizing inclusivity and well-being. Company C uses creative and gamified approaches to instill company values internally while externally focusing on diversity through targeted YouTube campaigns. Company D focuses on partnerships with universities to attract young talent, while Company E struggles to separate EB from overall branding, revealing a gap in targeting younger talent. Company F, meanwhile, took a more cinematic approach with a manifesto video, involving employees to strengthen both internal and external engagement. Overall, the key takeaway is that EB efforts ultimately depend on the individual target audiences that companies aim to attract.

Moving on to how the interviewed companies understand EB: Most interviews revealed that the intrinsic value of EB has grown, particularly post-Covid, although

distinguishing it from general branding is still challenging for some. While certain companies view EB as integral to their identity, others struggle with the overlap between EB and general branding. This overlap across departments may reveal untapped potential and synergies that companies can leverage. As noted in the literature, EB is not only about attracting talent but also about maintaining and enhancing the company's reputation as a great place to work, both locally and globally. Sullivan (2004) distinguished the inclusion of an employer brand in Great Place to Work lists as a key indicator of successful EB.

Before executing an EB strategy, the first conceptual stage, according to the Employer Brand Roadmap model (Minchington, 2006), is internal research. The value of internal research is recognized by all six companies, but their approaches vary depending on specific contexts, resources, and priorities. Companies like Company A and Company F, with more formal research processes, are likely to have more structured insights to inform their EB strategies, whereas Company B benefits from a more flexible approach. Company D and Company E balance formal and informal methods to a similar extent.

Parallel to internal research, external research completes the picture. External research practices across the six companies vary significantly, ranging from sporadic monitoring to systematic in-depth studies. The objective remains the same: align the employer brand with external expectations and market realities while balancing profitability.

In terms of person-organization fit, Kristof (1966) emphasizes the importance of finding employees who are both suitable for the job and compatible with the company's culture. Depending on business needs, each company must tailor its EB strategy to a particular target audience. Company C and Company D leverage personas—Company C focuses on motivational factors while Company D focuses on business-driven profiles. In contrast, Company E opts for clear academic and skill criteria, avoiding personas entirely. Company B, with its family business model, prioritizes proximity and cultural fit, while Company F adopts a global approach targeting diverse personas through workforce planning.

All companies share an understanding that their EB strategies must align with business goals and that understanding their target audiences is key to attracting and retaining talent. This is particularly significant for industries where STEM talent is in high demand.

The topic of generational inclusivity was mentioned twice during the interviews, and the other interviewees also recognized the importance of creating an organizational culture

in which employees from different generations and backgrounds feel valued and can work well together. According to Fodor et al. (2018), an inclusive balance in the workforce contributes to organizational success. Whether it is recognition and rewards, cultural and values alignment, communication and employee voice, or professional development – each of the interviewed company representatives approaches the topic of employee engagement in a different way. Deep roots in organizational identity shape the individual strategy into cultivating an environment of employees feeling valued, motivated, and integral to the company's journey. Both employee engagement and external messaging are facilitated if employees are encouraged to become an employee brand ambassador (Al-Shuaibi, 2016) and willingly share their positive experience within the corporate context. This was already stated by Sullivan (2004) in his list of eight key elements of every successful employer brand. That many candidates and especially young talents at universities trust their peer's or their potential future colleague – in the function of a campus ambassador – more than the official recruitment campaign has also been noted during the interviews.

Each company's approach to EVP is shaped by its specific needs and context, but the ultimate goal remains the same: to craft an EVP that not only resonates with potential candidates but also reinforces the company's identity and strategic direction internally. While some interviewed experts already initiated a complete restructuring of their EVP at the company, others are reworking it to better align with its mission, acknowledging that their previous efforts were insufficient. Only a few companies, such as Company F, seem to be in an advanced stage where their EVP is integrated deeply into their narrative and aligned with the core values of the company as an employer.

All six interviewed companies recognize the importance of aligning their vision and mission with their EB strategies to attract the right talent. They each use their vision and mission as a compass to navigate industry-specific challenges and long-term aspirations. More specifically, the contrast between companies like Company C, with its structured long-term planning cycles, and Company E's focus on valuable, time-bound employee relationships, offers insights into different strategic approaches. The latter approach matches the ASA model (Schneider, 1983), where after initial attraction follows the selection and eventually attrition, assuming that turnover is natural once the person's mission and the company's mission no longer match.

Despite differences in the profiles and processes of recruiting across industries, all six companies recognize the importance of aligning recruitment strategies with broader business objectives. Each company tailors its approach to attract talent that fits both the specific job roles and the company's culture and values. Internal recruitment and early talent engagement are recurring themes, emphasizing the value of nurturing and retaining talent from within or from a young age. The results show the significance of integrating recruitment with EB strategies and highlight the potential of early engagement and internal mobility as key components of effective talent strategies.

The importance of consistency in messaging is echoed by every interviewee who took part in this research study, ensuring that their external communication reflects their internal values and culture. Whether through social media, targeted advertising, or a new wave of podcasts as pursued by Company D and Company E, digital platforms are being leveraged. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on how companies navigate the complexities of external communication in the digital age. The importance of understanding audience demographics and selecting the right channels to reach them effectively is highlighted repeatedly. There seems to be a need for a flexible, audience-driven communication strategy that aligns with both the brand and the employer identity.

The results adhere to the advice from researchers like Percy (2014), who noted that for a successful communication strategy, having integrated channels is key. Coherent communication across the right channels both to internal and external audiences shapes a compelling EB narrative (Denning, 2006) and secures the desired consistency by the interviewed EB experts. By taking advantage of the effects of the signaling theory (Spence, 1973), companies are aware of the role model impact their communication and their actions can have.

Following internal communication, the company internal communication processes were also investigated. It can be observed that comparing the internal communication strategies across these six companies illustrates how they each tailor their channels to fit the unique needs of their workforce, balancing digital and non-digital methods to ensure effective communication. A blend of formal and informal channels is used, ensuring that communication is both accessible and comprehensive across different levels of the organization. The use of digital platforms like intranets and social tools is common, but each company adapts these tools to fit their specific dynamics among the employees.

Moving on to young talent engagement, the importance of partnering with universities as a means to attract talented students is recognized by most of the companies that were interviewed. Nevertheless, the effort to act upon it and establishing partnerships differs greatly. The variation in approaches – from passive receipt of applications to active and formalized partnerships – illustrates that the role of university partnerships in EB is not monolithic. Instead, it is shaped by a company’s broader strategic goals, industry context, and resource availability.

Many of the interviewed companies engage in early student and graduate programs by introducing an array of programs as a gateway to attract and integrate young talent. Different types of internships, trainee programs, and campus ambassadors are common denominators for many of the interviewed companies. However, the depth and structure of these programs vary significantly. Some companies like Company A and Company F place strong emphasis on cultural integration and long-term retention, while others, like Company B, have a more ad-hoc approach, lacking a strategic framework for early engagement.

During the interviews, it was also stated that the targeted audience is what it is because of the existing partnerships with the most prestigious universities in Portugal, mainly in the capital. In Lisbon especially, many students of the sample are from the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, followed by Universidade de Lisboa (including IST Lisboa) and Universidade Nova de Lisboa (including both the SBE and IMS schools). One interviewee described the students there as mainly Portuguese, white, middle and upper class, and financially stable. Even though the synergies from long-standing partnerships are naturally important and beneficial, they attract young talent very selectively and sometimes even biased due to the location and profile of their recruitment activities.

Looking more specifically at EB actions, the qualitative research reveals that on-campus talent attraction varies greatly as not all companies regard it as important. But the majority does engage in university activities as a visible and interactive on-campus player. These activities range from workshops and career fairs to brunch and talk events, and more immersive experiences like project-based learning. Most companies view early engagement and visibility as essential for attracting young talent, particularly in competitive fields like STEM degrees. Based on their recruitment needs, companies directly approach certain academic programs more, especially in STEM, than other fields such as the arts. This would

also explain why about an eighth of international students have had little to no contact with companies during their university experience.

Traditional recruitment channels, such as LinkedIn messaging and career fairs, remain the most prominent ways students engage with potential employers during their university years, according to the survey results. However, there is a significant portion of students who either have limited exposure to these programs or find the available opportunities irrelevant to their fields of study, as highlighted by the feedback from the artist who found few options available. Based on their recruitment needs, it seems that many companies directly approach certain academic programs more, especially in STEM, than others.

While some companies are just beginning to formalize their metrics to measure EB effort, others have already developed complex systems to track both internal satisfaction and external attraction. Despite these differences, there is a shared understanding that metrics and KPIs are crucial for aligning EB efforts with broader organizational goals and for making informed, strategic adjustments. Among others, metrics like the applicant-to-hire ratio, employee turnover, data analytics, social media monitoring, and conversion results are used for measuring the impact of EB initiatives. Sullivan (2004) also emphasized the use of metrics to evaluate brand building as a key element of very successful employer brands. However, the potential of AI-assisted or data-driven metrics to track EB success seems to be underutilized by the interviewed companies. While social media monitoring tools are in use, few other advanced metrics are employed.

When comparing the use of ROI measures across these six companies, there is a striking variation in how, and even whether, ROI is considered important in evaluating EB initiatives. While some companies, like Company F, are more advanced in integrating ROI measures into their EB evaluation, others are either at an early stage where ROI is not yet a focus or are relying on less formal methods. The variation in approaches illustrates that the use of ROI as a metric in EB is not universally adopted or understood, and its implementation depends heavily on the company's maturity and spendable budget in EB practices. This research highlights a gap in the standardization of financial evaluation methods for EB.

As being in the box sometimes does not allow you to think outside the box, all interviewees recognized the importance of collecting feedback as a critical element in refining their EB strategies. Formal surveys, focus groups, or informal conversations are used to gauge employee perceptions and align the employer brand with the workforce's

expectations and needs. In addition, the frequency and formality of internal reporting also vary between companies, as they are tailored to the specific needs of an organization's structure and culture.

While some companies have a formal and set structure of daily, monthly, or annual meetings, others hold informal business meetings irregularly depending on specific projects. Reporting can vary from a written report to a formal presentation to the top management or daily updates with the manager responsible. Transparent internal communication and aligned EB practices with the overall business goals ensure an authentic picture of an employer brand, where employees communicate with and not past each other.

Stiff and inflexible companies have long shown to eventually drop out of business. Therefore, the recognition of the need for ongoing evolution and adaptation to stay competitive and relevant in attracting top talent is omnipresent. However, the methods and focus areas for continuous improvement vary significantly across companies, reflecting their unique challenges and stages of development. Whether it is a continuous review of the EB strategy, strengthening the employer brand internationally, or implementing a more structured evaluation process, a static EB strategy is insufficient in today's competitive talent market. The interviewees shared their emphasis on adaptability and responsiveness of a company, especially highlighting the importance of agility in EB strategies. In 2004, Sullivan named establishing a culture of sharing and continuous improvement as one of eight key elements of every successful employer brand. Not resting on a good reputation as an employer but constantly seeking betterment is, according to Sullivan and the qualitative results, indispensable for long-term success and an agile employer brand.

Effectively, almost none of the interviewed companies have recruited international students, neither directly nor through one of their talent programs. Even though Company F does approach both Portuguese and international young talent, the inability to provide any numbers on international recruits indicates little importance attributed to the matter. A common theme among most companies is the reliance on local talent, with limited proactive efforts to recruit international students or graduates from Portuguese universities. Despite operating in a global context, these companies seem to prioritize or default to hiring primarily locally.

5.2 Perceptions of EB Strategies by International Master Students

In the next section, we shift our focus to the experiences and perspectives of international Master students at Portuguese universities. Their perception of EB strategies employed by Portuguese companies often contrasts with what EB departments intend to communicate.

Survey participants reported an average of 2.5 years of professional experience. With an average age of 25.6 years, they are slightly older than the average age of Portuguese Master graduates, who are among the youngest in the OECD (2023d). The data suggests that Portuguese companies cater to two rather different target audiences among Master graduates. While they offer EB activities and programs to less experienced Portuguese Master students, these might not match the experiences and needs of international Master students.

Looking at the demographics, the generational differences should be considered when the EVP is defined by an employer brand, as they greatly differ for each generation. As the majority of the survey's respondents are 28 years and younger, they belong to Generation Z and showcase certain unique characteristics and abilities that have to be addressed. Currently, this does not seem to be the case as many international graduates do not stay or do not feel addressed by companies' EB communications.

When investigating the contributors to a strong corporate identity, the survey participants value companies that cultivate a positive work environment, leverage employee testimonials, and uphold strong values to build and maintain a recognizable corporate identity. Feeling welcome and as an integral part of the company increases its attractiveness as an employer brand.

The key learning here is that while each company is at a different stage in defining and integrating their identity, brand image, and values, they all understand the critical role these elements play in shaping an authentic and attractive employer brand. The differences in their approaches highlight the importance of tailoring these elements to fit their unique organizational contexts, while the shared commitment to aligning brand image with core values underscores the universal importance of authenticity in EB. Authenticity is especially relevant to Generation Z (Beilharz, 2022), which characterizes the research study's target group of international Master students and graduates.

The company culture is highly influential in shaping an employer brand perception, with about three-fourths of organizational international Master students and graduates

considering it either significantly or substantially important, according to the survey. Therefore, organizational culture is a critical factor in employer brand evaluation, emphasizing the need for companies to cultivate and communicate it strongly, transparently emphasizing their shared values.

A significant takeaway when comparing how these six companies approach cultural integration is the varying depth and method by which they embed EB values into their organizational cultures. This underscores the idea that cultural integration is not just about aligning employees with company values but about making these values a lived experience across all levels of the organization. There's a shared emphasis on embedding these values early – whether through recruitment, workshops, or student programs – and ensuring they are consistently reinforced across the organization. Company C and Company F both focus heavily on livable values and an inspiring company culture. The theory of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) would confirm these observations made by the interviewees.

As presented earlier, a staggering 85.1% of survey participants either strongly or somewhat agree that a strong sense of loyalty to the employer significantly influences their motivation to be productive and show effort in their role. Having a strong corporate identity among employees is highlighted as being a crucial factor contributing to a positive EEX during the interviews with EB professionals. This survey result directly matches the “Theoretic Framework Model of EB” by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), as it states that employee productivity ultimately stems from employer brand loyalty which is created through organizational identity as well as an organizational culture. The described internal EB also influences the overall employer brand and its external perception. Two years earlier, Gifford et al. (2002) first wrote about this effect.

When they were asked about their expectations and their preferences the survey results revealed that the top 3 most important job characteristics were a competitive salary, remote work options, and opportunities for career advancement. Connecting these results with the previously discussed question regarding the current employer, the high number of remote workers living in Portugal, and the statistics on the number of international digital nomads in the country, allows the assumption that current EB efforts of Portuguese companies do not take into consideration the target group's most important EVPs, which they are looking for in an employer. Especially the low salaries even after graduating from a Master's degree, while the living costs in cities like Lisbon and Porto are constantly rising, sometimes do not

even make Portuguese companies being considered when international students and graduates are applying for jobs after university.

The findings are coherent with the analysis of the Randstad Employer Brand Research 2024 report for Portugal, which shows the greatest disparity in what Portuguese employers offer as EVPs and what candidates are looking for, especially concerning salary and benefits with rising costs of living and inflation. Remote work options in a hybrid model exist for some white-collar jobs and are increasingly offered by companies, though still relatively seldom in Portugal compared to other companies and countries (Randstad, 2024a).

Moreover, the survey results show that about a third of international students and graduates work in a remote job for a foreign company while living in Portugal. This circumstance is significant, as it indicates that Portuguese companies are facing strong competition from companies abroad and currently seem to not be succeeding in their EB efforts to recruit this target audience. Many graduates would therefore like to live in Portugal but are looking for other EVPs, which Portuguese companies cannot offer. Namely, high wages, a good work-life balance, and no mandatory days at the office, which both the interviewed EB experts as well as the economic overview of the country confirmed.

The survey results on the general willingness of international students and graduates to start a job at a Portuguese company indicate that the potential in talent attraction is given, yet not exploited. The number of students and graduates at a Portuguese company is equally as high, but one has to take into account a limited comparability as many who stated working at a Portuguese company, named food and beverage jobs to support their studies, while only about 21.7% named a Portuguese office as their place of work. Since this study looks especially at Master students, the different job profiles ought to be considered.

Microsoft, Siemens, Nestlé, Mercedes-Benz.io, and Bosch were the top five companies named when the survey participants were asked about perceived attractive employers in Portugal. It can be noted, that these five companies have a place of business in Portugal, but their headquarters are in other countries. Those on a job search still opting to apply to these companies show that the company culture speaks stronger than the country culture. Instead of wanting to apply to a local company, they would choose an international company. During the interviews, it was stated multiple times that the company brand and the employer brand often overlap in the public's perception of a company and joint campaigns take place. The results confirm again the aforementioned model (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004),

in which the EB strategy directly influences the employer brand associations in the public, creating a memorable employer image and generating employer attraction.

Even though AI-assisted talent recruiting is becoming increasingly popular, 72.5% of survey participants choosing family and friends or professional contacts as the second most important channel to look for a job shows that human experience and opinion continue to rank high in influencing human behavior. Job searchers still prefer a personal recommendation over technology-led software, which, in theory, offers the statistically best fitting job opportunities. In a time of advancing technology, many rely on their social circle first and choose, so to speak, man over machine. Even though in literature the risks of AI-assisted talent recruiting are addressed, the enthusiasm of Pandey (2023) and other scientists cannot be found in the data collection of this study and the previously explained results.

Social media, in first place among students and graduates as a channel for job search, still shows that looking for information about an employer online is popular since social media usually shows much more insights into a company than just the job description. The social and emotional connection of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn seems to create higher credibility for candidates, especially when a company has employee brand ambassadors. As stated before, authenticity and a direct communication approach to reach said target group are key to be successful.

But nevertheless, apart from LinkedIn posts and messages, the survey results indicate that international Master students have not had many experiences with student and graduate programs like internships, traineeships, or campus ambassadorship in Portugal, which confirms the low strategic targeting of the companies on international young talent.

5.3 Misalignment of Expectations

Lastly, we analyze the alignment and misalignment of expectations between companies and international students, beginning with language use. Central to any kind of communication, regarding language use there is a clear divide between those companies that prioritize English as a global business language and those that maintain a strong focus on local languages, reflecting both their operational needs and cultural contexts. This dichotomy reveals how language policies are not just about communication efficiency but also about organizational identity and inclusivity. Four out of six companies operate mainly in Portuguese, while only at Company C and Company F, the official language of

communication is English. Nevertheless, these two companies acknowledge the informal use of local languages, suggesting an awareness of cultural and regional sensitivities. This balance is essential for both internal cohesion and external customer engagement, particularly in multilingual environments. Language is not just a tool for communication but a strategic element of EB and organizational culture. It sheds light on the impact of language policies on employee integration, satisfaction, and identity within global companies.

In contrast to the findings and the status quo at Portuguese companies, the language proficiency of international Master students that participated in the survey is much stronger in English than in Portuguese. Since many Master programs are held in English and it is a global language, this is not surprising. Many international students outside of the CPLP community do not speak Portuguese or merely on a basic level. As the qualitative results indicate, a fluent knowledge of Portuguese is imperative to be considered for employment at the interviewed companies in this study but two. Moreover, Portuguese is still spoken on an informal level within the teams even in Company C and Company F.

This discrepancy in expectations creates a conflict of interests and lesser opportunities for the international Master graduates' and companies' goals to align. The results of the fifth and sixth questions confirm this circumstance, as the willingness to start an English-language job at a company in Portugal is considerably higher than if the required language is Portuguese. Matched with the language skills, only international students who are Portuguese native speakers or other individuals with highly fluent language skills could even apply for the jobs advertised, while others face an almost insurmountable hurdle. Only Company C and Company F open the possibility for non-Portuguese-speaking international students to apply and consider the company as an attractive employer brand.

Moving on to the matter of nationalities – their distribution amongst the survey participants shows that the majority of international students at Portuguese universities come from Germany, followed by Brazil and Spain. The high number of students from the European Union could be explained by the students' proximity to their home country and an overall stronger economic outlook of the countries' economies to finance their studies abroad.

International students and graduates participating in the survey from the CPLP made up a share of about a sixth, namely from Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, and Mozambique. While not being the topic at hand in this research study, the role of CPLP students and

employees has surfaced multiple times during the investigation of different matters due to Portugal's colonial past and the spoken Portuguese language. None of the companies interviewed systematically tracks or actively recruits from this group, arguing that everyone is welcome to apply, and their EB university activities target everyone in the Master program regardless of their nationality. Given that four out of the six companies interviewed require fluency in Portuguese for certain roles, the potential for recruiting from CPLP countries becomes even more relevant.

Foreign nationals are frequently recruited by the interviewed Portuguese companies, however, there seems to be a discrepancy regarding the recruitment of particularly international Master students and graduates from Portuguese universities. As the interviewees did not share any specific numbers with the researcher, no difference between international Master students and those from CPLP countries could be detected. Generally, there is a surfacing trend toward increasing diversity – often also stated in the companies' declared values –, whether through intentional recruitment strategies or as a byproduct of global operations. This trend reflects an awareness that a diverse workforce can enhance innovation, cultural competency, and global market reach. But international Master students at Portuguese universities who often stay in the country for about two years are not primarily targeted by the recruitment and EB strategies in place, as this research indicates.

The mismatch in expectations from the students' and the companies' perspectives becomes especially visible when we analyze the results of the last two questions of the survey. Understanding the main reasons why international graduates decide to stay in or leave Portugal and suggesting notable differences in the motives for graduate migration between European and Latin American students in Portugal can be seen in the quantitative results. The analysis indicates that European students prioritize career-related factors such as career prospects and salary more than Latin American students, who place greater emphasis on quality of life factors like work-life balance and cost of living. Therefore, the data implies that cultural and economic backgrounds influence the migration decisions of students

These results can be connected to the push-pull theory of migration (Lee, 1966). For Europeans, low salary levels in Portugal appear to be a significant push factor, meaning a reason to leave Portugal and emigrate after graduation, whereas for Latin Americans, the high cost of living appears likely to be the main push factor. Quality of life aspects like work-

life balance and political stability tend to be strong pull factors for Latin Americans to stay in Portugal after graduation, whereas career-related opportunities and personal affairs appear to be more compelling pull factors for Europeans, and therefore reasons to stay in Portugal or immigrate in the first place. The offers and EVP's of the investigated Portuguese companies do not seem to appeal much to the international Master students, who do not feel compelled to and pulled in to staying in Portugal after graduation.

Although the database of collected survey responses is rather small, the observed differences can be interpreted by looking at the hard and soft locational factors, allowing for assumptions on motives influencing a graduate migrant's decision. The emphasis on different factors can be linked to the socio-economic backgrounds of the students. For example, Latin American students may be more sensitive to cost-related issues due to potentially difficult economic conditions in their home countries, whereas European students may have more robust economic support or expectations for higher earnings, making salary a more critical factor. Similarly, the importance of work-life balance for Latin Americans could reflect cultural values that prioritize family and personal time over professional advancement, which might not be as strongly emphasized in European cultures.

Moreover, the TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980) provides a useful framework for understanding the migration decisions of graduates in our study. It suggests that both personal attitudes toward staying or leaving Portugal and the perceived expectations of significant others play a critical role in shaping these decisions. The influence of subjective norms – what important people in a graduate's life expect or do – can either reinforce their intentions to stay or push them toward leaving.

The TPB by Ajzen (1991) expands on the TRA by incorporating perceived behavioral control, which adds depth to the understanding of graduate migration decisions. While the TRA focuses on attitudes and subjective norms, the TPB acknowledges that even if a graduate has a positive attitude towards leaving and feels social pressure to do so, their perceived ability to actually leave (or stay) will significantly influence their final decision. Therefore, the perceived behavioral control has a strong impact on the decision-making of international Master graduates. If they perceive high barriers to leaving Portugal (e.g., difficulty in securing visas, financial constraints, or lack of job opportunities abroad), they may decide to stay even if their attitudes and subjective norms favor leaving. Conversely, if they perceive it as easy to leave (e.g., they move back to their family, have dual citizenship,

a job offer abroad, or sufficient financial resources), they might be more likely to emigrate. Therefore, understanding these social influences is crucial for companies and universities seeking to retain young talent and mitigate brain drain in Portugal. The companies of this sample show limited engagement to counter these circumstances so far.

When asked about the influence of close relations' decisions on their future plans, a majority stated a tendency to consider the decisions of others on their own decision-making. This finding connects to the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) through the concept of subjective norms, which refer to the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a behavior. The social influence of family or friends is therefore a key component of subjective norms.

In summary, this chapter has explored the diverse approaches to EB strategies within Portuguese companies and highlighted how they are perceived by international Master students. The findings underscore both the strengths and gaps in current practices, particularly in aligning company expectations with the needs and experiences of international graduates. While companies demonstrate varied levels of engagement and strategic focus, key areas such as generational inclusivity, language use, and alignment between internal values and external messaging remain central to their EB efforts.

Furthermore, the analysis of the alignment and misalignment of expectations between companies and international Master students points to significant challenges in attracting and retaining this demographic. Discrepancies in language requirements, recruitment practices, and EVP offerings suggest that Portuguese companies may need to reevaluate their strategies to compete more effectively in a global talent market. These insights are crucial not only for shaping future EB practices but also for understanding how companies can better position themselves as attractive employers to diverse talent pools.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the Portuguese context, offering valuable lessons for both academia and industry on the evolving nature of employer branding in an increasingly competitive, globalized labor market. The following chapter will synthesize these findings and provide recommendations for future research, as well as practical steps for organizations to enhance their EB strategies in light of the challenges and opportunities identified in this study.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research has been to examine the EB strategies employed by Portuguese companies and their effectiveness in attracting international Master students and graduates. As Portugal continues to be a popular destination for international students, the country faces the ongoing challenge of retaining this highly skilled talent. This study aimed to bridge the gap in understanding how Portuguese companies use EB strategies to engage with international graduates and how these align with the expectations of this diverse talent pool.

Through a mixed-method approach conducting qualitative interviews with EB specialists at Portuguese companies and a quantitative survey of international Master students, this research provides insights from both employers' and candidates' perspectives. The findings highlight a disconnect between international graduates' aspirations and what Portuguese companies currently offer, suggesting a need for reimagining EB efforts to better attract and retain talent in a globalized market.

The EB strategies of Portuguese companies show considerable variation based on factors such as size, industry, and organizational structure. While HR often drives EB efforts, their success depends heavily on cross-departmental collaboration and leadership alignment. In companies like Company C, leadership takes a hands-on approach, ensuring that EB initiatives align with broader organizational goals. On the other hand, companies like Company D adopt a more detached oversight, providing flexibility but with less direct leadership involvement. Leadership engagement emerges as a critical factor in effective EB strategies across different business contexts.

These strategies tend to reflect internal business needs rather than a targeted focus on attracting international Master students. For example, Company F, with its global operations, leverages EB to address workforce planning by appealing to diverse personas, but its focus remains internal. Family-run businesses like Company B prioritize local talent, emphasizing cultural fit and proximity to leadership, which further highlights the local-centric nature of EB strategies in Portugal.

A key challenge for many companies is distinguishing EB from general corporate branding. While some, like Company C, have creatively integrated EB through gamified campaigns and value-based recruitment, others – such as Company E – struggle to separate the two, missing opportunities to leverage synergies that could enhance both talent

acquisition and overall corporate identity. This lack of clarity in defining EB strategies weakens their effectiveness in attracting a global talent pool.

Language barriers also present structural challenges, as seen with Company F, where most internal communication occurs in English, but some departments, particularly market-related ones, still operate exclusively in Portuguese. This duality suggests that the challenge of attracting international Master graduates may not always stem from a lack of willingness but rather from structural issues within the company. Companies may have departments and processes deeply embedded in the local language, making it difficult to fully integrate international talent unless they possess fluency in Portuguese. This highlights the need for flexible internal strategies that can accommodate different language skills depending on the role and department.

Despite these efforts, most of the sampled Portuguese companies are not actively targeting international Master students. University partnerships, while valuable, tend to focus on local talent, leaving a gap in engaging international graduates. A more deliberate approach to international recruitment could unlock a highly skilled talent pool that is currently underutilized.

The reliance on local talent, seen across most companies, raises the question of whether the companies are making a strategic decision to prioritize local talent or whether they lack the necessary infrastructure to recruit internationally. Addressing this gap could help companies strengthen their workforce diversity and leverage the benefits of a more global talent strategy. Tailoring EB strategies to international graduates' needs – particularly around competitive EVP offerings and language barriers – could be crucial in bridging this gap.

However, it is not simply a matter of adjusting EVP offerings; companies must also navigate internal equity concerns. Offering higher salaries to international graduates without similarly increasing compensation for current employees is problematic. This raises the broader issue of wage disparity in the country, suggesting that political or industry-wide interventions, such as raising the minimum salary, may be necessary to ensure that companies can offer competitive salaries to all employees without creating internal inequities.

Answering the second research question, it becomes evident that the perception of EB strategies among international Master students show a clear disconnect between their

expectations and what Portuguese companies offer. International students prioritize competitive salaries, remote work, and career advancement, yet these elements are currently not being adequately addressed by most companies. This gap leads many international graduates to seek employment with foreign companies, either moving abroad or working remotely while continuing to live in Portugal.

While some companies have begun to introduce remote work options, flexibility and salary competitiveness remain insufficient. The 2024 Randstad Employer Brand Research highlights this disparity, showing that Portuguese employers still fall short in the key areas that international graduates value most.

Interestingly, the ability to accommodate international talent often depends upon the specific function within the company and the willingness of the department head to engage with English-speaking employees. One interviewee mentioned that, while Portuguese is the primary language used across the company, they would consider hiring an English-speaking Master graduate for a technical role, such as in IT, where Portuguese skills are less critical. However, this narrows the opportunity pool for other study programs, as it becomes more about the role and the manager's preferences rather than a company-wide policy. This highlights how company context, including departmental flexibility and leadership, plays a crucial role in determining the success of international hiring.

Generational differences also influence the perception of EB strategies. Most surveyed students belong to Generation Z, a group that values authenticity, work-life balance, and career progression. While some companies are adapting their strategies to reflect these preferences, such efforts remain the exception rather than the rule. Cultural and linguistic challenges further complicate international students' perception of Portuguese companies as attractive employers. The requirement for fluency in Portuguese, for instance, continues to be a barrier, even in companies where English is used as the official language of communication. This issue is particularly pronounced in smaller or more traditional companies, where informal use of Portuguese can create an unwelcoming environment for non-Portuguese speakers.

While international graduates acknowledge the presence of EB efforts, many feel these strategies are not designed with them in mind, particularly as programs often cater more to less experienced Portuguese Master students.

Another key issue is the reliance on local talent, with minimal efforts to actively recruit international graduates. This approach not only limits workforce diversity but also overlooks the potential contributions of international talent to innovation and global competitiveness.

The limited recruitment from the CPLP community, in particular, suggests that companies may be missing out on a key demographic that could fill important talent gaps. Despite Portugal's investment in educating international students, companies are often unprepared to integrate them into the workforce. Language remains the most significant barrier, followed by EVP offerings. Overcoming this gap requires both structural adjustments in company operations and a greater willingness to accommodate the diverse needs of international talent.

Additionally, the influence of family and friends, often a major factor in graduates' decisions to stay or leave, is not fully considered in current EB strategies. By taking these social dynamics into account, Portuguese companies could tailor their EVP to better align with the personal and professional needs of international graduates.

This study set out with four primary objectives, and the analysis of the findings offers a clear assessment of their achievement.

The first objective, identifying the EB strategies employed by Portuguese companies, was largely met. The research outlined diverse approaches, from university partnerships to embedding EB within recruitment. However, strategies varied widely in depth and maturity, revealing the fragmented nature of EB efforts across companies of different sizes and industries.

The second objective, examining how companies tailor EB strategies to attract international Master students, was only partially achieved. While some globally focused companies showed inclusivity, most still prioritized local talent, with limited initiatives for international graduates. A clear gap remains in addressing the unique needs of this group, indicating missed opportunities to tap into the international talent pool.

The third objective, assessing the perceptions of international Master students regarding EB strategies, was fully achieved. The survey revealed a significant disconnect between student expectations and company offerings, particularly in areas like salaries, remote work, and career advancement. This misalignment complicates retention efforts for international graduates.

The fourth objective, evaluating the success of EB strategies in meeting international students' expectations, was also only partially achieved. While some companies are improving their EVP, most still struggle with language barriers, wage disparities, and a focus on local recruitment, limiting their ability to attract and retain international talent.

Given the limitations of this study, several areas for future research emerge. First, a comparative study across industries would provide valuable insights, as significant differences in EB practices were observed between sectors. A systematic comparison could identify industry-specific best practices, refining EB strategies to fit diverse economic contexts and organizational needs.

Second, measuring the direct impact of EB remains challenging due to overlaps with corporate branding. Future research should explore the synergies and tensions between these functions to determine whether EB efforts are strengthened or weakened by broader branding initiatives.

Third, a combined study investigating both the long-term effects of EB strategies on talent retention and the role of national policies is essential. Tracking international graduates who stay in Portugal versus those who leave could reveal critical patterns. Simultaneously, understanding how government incentives or regulations shape corporate EB strategies could help align national and corporate goals in retaining skilled talent.

Fourth, future research should focus on SMEs, which play a crucial role in the Portuguese economy but often lack resources for robust EB strategies. Investigating how SMEs can develop effective strategies within their limitations would provide a more comprehensive view of the talent landscape.

Finally, expanding the research sample to include more companies, particularly those actively recruiting international Master students, would provide a deeper, more nuanced analysis. This could identify successful models for attracting global talent and inform broader implementation.

Looking ahead, Portugal, like many countries facing brain drain, is at a critical juncture. The continued exodus of highly educated young talent – both domestic and international – poses a serious threat to the country's human capital, innovation potential, and long-term economic health. In particular, the loss of skilled workers weakens Portugal's ability to compete globally in high-tech and knowledge-intensive sectors, which rely heavily on a robust talent pipeline. This talent drain exacerbates existing demographic challenges,

such as an aging population, further straining social welfare systems and undermining economic sustainability.

However, the situation is not without hope. By strategically rethinking and refining their EB strategies, Portuguese companies can play a crucial role in reversing these trends. There is an urgent need for businesses to align their EB efforts with the evolving needs and expectations of today's graduates – both local and international. This alignment can help retain local talent and attract international professionals, thereby boosting economic growth, fostering innovation, and ensuring a more balanced demographic structure.

To tackle the brain drain effectively, a collaborative approach is required. Companies, policymakers, and academic institutions must work together to create a vibrant, competitive job market that appeals to both local and international talent. Businesses that succeed in building attractive, future-oriented workplaces will not only retain talent but also drive economic expansion and innovation. Retaining young professionals also supports demographic stability, relieving pressure on social welfare systems and contributing to a healthier, more resilient economy.

While this study's findings are specific to the Portuguese context, they hold broader relevance. The challenges identified are not unique to Portugal but most probably mirror issues faced by other countries dealing with talent retention in similar economic and demographic contexts. Although the results are not fully generalizable across all industries or company sizes in Portugal, they offer valuable insights for other economies facing similar challenges. Companies and countries looking to improve their EB strategies in competitive, globalized job markets can draw on these lessons to address talent gaps and foster sustainable growth.

In conclusion, the challenges of brain drain and talent retention in Portugal are significant, but the potential for positive transformation is equally strong. With the right strategies – and a concerted effort from businesses, government, and educational institutions – Portugal can position itself as a leader in global talent retention, ensuring a future marked by innovation, competitiveness, and economic resilience.

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Annexes

Annex A

Declaration of consent to the collection and processing of interview data

Master's dissertation: “Employer Branding in Portuguese organizations: An assessment of communication strategies to attract international Master recent graduates in Portugal”

Interviewer: Xenia Rebecca Cleuvers

Interview date: _____

The ethical procedures applicable to scientific research require that participants explicitly express their agreement with this participation and with the way in which the data collected will be used. This consent form is required to ensure that you understand the purpose of your participation, and that you agree with the procedures proposed for the study. Thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

Please sign this form, proving your agreement with the following:

- I agree to take part in an interview as part of the above-mentioned master dissertation.
- I have been informed about the aim and the course of the research project.
- I agree that the interview may be recorded and put into written form by a typing pool.
- I agree that the audio files will be saved, and the transcripts of the interviews will be...

[please check what you agree with]:

- completely anonymized, i.e. stored without names and personal details such as company name and job position
- partially anonymized, i.e. stored without names and company name but mentioning job position
- partially anonymized, i.e. stored without names but mentioning the company name and job position
- not anonymized, i.e. stored with names and personal details
- I agree that the access to the transcripts of the interviews will be limited to researchers from the Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

- I understand that my words may be quoted directly, and I agree that Ms. Cleuvers may use these quotes in her master dissertation, while attributing them to a pseudonym or code according to the selected way of anonymization above.

My participation in the survey and my consent to the use of the data as described above are completely voluntary. If I decide not to participate there will not be any negative consequences. I am aware that if I decide to participate, I may stop participating at any time and I may decide not to answer any specific question asked by the researcher.

Under these conditions, I agree to give the interview and consent to it being recorded, transcribed, anonymized (if previously indicated) and analyzed.

Place and date

Name and signature

Researcher

I have explained the study procedures to the participant before asking for their signature above. There are no blank spaces in this document.

Place and date

Name and signature

Annex B

Conceptual Framework of the Survey

Concept	Theory	Questions	Response
Demographic Information	-	1. What's your nationality?	[Open-ended response]
	-	2. How old are you?	[Open-ended response]
	-	3. How long do you/did you live in Portugal?	[Single Choice] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 6 months • 6 months to 1 year • 1 year to 2 years

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 years to 5 years • More than 5 years
Language Proficiency	-	4. How well do you speak Portuguese?	[5-item Likert scale] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native – Fluent – Proficient – Basic – No Knowledge
	-	5. How well do you speak English?	[5-item Likert scale] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native – Fluent – Proficient – Basic – No Knowledge
	<i>Attitudes toward working in a foreign language based on TPB</i>	6. Are you generally willing to start a Portuguese-language job at a Portuguese company?	[3-item Likert scale] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes – No – Unsure
	<i>Attitudes toward working in a foreign language based on TPB</i>	7. Are you generally willing to start an English-language job at a Portuguese company?	[3-item Likert scale] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes – No – Unsure
Academic Background	-	8. Are you currently enrolled in a full degree program at a University in Portugal?	[Single choice] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, in my first year of my Master. • Yes, in my second year of my Master. • No, I have graduated last year in 2023. • No, I am an Erasmus Master student. • No, none of the above.
	-	9. In which field is/was your Master's program located?	[Single choice] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Administration, Management and Economics • Engineering (e.g., Mechanical, Electrical, Civil, etc.) • Information Technology and Computer Science • Health Sciences and Healthcare Administration • Psychology and Sociology • Education and Teaching • Communication and Media Studies • Environmental Sciences and Sustainability

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and Humanities (e.g., Literature, History, Fine Arts, etc.) • Public Policy, Law, and International Relations • Other
	-	10. Which university in Portugal are you attending/did you attend (full-time) for your Master's program?	[Single Choice] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centro Universitário Lusófona • IADE • Instituto Politécnico do Porto • IPAM • ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa • ISG Business & Economics School • Universidade Católica Portuguesa • Universidade da Beira Interior • Universidade de Aveiro • Universidade de Coimbra • Universidade de Évora • Universidade de Lisboa • Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro • Universidade do Algarve • Universidade do Minho • Universidade do Porto • Universidade Europeia • Universidade Lusíada • Universidade Nova de Lisboa • Other (Please specify)
Employment Status	-	11. Are you currently employed?	[Single Choice] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, I work in a job related to my study field. • Yes, I work in a job not related to my study field. • Yes, I work as an intern/trainee. • Yes, I work part-time as a working student. • No, I am a full-time Master student. • No, I am currently looking for a job.
	-	<i>(dependent on “Yes”)</i>	[Open-ended response]

		If you are already working, who do you work for?	
	<i>Theoretic Frame-work Model of EB: The Employer Brand Loyalty and Satisfaction</i>	(<i>dependent on “Yes”</i>) How likely are you to recommend your current employer to others to work?	[5-item Likert scale] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely likely – Somewhat likely – Neither likely nor unlikely – Somewhat unlikely – Extremely unlikely
	-	12. Overall work experience related to field of study as in internships, working student, jobs etc. [in years]	[Open-ended response]
	<i>Theoretic Frame-work Model of EB: Organization Identity, Employer Brand Loyalty</i>	13. Have you already applied to a company based in Portugal?	[Single Choice] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes/No
	-	(<i>dependent on “Yes”</i>) If yes, which company did you apply to?	[Open-ended response]
	<i>Attitudes toward Employer Branding from TPB towards EB</i>	14. Would you generally consider remote work while staying in Portugal?	[Single Choice] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, I am open to remote work. No, I prefer working on-site. It depends on the job and company.
Employer Branding Experiences and Opinions	<i>Companies based on Interview Partners and the Randstad EB Research 2023 winners (Nabais Ferreira, 2023)</i>	15. Which companies based in Portugal do you consider attractive as an Employer?	[Multiple Choice: choose TOP 3] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Altice Banco de Portugal Bosch Corticeira Amorim CUF (Grupo José de Mello Saúde) Delta Cafés Farfetch Fidelidade Fujitsu Technology Solutions GroundLink Holding

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grupo Salvador Caetano • Hospital da Luz • Hotel Group Pestana • Hovione • Ikea Portugal • Jerónimo Martins • Joaquim Chaves Saúde • Mercedes-Benz.io • Microsoft • Milestone • Nestlé • Nokia • NOS • OGMA – Indústria aeronáutica de Portugal • Olisipo • Onyria Group • PHC Software • RTP – Rádio e Televisao de Portugal • Siemens • The Navigator Company • Volkswagen Group Services
	<i>Theoretic Frame-work Model of EB: EB activity of companies targeted at Master students</i>	16. What is your experience with active recruiting programs with Portuguese companies during or after your Master's program?	<p>[Multiple Choice]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Interviews • University Career Center • Career Fairs • Internship • Traineeship • Guided Company Tour • Summer/Winter Camps • LinkedIn Direct Messaging • Other (Please specify)
	<i>Theoretic Frame-work Model of EB: Organization Identity shaped through EB initiatives</i>	17. In your opinion, what elements contribute most to creating a strong corporate identity (i.e. building and maintaining a consistent and recognizable company identity)?	<p>[Multiple Choice]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company values and ethics • Organizational culture and work environment • Mission statement and vision for the future • Visual identity elements (logo, color scheme, design elements) • Employee experiences and testimonials • Community engagement and outreach efforts

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts • Consistency in brand communication and messaging
<i>Theoretic Frame-work Model of EB: Organizational Culture influenced by and influencing EB initiatives</i>	18. The organizational culture (i.e. shared values, practices and expectations) of a company...	[5-item Likert scale]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...significantly influences my decision and attraction to an employer. • ...plays a substantial role in shaping my perception of an employer brand. • ...is one of several factors I consider when evaluating employers. • ...has minimal influence on my decision to consider an employer; other factors like salary, benefits, and career growth opportunities are more important. • ...does not influence my decision to consider an employer at all; I prioritize other factors.
<i>Theoretic Frame-work Model of EB: Success of EB Attraction efforts online</i>	19. What channels do you primarily use to search for and evaluate attractive employers when applying for jobs?	[Multiple Choice]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online job portals and career websites • Social media platforms (LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.) • Networking events and industry conferences • Referrals from friends, family, or professional connections • Company review websites (Glassdoor, Indeed, etc.) • Company blogs, newsletters, and industry publications • Other (Please specify)
<i>Theoretic Frame-work Model of EB: Employer Brand Loyalty's perceived effect on</i>	20. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: A strong sense of loyalty to the employer does significantly	[5-item Likert scale]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly agree – Somewhat agree – Neither agree nor disagree – Somewhat disagree – Strongly disagree)

	<i>Employee Productivity</i>	influence my motivation to be productive and show effort in my role.	
	<i>Theoretic Frame-work Model of EB: Employer Attraction by proposing the right EVPs</i>	21. Which characteristics of an employment do you consider a non-negotiable?	<p>[Multiple choice: choose a TOP 5]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive salary and bonuses • Comprehensive benefits package (healthcare, retirement plans, etc.) • Opportunities for career advancement and professional development • Supportive work environment and company culture • Flexibility in work hours and remote work options • Recognition and rewards for performance • Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives • Meaningful work and opportunities to make an impact • Opportunities for mentorship and learning from experienced professionals • Commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility
Future Plans and Motives of decision-making	<i>Intention of Action following Attitudes, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioral control from TPB towards EB</i>	22. What is/was your future academic or career plan after completing your Master's degree?	<p>[Single Choice]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhD • Secondary Master • Apply for a job • Internship • Traineeship • Other (Please specify)
	<i>Subjective Norms from TPB towards EB</i>	23. How much do/did your friends' or family's career choices affect your decision to stay in	<p>[5-item Likert scale]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A great deal – A lot – Somewhat – A little – Not at all

		Portugal or seek opportunities abroad?	
		24. What factors or motivations would influence your decision to <u>stay</u> in Portugal after graduation?	[drag and drop to rank a TOP 7] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary • Personal affairs (relationship, family, etc.) • Costs of living • Work-life-balance • Political stability • Career prospects • Other (Please specify)
		25. What factors or motivations would influence your decision to <u>leave</u> Portugal after graduation?	[drag and drop to rank a TOP 7] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary • Personal affairs (relationship, family, etc.) • Costs of living • Work-life-balance • Political stability • Career prospects • Other (Please specify)

Annex C

Codebook for deductive codes based on the Employer Branding Roadmap Model

Theme	Code	Code Definition	Code Description	Examples
Concept Phase EB	EB Team and Stakeholder	The group responsible for creating and executing the EB strategy, including internal teams and external partners.	This code refers to discussions about who is involved in the EB process, highlighting collaboration between HR, marketing, leadership, and external stakeholders.	“The responsibility for employer branding is within the human resources department. And this is where the majority of the initiatives are developed” (IN5_Par.4).
Concept Phase EB	Internal Research	Gathering insights from within the organization to	This code includes references to employee	“So they give us insights onto why they chose our company, what keeps them from

		shape EB strategies.	feedback methods, such as surveys and interviews, used to inform the employer value proposition.	not leaving the company so that we can look at those insights and broadcast them externally so that other people can relate to them, and maybe join the company as well” (IN4_Par.15).
Concept Phase EB	External Research	Collecting data from external sources to align EB with the market and competition.	This code covers external surveys, market trends, and competitor analysis that shape how the company positions itself as an employer.	“(…) when you're talking about employer brand, there isn't a single perception, an external perception. There's a perception of recruiters. There's a perception of those that work in other companies. There's a perception of students and as well as teachers of students. They have very different perceptions that need to be taken into account” (IN5_Par.7).
Concept Phase EB	Target Audience Analysis	Understanding the characteristics and needs of the talent pool targeted by the EB strategy.	This code refers to analyzing different audience segments, such as recent graduates or experienced professionals, to tailor branding efforts effectively.	“We have mapped our personas that we will be using not only externally but also internally as well. They are motivational personas instead of like the typical ones where you see per role or per department. For us it's more about motivation. And we will use those personas externally to attract people and segment our communication (…)” (IN3_Par.5).

Concept Phase EB	Employer Value Proposition	The unique set of benefits and values offered by the employer to its employees.	This code includes talks about the EVP transformation based on an extensive study to establish special benefits, chances, and experiences the company offers its employees that make it stand out from other companies.	“We did an internal, a global survey in the company, to understand what were the drivers, what was the perception of our employees? And also from externally, what was the perception of our brand as an employer? And so from that study, we had some insights and we developed our employer value proposition. This employer value proposition was revised and rewritten in 2020” (IN4_Par.3).
Concept Phase EB	Identity, Image and Values	The company’s core values and how it is perceived, shaping its employer brand.	This code captures discussions on aligning internal values with external perceptions to create an authentic employer brand.	“So at the end of the day the company image is everything. Every action is employer branding” (IN4_Par.16).
Concept Phase EB	Vision and Mission	The long-term goals and purpose that guide the company’s EB strategy.	This code includes discussions on how the company’s vision and mission attract talent aligned with its direction and purpose.	“And we really want to build this diverse workforce because we believe that is diversity, that we have our main asset to promote the innovation that we need to continue being a leader in the energy transition” (IN6_Par.35)
Design Phase EB	Recruitment Strategies	The methods and approaches used by the	This code covers discussions	“The workforce planning is where the teams identify the

		company to attract and hire new talent.	about specific recruitment plans, including digital campaigns, talent pools, and tailored approaches to different candidate segments.	recruitment needs for the next year or until 2026, when we do the business plan exercise, which is more long term” (IN6_Par.10).
Design Phase EB	EB Campaigns and Initiatives	Targeted efforts to promote the employer brand and attract potential employees.	This code refers to the design and execution of EB activities such as online campaigns, social media, and events aimed at enhancing visibility as an employer.	“So in the beginning of the year 2024, we communicated our EVP to the market. We did that internally and externally and we produced a manifesto video. It’s called EVP manifesto and if you research online, you will find the video. We recorded that video with our own talent, so our employees were our actor” (IN6_Par.25).
Design Phase EB	Leadership Involvement	The role leaders play in shaping and supporting EB efforts.	This code includes references to leadership participation in EB initiatives, highlighting the influence of top management in driving brand alignment and engagement.	“So, HR top management is involved, and they accompany every step of the process, they don’t only approve the end result, okay” (IN4_Par.18).
Integration Phase EB	Employee Engagement Initiatives	Programs and activities designed to involve and motivate employees.	This code focuses on efforts that enhance employee participation, satisfaction, and commitment to	“We played, we created this game. It was amazing, actually, and everyone had a lot of fun to memorize the values, to understand how the values are to be used. So we have

			the company’s values and culture, including initiatives like workshops, feedback sessions, and team-building.	the values, but then per value, we have behaviors attached to each value so that people understand what they mean” (IN3_Par.14).
Integration Phase EB	External Communication Channels and Messaging	The platforms and strategies used to communicate the employer brand to external audiences.	This code refers to how companies deliver their employer brand through public-facing channels such as social media, websites, and public relations, ensuring consistent and compelling messaging to attract potential employees.	“(…) all of our communication is like at Parent Company C. It’s just us. We just sell the company. In terms of specific communication, design, branding or anything. We are very consistent in the sense of that we try to be as real or at least as consistent as we are internally, externally as well” (IN3_Par.12).
Integration Phase EB	Internal Communication Channels and Messaging	Methods used to share information about EB within the organization.	This code includes discussions about how companies communicate EB strategies and values internally, using tools like intranets, emails, or internal newsletters to engage current employees and reinforce the brand message.	“We have a strong internal communication, and we have different internal channels like our intranet, which is where we post daily news about the company” (IN6_Par.14).

Integration Phase EB	Cultural Integration	The process of aligning employees with the company's values, mission, and culture.	This code addresses efforts to foster a strong company culture, where new and existing employees understand and live by the organizational values, promoting cohesion and unity across teams.	"We work on a constant basis to keep what we know are the principles of our employer branding alive. So communicating our purpose, reinforcing what our culture is, our values, what we expect from each person, ensuring that, for example, when we participate in external events that we take the best internal people that we have that represent this culture. So we try to make this, this connection" (IN5_Par.9).
Evaluation Phase EB	Continuous Improvement	Ongoing efforts to refine and enhance EB strategies.	This code involves discussions about regularly updating and optimizing EB practices based on performance data, employee feedback, and evolving industry trends to ensure sustained effectiveness.	"Back then part of the challenge was to rethink how we would position ourselves as employer and an employer brand" (IN5_Par.3).
Evaluation Phase EB	Feedback Mechanisms	Systems in place to gather input from employees and candidates regarding EB strategies.	This code covers formal and informal methods, such as surveys and focus groups, that are used to collect insights about how the employer brand is perceived	"We always send a survey through Google Forms. But when it's like this communication measures, we collect informal feedback" (IN2_Par.11).

			internally and externally, driving adjustments to EB efforts.	
Evaluation Phase EB	Internal Reporting	The process of documenting and sharing the outcomes of EB initiatives within the organization.	This code includes internal assessments of EB activities, such as regular reports to leadership and HR teams that track progress, identify issues, and highlight successes related to EB.	“I have two managers in a way, because of my two teams internal communication and employer branding. And I do report to both of them the results from each project and the ongoing state of the project. It's not a presentation per se unless there is like a big project that I need to show to the managers” (IN3_Par.24).
Evaluation Phase EB	Metrics and KPIs	Key performance indicators used to evaluate the success of EB initiatives.	This code focuses on the quantitative measures used to track the performance of EB efforts, such as employee retention rates, candidate satisfaction, and social media engagement, providing a clear picture of EB effectiveness.	“We redo the employer branding study in a shorter version, what we call “atracking”. And so, we do that about every two years to understand how this is evolving. And probably this is the most relevant metric that we have, because not only allows us to see how we are positioned and whether we have improved or not, but also how direct and indirect competitors have improved” (IN5_Par.12).
Evaluation Phase EB	ROI Analysis	The financial evaluation of the return on investment for EB activities.	This code refers to the calculation of financial returns from EB	“(…) we also present the part of talent attraction, with what we achieved and the ROI that we had, and

			efforts, comparing the costs of initiatives like recruitment campaigns or employee engagement programs to the benefits gained in terms of talent acquisition and retention.	always also, in the beginning of each year we report externally and we have that report on our website, which is the P&O report (...)” (IN6_Par.23).
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Annex D

Demographics

Q1: List of Countries

Country	N	%
Albania	1	1.1%
Angola	2	2.2%
Argentina	3	3.3%
Austria	5	5.5%
Belarus	1	1.1%
Belgium	4	4.4%
Brazil	12	13.2%
Brunei Darussalam	1	1.1%
Canada	1	1.1%
Cape Verde	1	1.1%
Chile	3	3.3%
China	1	1.1%
Czech Republic	1	1.1%
Denmark	2	2.2%
Ecuador	4	4.4%
Finland	2	2.2%
France	3	3.3%
Germany	19	20.9%
Greece	1	1.1%
Guatemala	1	1.1%

Hungary	1	1.1%
Italy	4	4.4%
Lithuania	1	1.1%
Mexico	1	1.1%
Mozambique	1	1.1%
Netherlands	4	4.4%
Norway	1	1.1%
Spain	7	7.7%
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1	1.1%
United States of America	2	2.2%

Q2: Age

Age	N	%
22	2	2.2%
23	12	13.2%
24	18	19.8%
25	15	16.5%
26	18	19.8%
27	14	15.4%
28	3	3.3%
29	4	4.4%
30	3	3.3%
32	2	2.2%

N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance
91	10	22	32	25.57	.219	24.26	2.088	4.359

Q3: Time lived in Portugal

	N	%
Less than 6 months	0	0.0%
6 months to 1 year	26	28.6%
1 year to 2 years	53	58.2%
2 years to 5 years	9	9.9%
More than 5 years	3	3.3%

Language Proficiency

Q4 + Q5: Proficiency in Portuguese/English

Level of Proficiency	Portuguese		English	
	N	%	N	%
Native	19	20.9%	9	9.9%
Fluent	13	14.3%	74	81.3%
Proficient	21	23.1%	8	8.8%
Basic	31	34.1%	0	0.0%
No knowledge	7	7.7%	0	0.0%

Q6 + Q7: Willingness to start a Portuguese/English language job in Portugal

	In Portuguese		In English	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	34	37.4%	49	53.8%
No	43	47.3%	15	16.5%
Unsure	14	15.4%	27	29.7%

Academic Background

Q8: Enrollment status at a Portuguese university

	N	%
Yes, in my first year of my Master.	25	27.5%
Yes, in my second year of my	56	61.5%
No, I have graduated last year in	10	11.0%
No, I am an Erasmus student.	0	0.0%
No, none of the above.	0	0.0%

Q9: Study field of Master program

	N	%
Business Administration, Management and Economics	20	22.0%
Engineering (e.g., Mechanical, Electrical, Civil, etc.)	7	7.7%
Information Technology and Computer Science	8	8.8%
Psychology and Sociology	10	11.0%
Communication and Media Studies	28	30.8%
Arts and Humanities (e.g., Literature History, Fine Arts,	8	8.8%
Public Policy, Law, and International Relations	9	9.9%
Other	1 (no answer)	1.1%

Q10: Attending University

	N	%
ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de	4	4.4%
ISG Business & Economics School	5	5.5%
Universidade Católica Portuguesa	37	40.7%
Universidade de Coimbra	5	5.5%
Universidade de Lisboa	18	19.8%
Universidade do Minho	1	1.1%
Universidade do Porto	6	6.6%
Universidade Nova de Lisboa	15	16.5%

Employment Status

Q11: Current employment status

	N	%	Employed
Yes, I work in a job related to my study field.	20	22.0%	47 (Yes)
Yes, I work in a job not related to my study	14	15.4%	
Yes, I work as an intern/trainee.	2	2.2%	
Yes, I work part-time as a working student.	11	12.1%	
No, I am a full-time Master student.	39	42.9%	44 (No)
No, I am currently looking for a job.	5	5.5%	

Q11a: Name of current employer (free-text)

	N	%
	47	50.6%
A marketing agency in Chile (remote)	1	1.1%
Accenture	1	1.1%
Altice	1	1.1%
An insurance broker in Ecuador	1	1.1%
Avature	1	1.1%
Bagel place	1	1.1%
Bartender	2	2.2%
BBC Journalist and book author	1	1.1%
Cars2click	1	1.1%
Cisco	2	2.2%
Consulting Firm	1	1.1%
Copenhagen Café	1	1.1%
curva	1	1.1%

Customer service	2	2.2%
dammannworks	1	1.1%
Deloitte	1	1.1%
EPAM in Minsk but atm remote	1	1.1%
Eviden	1	1.1%
Fitnesshut Personal Trainer	1	1.1%
Fnac	1	1.1%
German company (VISPIRON systems gmbh)	1	1.1%
Getpress	1	1.1%
Green flexibility. a German start-up for battery storage	1	1.1%
I work remotely for a CX company in the marketing field	1	1.1%
INDIE CAMPERS	1	1.1%
Marketing department for a logistic company in Ecuador	1	1.1%
Microsoft US	1	1.1%
NOS as a Project Manager	1	1.1%
PHC	1	1.1%
PwC	1	1.1%
Renault Hungary	1	1.1%
Roadsurfer	1	1.1%
SAP	2	2.2%
Self-employed freelance artist in Berlin	1	1.1%
Start up	1	1.1%
Team LEWIS	1	1.1%
Teleperformance	2	2.2%
The Folks Café	1	1.1%
To a company located in spain	1	1.1%
Universidade de Coimbra	1	1.1%
Volkswagen do Brasil	1	1.1%

Q11b: Recommendation of current employer

	N	%
Extremely likely	11	23.9%
Somewhat likely	22	47.8%
Neither likely nor unlikely	2	4.4%
Somewhat unlikely	9	19.6%
Extremely unlikely	2	4.4%

Q12: Years of professional experience related to the field of study

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
<i>Years</i>	91	11.0	.0	11.0	2.657	.2385	2.2751	5.176

Q13: Have you already applied to a company based in Portugal?

	N	%
Yes	30	33.0%
No	61	67.0%

Q13a: If yes, which company did you apply to?

Answers
MANY
More than 30
Accenture, McKinsey, Star Insider
Indie campers
Siemens, Bosch, Cisco, Marley spoon
Webasto
Team Quatro
Edp
Teleperformance
Avature, AgileEngine
PHC
Accenture and Atlean World
Nestlé
Superbock
cluster osl
Accenture, Gulbenkian Foundation
NOS
EDP
Fitnesshut
Song Sleuth
Teleperformance, Emma
Bosch, Delloite

Q14: Open to remote work while living in Portugal

	N	%
Yes, I am open to remote work.	45	49.5%
No, I prefer working on-site.	11	12.1%
It depends on the job and company.	35	38.5%

Employer Branding Experiences and Opinions

Q15: Which company based in Portugal do you consider attractive as an Employer?
(Choose 3 from 31)

Company	N	%
Microsoft	45	16.5%
Siemens	40	14.7%
Nestlé	29	10.6%
Mercedes-Benz.io	22	8.1%
Bosch	16	5.9%
Volkswagen Group Services	14	5.1%
Fujitsu Technology Solutions	10	3.7%
NOS	10	3.7%
RTP – Rádio e Televisão de Portugal	10	3.7%
Nokia	9	3.3%
Fidelidade	8	2.9%
PHC Software	7	2.6%
Delta Cafés	6	2.2%
Farfetch	6	2.2%
The Navigator Company	6	2.2%
Altice	5	1.8%
CUF (Grupo José de Mello Saúde)	5	1.8%
Ikea Portugal	4	1.5%
Hospital da Luz	3	1.1%
Hotel Group Pestana	3	1.1%
Joaquim Chaves Saúde	3	1.1%
Milestone	3	1.1%
Banco de Portugal	2	0.7%
Hovione	2	0.7%
OGMA – Indústria aeronáutica de Portugal	2	0.7%
Corticeira Amorim	1	0.4%
Onyria Group	1	0.4%
Securitas Direct by Verisure	1	0.4%
Grupo Salvador Caetano	0	0.0%

GroundLink Holding	0	0.0%
Olisipo	0	0.0%

Q16: Experiences with active recruiting programs at university

Measure	N	%
Job Interviews	21	11.2%
University Career Center	31	16.5%
Career Fairs	37	19.7%
Internships	6	3.2%
Traineeship	0	0.0%
Guided Company Tour	21	11.2%
Summer/Winter Camp	7	3.7%
LinkedIn Direct Messaging	37	19.7%
None	23	12.2%
Other	5	2.7%

Other
Breakfast with Deloitte
Company presentations at uni
I wasn't really interested because for artists there were just few options
Meet-up with Altice professionals & Breakfast with L'oreal
Mentoring

Q17: In your opinion, what elements contribute most to creating a strong corporate identity (i.e. building and maintaining a consistent and recognizable company identity)?

<i>Elements of corporate identity</i>	Responses		Percent of Cases	Rank
	N	Percent		
Company values and ethics	44	13.1%	48.4%	3
Organizational culture and work environment	64	19.0%	70.3%	1
Mission statement and vision for the future	31	9.2%	34.1%	8
Visual identity elements (logo, color scheme, design elements)	38	11.3%	41.8%	4
Employee experiences and testimonials	58	17.3%	63.7%	2

Community engagement and outreach efforts	35	10.4%	38.5%	5
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts	32	9.5%	35.2%	7
Consistency in brand communication and messaging	34	10.1%	37.4%	6

Q18: The organizational culture (i.e. shared values, practices and expectations) of a company...

	N	%
...significantly influences my decision and attraction to an employer brand.	37	40.7%
...plays a substantial role in shaping my perception of an employer brand.	30	33.0%
...is one of several factors I consider when evaluating employer brands.	15	16.5%
...has minimal influence on my decision to consider an employer brand; other factors like salary, benefits, and career growth opportunities are more important.	9	9.9%
...does not influence my decision to consider an employer brand at all; I prioritize other factors.	0	0.0%

Q19: What channels do you primarily use to search for and evaluate attractive employer brands when applying for jobs?

Channels	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Online job portals and career websites	65	22.7%	71.4%
Social media platforms (LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.)	75	26.2%	82.4%
Networking events and industry conferences	28	9.8%	30.8%
Referrals from friends, Family, or professional connections	66	23.1%	72.5%

Company review websites (Glassdoor, Indeed. etc.)	37	12.9%	40.7%
Company blogs, Newsletters, and industry publications	14	4.9%	15.4%
Other (Please specify)	1	0.3%	1.1%
	“The lack of interesting offers made me my own boss”		

Q20: "A strong sense of loyalty to the employer does significantly influence my motivation to be productive and show effort in my role."

	N	%
Strongly agree	37	40.7%
Somewhat agree	41	45.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	8	8.8%
Somewhat disagree	5	5.5%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%

Q21: What characteristics of a job are the most important and non-negotiable for you? (Top 5)

Job characteristics	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Competitive salary and bonuses	68	14.9%	74.7%
Comprehensive benefits package (healthcare, retirement plans, etc.)	59	13.0%	64.8%
Opportunities for career advancement and professional development	65	14.3%	71.4%
Supportive work environment and company culture	44	9.7%	48.4%
Flexibility in work hours and remote work options	67	14.7%	73.6%
Recognition and rewards for performance	32	7.0%	35.2%
Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives	25	5.5%	27.5%
Meaningful work and opportunities to make an impact	43	9.5%	47.3%
Opportunities for mentorship and learning from experienced professionals	37	8.1%	40.7%

Commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility	15	3.3%	16.5%
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Future Plans and Motives of decision-making

Q22: What is/was your future academic or career plan after completing your Master's degree?

	N	%
PhD	10	11.0%
Secondary Master	0	0.0%
Apply for a job	68	74.7%
Internship	4	4.4%
Traineeship	6	6.6%
Other (Please specify)	3	3.3%

		N	%
		88	96,7%
Other (Please specify)	Continue working at my job,	1	1.1%
	No idea	1	1.1%
	Self-employment in Berlin	1	1.1%

Q23: How much do/did your friends' or family's career choices affect your decision to stay in Portugal or seek opportunities abroad?

	N	%
A great deal	22	24.2%
A lot	25	27.5%
Somewhat	21	23.1%
A little	19	20.9%
Not at all	4	4.4%

Q24: What factors or motivations would influence your decision to STAY in Portugal after graduation? (drag and drop to rank a TOP 7⁴)

⁴ (1 = Salary; 2 = Personal affairs; 3 = Costs of living; 4 = Work-life-balance; 5 = Political stability; 6 = Career prospects; 7 = Other)

Participant	Most Important	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	6th choice	Least Important
P1	3	1	4	2	6	5	7
P2	3	1	4	2	6	5	7
P3	5	6	7	2	4	3	1
P4	1	2	5	4	6	3	7
P5	1	4	3	5	6	2	7
P6	6	4	7	1	2	5	3
P7	1	3	4	2	6	5	7
P8	7	2	4	1	3	5	6
P9	1	4	2	3	6	5	7
P10	1	4	2	3	5	6	7
P11	2	3	4	6	5	1	7
P12	4	5	6	3	7	2	1
P13	2	1	3	5	6	4	7
P14	1	3	4	2	6	5	7
P15	2	3	4	5	6	1	7
P16	1	2	3	4	6	5	7
P17	3	2	4	5	1	6	7
P18	4	1	2	3	6	5	7
P19	5	3	2	1	4	6	7
P20	6	2	3	1	4	5	7
P21	2	4	5	6	3	1	7
P22	4	5	6	3	1	2	7
P23	6	3	2	1	4	5	7
P24	4	2	5	1	6	3	7
P25	4	1	2	3	5	6	7
P26	6	1	3	2	5	4	7
P27	5	1	3	2	4	6	7
P28	5	2	4	1	3	6	7
P29	1	5	3	2	6	4	7
P30	7	4	3	2	5	6	1
P31	3	5	6	2	4	1	7
P32	2	3	5	4	6	1	7
P33	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P34	2	5	4	3	6	1	7
P35	3	1	5	2	6	4	7
P36	3	1	4	2	6	5	7
P37	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P38	4	1	5	2	6	3	7
P39	2	4	6	5	1	3	7
P40	6	2	5	1	3	4	7
P41	5	2	6	1	3	4	7
P42	6	4	7	3	5	1	2

P43	6	4	7	5	3	2	1
P44	3	5	6	4	1	2	7
P45	7	5	3	1	4	6	2
P46	3	4	5	6	1	2	7
P47	6	2	4	1	5	3	7
P48	6	4	2	1	5	3	7
P49	6	2	4	1	5	3	7
P50	1	3	4	2	6	5	7
P51	5	1	2	3	6	4	7
P52	1	6	2	3	5	4	7
P53	1	3	2	4	5	6	7
P54	4	6	3	1	7	5	2
P55	4	7	6	5	3	2	1
P56	2	6	4	5	3	1	7
P57	5	1	6	3	2	4	7
P58	5	2	6	1	3	4	7
P59	7	3	5	2	6	4	1
P60	1	6	5	4	2	3	7
P61	5	4	1	3	6	2	7
P62	5	3	4	1	6	2	7
P63	7	6	3	1	4	5	2
P64	6	2	1	3	4	5	7
P65	4	5	6	3	2	1	7
P66	4	5	6	3	1	2	7
P67	3	6	5	4	2	1	7
P68	4	3	6	5	2	1	7
P69	6	3	2	1	5	4	7
P70	5	6	4	2	1	3	7
P71	3	6	2	1	4	5	7
P72	6	4	2	1	3	5	7
P73	4	6	5	2	1	3	7
P74	4	7	5	2	1	6	3
P75	6	3	1	2	5	4	7
P76	3	7	6	5	4	2	1
P77	6	5	2	1	4	3	7
P78	5	6	2	1	3	4	7
P79	5	6	3	1	4	7	2
P80	5	4	1	2	6	7	3
P81	4	3	2	1	5	6	7
P82	2	6	4	5	3	1	7
P83	2	6	4	5	3	1	7
P84	6	5	3	2	7	4	1
P85	6	2	4	1	5	3	7
P86	5	2	3	1	6	4	7
P87	2	4	5	6	3	1	7

P88	7	5	2	1	6	4	3
P89	4	6	2	1	5	3	7
P90	5	3	2	1	6	4	7
P91	5	4	3	1	7	6	2

“Other” factors to stay in Portugal included:

Coding Frame by establishing categories	N
Safety/Security	4
Surfing	4
Sun/Weather	4
Portuguese Citizenship	4
Beach	2
The job/work	2
Staying is no option	2
Location of Portugal	1
Good Food	1

Q25: What factors or motivations would influence your decision to LEAVE Portugal after graduation? (drag and drop to rank a TOP 7⁵)

Parti- cipant	Most Impor- tant	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	6th choice	Least Impor- tant
P1	2	1	4	5	6	3	7
P2	2	1	4	5	6	3	7
P3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P4	1	2	3	4	6	5	7
P5	1	6	3	4	5	2	7
P6	1	2	4	5	6	3	7
P7	1	4	3	5	6	2	7
P8	1	4	2	7	5	3	6
P9	1	4	2	3	6	5	7
P10	1	4	2	3	5	6	7
P11	2	3	4	6	5	1	7
P12	2	4	5	3	6	1	7
P13	2	1	4	5	6	3	7
P14	1	4	6	5	3	2	7
P15	4	2	1	5	3	6	7
P16	3	1	4	5	6	2	7
P17	1	2	3	4	6	5	7
P18	2	1	3	4	5	6	7
P19	1	3	4	5	6	2	7

⁵ (1 = Salary; 2 = Personal affairs; 3 = Costs of living; 4 = Work-life-balance; 5 = Political stability; 6 = Career prospects; 7 = Other)

P20	1	4	2	5	6	3	7
P21	5	3	1	4	6	2	7
P22	4	2	1	3	6	5	7
P23	1	4	3	5	6	2	7
P24	1	2	6	4	5	3	7
P25	1	6	2	4	5	3	7
P26	1	6	2	4	5	3	7
P27	2	6	3	5	4	1	7
P28	3	5	1	4	6	2	7
P29	1	5	3	2	6	4	7
P30	1	2	6	7	4	3	5
P31	3	1	2	4	5	6	7
P32	2	6	3	4	5	1	7
P33	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P34	1	4	3	5	6	2	7
P35	1	5	4	3	6	2	7
P36	1	6	3	2	4	5	7
P37	1	3	2	5	4	7	6
P38	4	1	5	2	6	3	7
P39	3	2	1	4	6	5	7
P40	2	4	1	6	5	3	7
P41	2	4	1	5	6	3	7
P42	1	3	2	5	6	4	7
P43	3	1	4	2	6	5	7
P44	2	3	1	5	6	4	7
P45	2	5	3	6	7	1	4
P46	3	1	2	5	6	4	7
P47	1	4	2	5	6	3	7
P48	1	3	2	5	6	4	7
P49	2	3	1	5	6	4	7
P50	1	5	2	3	6	4	7
P51	2	4	1	5	6	3	7
P52	1	3	4	6	5	2	7
P53	3	1	2	4	5	6	7
P54	2	1	5	6	4	3	7
P55	3	4	1	5	6	7	2
P56	4	1	2	3	5	6	7
P57	2	4	1	5	6	3	7
P58	2	4	1	5	6	3	7
P59	2	4	1	6	5	3	7
P60	3	4	1	5	6	2	7
P61	2	3	1	5	6	4	7
P62	2	3	1	6	4	5	7
P63	1	3	4	6	5	2	7
P64	1	6	5	2	4	3	7

P65	3	1	2	4	5	6	7
P66	2	3	1	5	6	4	7
P67	3	1	2	5	6	4	7
P68	2	4	1	3	6	5	7
P69	1	3	4	6	5	2	7
P70	3	1	2	5	6	4	7
P71	2	1	3	6	5	4	7
P72	1	6	2	5	4	3	7
P73	2	6	1	3	5	4	7
P74	2	3	1	4	6	5	7
P75	1	4	2	5	6	3	7
P76	4	2	1	3	6	5	7
P77	1	3	2	6	5	4	7
P78	2	1	4	6	5	3	7
P79	2	4	3	6	5	1	7
P80	2	3	4	5	6	1	7
P81	3	2	4	6	5	1	7
P82	2	4	1	3	6	5	7
P83	2	3	1	4	6	5	7
P84	1	4	3	5	6	2	7
P85	1	4	2	5	6	3	7
P86	1	4	3	5	6	2	7
P87	5	3	1	2	4	6	7
P88	1	3	4	5	6	2	7
P89	2	1	4	5	6	3	7
P90	2	4	3	5	6	1	7
P91	3	2	4	5	6	1	7

“Other” factors to leave Portugal included:

Answer	N
Safety	1
Weather and access to nature	1
Quality of life and healthcare	1
My girlfriend in Brasil	1

Annex E

Interview Transcript No. 1

S1: Okay. So first of all, thank you very much for participating in the interview. It will take probably about 30 minutes, but this depends very much on how in depth we can go or not. But, that's all about your flexibility in your responses. And you can interrupt at any time. There are no right or wrong answers. And it's to get to know your perspective on employer

branding, your daily work, how that is performed. Do you have any questions before we start or should we just start?

S2: We can start. (IN1_Par.1)

S1: Okay, great. Can you maybe do a short introduction. Like, what's your job, the company, how many years are you working in that company and area? And what your connection is to employer branding?

S2: Okay, so, from the beginning, my name is Person A and my company name is Company A. Our core business is to provide certified services of cleaning and washing of aircrafts. We are also doing some smaller services of light engineering at the airports. So we work mainly at the airport. We are part of the civil aviation area. Our main clients are the biggest low cost companies of the aviation market. So we are talking about Ryanair, Easyjet, Norwegian, Wizz Air. And going on, the group was created in 2008 and since then we grew a lot. We are now working at 28 airports. In Portugal, Spain, UK, Belgium, Austria and Poland. So we are distributed around Europe. Yeah. My position at the company is head of the human resources department. I started on this position at the end of 2018. And, I don't know if this is the common answer or not, but the majority companies in Portugal, started as little companies, with the family, a family company, you know. (IN1_Par.2)

S1: Ah, okay. Is it the same for Company A?

S2: Yeah. Exactly the same. So we try to adapt. Look, we are growing, and we are trying to keep the company like that but being able to process and move on. It forces us to to be able to do new things in many areas, like communication, even the part of the company branding and all of that. Sometimes, they don't have the importance that we should give them. We are always focused on being able to have the people, the necessary people to provide the services to provide the clients the quality and the services they are requesting. Yes. So our main focus for the last years has been always this and now we are trying to restructure the company. Like not the bad restructuration that forces companies to dismiss people or so. No, we are growing. We are just creating more structure to be able to, well, to reply in a better way to all the demands. Yeah. (IN1_Par.3)

S1: Okay. To provide better work. So the departments are being restructures or newly introduced, right?

S2: Well, what we are creating is structure in the different regions that we are operating in. Okay. So until now, at the airports where we are working, we have a station manager and

two team leaders and all of the other employees. And the operation is mainly coordinated by the main office. Now we are trying to create some local offices with a regional manager, local admins, local safety officers. So we are trying to be closer to the operation, closer to the workers. And we believe that it will be a way to, well, to work better together and to avoid problems that come with the job at the airport. Now, regarding the employer branding, what can I say? (IN1_Par.4)

S1: What is your current focus in Employer Branding? Like do you have a campaign going on or something.

S2: Well, we have two types of focuses. One of them is on the aircraft cleaner. And it's very difficult because a normal cleaner, a person that goes to a building and does some cleaning. Yeah, that's usually a normal type of contract. It's very easy. Someone that needs to work on the site of the airport, they need to comply, first of all with the background check of the last five years, and they need to certify this, every five years. And they also need to present a clean criminal record. (IN1_Par.5)

S1: Okay, I understand, so it's very sensitive and they need to pass a lot of checks first.

S2: Yeah. If they are not clean, the airport authorities won't allow them to have the airport ID, and then they need to do a bunch of certifications on safety and security. On the training of the job, they will be provided. So normally, between the process, when you start to recruit someone and the date that person will start, it will last more or less a month. And only when that person starts, it will start the practical training. (IN1_Par.6)

S1: Okay, right.

S2: It's a very bureaucratic process and this is one of our focuses. And to find these people that are available to work as aircraft cleaner. Normally we rely on the station manager because there are a lot of companies that are working at the airport. Some of the services are also very seasonal. So normally working with the airplanes, you will have the start of the summer season at the end of this month. It will start at the end of March and will be finished around the end of October. (IN1_Par.7)

S1: Okay.

S2: And this intense period, normally, make the company to hire a lot more workers than in the other period. One way we use to recruit people is relying on the station managers and on people that are already working at the airport and then approach us to come to work for us

based on recommendation. The other way is to do the normal advertising on employment websites on social media, on LinkedIn. (IN1_Par.8)

S1: So you use LinkedIn also for aircraft cleaners?

S2: Sorry, not for cleaners, as the people we are able to hire for this position usually don't have a higher degree of education. Okay, their salaries are not very high also. (IN1_Par.9)

S1: Okay, gotcha.

S2: So and it's easier to hire them and to find people that are available and willing to do it. But the UK it's a living hell. Since Brexit there are no people available to work. It's very difficult. And since Brexit, managers stopped to send people from other countries or other stations to go there and work. (IN1_Par.10)

S1: I can imagine, it's challenging. Yeah. I believe you. So that was actually already a lot of information. Can you maybe name the key stakeholders that are involved in the employer branding planning initiatives. Is it like, for example, just your human resource department. Or do you also have marketing and communication and work with them? Is there a corporate social responsibility team, a legal team, a finance team? Or also senior leadership, like in general who takes part in the recruiting and also the employer branding, stating why you should work for Company A. Which departments are involved?

S2: Mainly human resources, mainly. (IN1_Par.11)

S1: Okay, so you and your team.

S2: Of course, sometimes we request some advising from our legal advisor. But mainly what we do is, well, first of all, we work at the airport, but we are not an aviation company. So, we depend a lot on the planification and the services our clients are demanding. So, all our planification is a bit conditioned by the planification of our clients. But normally what we usually do is we create a profile for each job function or each vacancy. So we have, for example, a generic profile for a station manager. We have a generic profile for a team leader and for a normal cleaner and for the other jobs too. And we try to adapt, more or less, that profile to the specifications of each position in each region, at each airport. Because working at the airport, I'll give you an example, we are working at 20 airports in total and at 14 airports in Spain. (IN1_Par.12)

S1: Okay.

S2: And all of them look different because the legislation is different. The procedures are different. The salaries are different. All of them have collective contracts. Okay. And all of

them are different. Yes. We have a study on which stations it will be easier to find people. What are the stations that we will face more challenges on finding people. But normally regarding the recruitment of aircraft cleaners, we use the basic forms. So we have the profiles, that we adapt more or less. And then we do the advertising. At the airports, at the employment websites and on social media and we heavily rely on the station managers. Of course. (IN1_Par.13)

S1: Yes, that makes sense.

S2: When we started to do these profiles, these kind of advertising and all of that, it was previously approved by the board of directors. (IN1_Par.14)

S1: Okay.

S2: We normally talk with them first. Look this is what we are thinking. It's the best way to get people and to explain people how and what is our job, what we have to offer, what are the opportunities at the company. But we never recruit anyone without doing a pre-interview, then doing the real interview. And then we also have to give them the training before we apply for the airport IDs. So we normally will know a bit more of the person before that person really starts to work. (IN1_Par.15)

S1: Okay. So there are multiple steps involved in the recruitment itself. Okay. Is there external market research done or maybe like internal employee surveys? In order to understand better what is missing, which qualification a new employee needs. Are there like satisfaction or employee surveys that are conducted internally also?

S2: Yeah, we do that. Even our clients force us to do that. We need to do it every two years, at least every two years. We have to fill an assessment of each worker. And on that we will evaluate them from the human resources part, from the training part. Because in our company the human resources department is separated from the training department. (IN1_Par.16)

S1: Okay, so it's less the employees giving feedback but you and the other teams submitting feedback on the employee's performance, right?

S2: Yeah, well I guess so. Because we also sell services of training. We are certified. So we are able to train people to go to the airport. (IN1_Par.17)

S1: Okay.

S2: But like I was saying, they are evaluated by us, by the operation side, by the training, by the safety. And we have a company, that together with the department of Audit and

Compliance that are always doing internal audits. And the training of people is very frequent. So we are always training people. (IN1_Par.18)

S1: Okay, next question, how would you define the employer brand identity and image of Company A? Is there something that's connected to the corporate culture or why should Company A be an employer of choice? Maybe can you separate that into the part of the cleaners and the part of the higher qualified office workers?

S2: That is the part that is missing. What I was talking about, is about the position of aircraft cleaner. When we talk about the office, we don't have specific procedures. Okay, it will depend on the position we are looking for. Of course, we have the profiles already created. We used to talk with other companies that work on the aviation area. We used to talk with employment institutes of each company. We used to go to employment conventions and all of that. Sometimes we also, we also contact some recruitment agencies. (IN1_Par.19)

S1: That help with the recruiting for the office position, right?

S2: Well we are working mainly with Robert Walters recruitment. Yeah. So this is what we mainly do. We don't have a specific procedure, but this week I had a meeting with them since we are looking for, well it's not a station manager, but it's like the chief of a new services team we will have in Porto at the hangar. So we don't want the normal cleaner. We want someone with some experience on the aviation area and with some knowledge of engineering. So, we had a meeting with a company called SmartAvia. That company works at the Porto airport. And what they do is to provide training to pilots and to people from engineering. That do the maintenance of the aircraft and all of that. So every time we know a company that works in the aviation sector, that provides training at an airport, we always try to create a relation where we can talk, we can help each other. And if they have people, for example alumni, that may be interested in coming to work for us, we always are available to talk with them to check their profiles, their CVS. So we used to do that a lot also. (IN1_Par.20)

S1: Yeah, okay. So for these positions a higher qualification and maybe a university degree is required, correct?

S2: Yeah, like we normally have trainees that came from the employment institutes. We use a lot those programs because they are co-financed by the proper employment institute. And this allows people that have graduated to immediately come to work for us. Those nine months as a trainee are very good for them to learn. The culture of the company, the

procedure and what is required to be on that position. And I can tell you that all the persons that we have at the end of the program, all of them were hired and are still working for us. So it's a good way to groom people to be able to stay with us and to have a cultural fit. In those nine months they probably understand the cultural identity and the corporate identity. (IN1_Par.21)

S1: That's much easier then for you, to also integrate them into the teams I guess.

S2: Like I said, we cannot forget that 90% of the companies in Portugal are small or medium sized companies. Okay. They are not big companies. So I know the salaries and the labor cost is something that is always being taken into consideration. And it's much easier if you got a trainee and give him time to learn to adapt. And at the end after nine months of training, that person will be ready to be responsible to, to give a good reply to all the demands of that position. And sometimes when you hire someone, and you are paying him a lot more than a trainee, you know that that person needs some time to adapt to start to work properly. But the truth is, at the end of 2 or 3 weeks, we are already getting some demands and complaints. Why he didn't do it this way. How he didn't learn this yet. So sometimes it's easier to hire specifically educated trainees instead of experienced professionals that have worked like at some other company. But like I said, there are positions where you can do that, where you can rely on trainees and groom them. And other positions you just cannot. So you need to find another way and another solution. (IN1_Par.22)

S1: Okay. Yeah. That's very interesting. Thank you. Do the trainees have a specific background or come from a specific university?

S2: Yeah, they do. Because for those programs, you need to apply with some requirements. And they are very strict. Or they will not approve your application. But the thing is, if you want recruit someone to work in audit and compliance, for example, you will need of course someone with a degree on, I don't know, legal or compliance management. Or someone that has some knowledge, or at least some training related with health and safety. That's an important part of the audit because there are always some jobs where people can have the degree and a lot of training and all of that. But once they enter a new company, they need to learn, what are the precedents? What's the way the company works, what is expected or not. So we always need to give some training to everybody that can come to the company. But this part of knowledge and safety is for the audit and compliance department. If you recruit someone like for human resources, you have two main concerns. Normally one is someone

with knowledge or on a part of recruitment and all of that. The other is the part of payroll and legal. (IN1_Par.23)

S1: I understand, okay. So it will depend a bit on the department and on the position which skill set is required. Okay, I understand.

S2: Yes. They, they all need to have some sort of a degree. Otherwise, the payment will be very, very low. (IN1_Par.24)

S1: Okay. Does it have to be a Master or Bachelor or does that also depend on the position?

S2: If you have a Master the payment will be higher. (IN1_Par.25)

S1: Okay. Understood. Coming back to the communication channels of employer branding – is there something only internally that's used, for example, is there a company newsletter? Is there an intranet? Are there employee engagement platforms where they can maybe exchange some views or something?

S2: We had a newsletter, an internal newsletter, yeah. That was shared every week until Covid came. Then the person that was working on the communication part and did it left, and nobody picked it up again. But it will come back. (IN1_Par.26)

S1: Okay, alright. That's probably also part of the restructuration.

S2: Yeah, like restructuration is for the next month or two months, but the newsletter will come back. Also, we do some communication on Facebook, like in Facebook groups of the company. With LinkedIn, we send a lot of memos to the stations across Europe, we from HR and communications, yeah like regarding open positions. But for new vacancies we always try to find people inside the company first. (IN1_Par.27)

S1: Okay, so an internal recruiting.

S2: If we understand that at the company, we can find someone and give them other responsibilities and another job, we will do it. Like in our office in the main positions, all of us came from other positions within the company. (IN1_Par.28)

S1: Okay. Do you regard that maybe as beneficial that they know before hiring also understand the corporate culture, how things work, like the workflows and everything? So is that one of the reasons why you choose to first hire internally and then go to probably external platforms?

S2: You know, I think our area is so specific that it makes sense. (IN1_Par.29)

S1: Yeah.

S2: And also regarding the company culture, if we find someone at the company that already knows the company, that already knows what we do, how things work and has the ability and the capacity to do that job, it's much easier. Even the integration and the onboarding. (IN1_Par.30)

S1: Okay. Yeah, I understand.

S2: And we always try to reward people that are working with us. This show that great work is worth it and that if you have capacity to do it, you will always have a chance to go higher on the ranks and to get another job inside the company. (IN1_Par.31)

S1: So to make an internal career. Yeah.

S2: It is always difficult for you to get another job. But if you are responsible, if you are a hard worker in the offices and all of that, you will always be rewarded for that with a bonus, with some travel to go on your vacations or so. So we are awarding our workers. But yeah, we can't award everybody with a different kind of job because people are people. There are people that are not capacitated to work in other parts. For example, I'm working in human resources for eight years now. Six of them as head of department. If someone wants to put me on the safety department or something like that I don't want to go because it's not my thing. I'm not good at it. I can do the efforts if needed. Yeah, I can help, but I won't be a good fit for the position. I won't be good at that. (IN1_Par.32)

S1: Yeah, I get it. Probably, because your experience lies otherwise. So it probably also has to match like the skills and the experience with the position.

S2: And you have to understand what motivates someone to be working on each department or on each position and safety. I'm looking a lot on safety. Safety is very important. (IN1_Par.33)

S1: Safety first.

S2: Yeah. But it doesn't thrill me but well. (IN1_Par.34)

S1: Ok, yeah. It doesn't interest or fascinates you much. But I believe your long term job in human resources speaks for itself, that this is more your area, I guess. Do you use social media channels to recruit people, to spread awareness about the employer brand? Is it like, I don't know, even TikTok, Instagram, Facebook? LinkedIn. Anything else?

S2: Yeah, like on Facebook. We used to publish our advertising on the company page. And also, for example, when we need to, wait I'll give you an example. We started last year in Austria. And it's very, very difficult to start work in Austria without anybody that we know

there. So it ain't easy to speak English with someone there. Normally, if you call from a foreigner number, they don't pick up the calls. If you send an email, they won't reply. So it was all very difficult. Yeah. And because we face so many challenges, so many challenges on finding lawyers, finding a payroll company, finding everything else. It was our clients that actually helped us by doing some recommendations and put us in contact with other companies and recruiting people to work there which was also very difficult. So, what I did was to try to find some Facebook groups, like groups of people Searching for work in the area of Vienna. We understood to put some advertising there to look for people we are willing start to work here. These are those are the conditions. This is the work we as a company do. (IN1_Par.35)

S1: So an active outreaching to the target group that was looked at and not just on the main page on Facebook of your company, right?

S2: No. Because okay, like that we will reach a few people on. (IN1_Par.36)

S1: No that's good. That's right. Is there something like regular reports, presentations or insights that are sharing with senior management regarding recruiting and employer branding. Do you like give a status report or something to her headquarters.

S2: Yeah. We do. (IN1_Par.37)

S1: And like how often? What does it entail?

S2: At the end of the day. (IN1_Par.38)

S1: Oh, okay.

S2: And the report with the first number of people we have on each airport, the numbers that are approved, the numbers we really have they're working. And also a brief description of the all the recruitment process that are going on. (IN1_Par.39)

S1: Okay. So senior management is always in the loop like they're always informed.

S2: If they check their email. Yes. (IN1_Par.40)

S1: Okay.

S2: Even when they don't check I will go there and look I've sent you an email. (IN1_Par.41)

S1: Yeah. So the flow of information is very steady.

S2: The thing is, and this is also a very specific thing of our company. They are very easy and approachable. The owner of the company and the three guys that are on the board of directors. Okay, look, I can finish this interview with you, and I will call them, and they are ready to discuss whatever I need to discuss. (IN1_Par.42)

S1: Got it. Okay.

S2: Not just me. Almost of all the workers of the company can do that. And we are talking about 500 and something. (IN1_Par.43)

S1: That's impressive. Yeah. So it's very familiar in terms of the vibe inside the company and the relationship between the employees.

S2: Yeah, it is. Also because we always attribute a great importance to communication, to the board of directors and to the CEO. So we always are feeding him with the information on, this is what we are doing. These are the challenges we are facing. Those are the solutions. What we think are the correct ones. Yeah. That they must authorize or so. (IN1_Par.44)

S1: Good, so very transparent communication.

S2: So we are always involved and informed. Yeah. And they always know what is happening at all the departments and at all the stations everywhere. (IN1_Par.45)

S1: Okay. Yeah. That's makes the information flow and the workflow probably also much easier. And the two way streets seem to work too.

S2: For example, every Monday we have an interdepartmental meeting which used to last like 2 or 3 hours. Because everyone will speak. Yes. (IN1_Par.46)

S1: Oh, wow, that's long.

S2: But the communication between departments is also very, very easy. For example, if someone at the operation department feels that it will need 3 or 4 more workers for a specific station, he will call me directly. Look, I'm in the middle of a big shit now. I need your help. Please find me 3 or 4 people as soon as possible. (IN1_Par.47)

S1: Okay, I understand. Okay, so there's a feedback and communication channel from different departments or workers that can directly address, for example, you from HR and make a request or so. Yeah, especially filling the vacancies that probably exist in that moment. Very good. You also spoke of the different languages, like you say you mainly work in Spanish, but since it's spread out across Europe, what is the company language? Is that Portuguese or how does that work?

S2: The thing is the official language for civil aviation is English. (IN1_Par.48)

S1: Okay. Yeah.

S2: You need to know, at least a bit of English. But in Spain the majority of the persons won't speak English. They speak Spanish. If you go to Portugal, you will have more people speaking English. But the majority will keep talking in Portuguese. If you go to Poland there

you will have a great, great barrier, because there we have just three, four workers that are able to speak in English. The other ones not all. They just speaks Polish. (IN1_Par.49)

S1: And I imagine you don't know much Polish.

S2: No, certainly not. Even when we need to arrange a meeting with a station, we always need to assure that some guy that speaks in English will be there to translate and highlight their part, what's important for them. (IN1_Par.50)

S1: So, okay, I can imagine how difficult that is.

S2: We sometimes we struggle a bit. Yeah. (IN1_Par.51)

S1: So I imagine it's very challenging to have English as a common language, as a requirement and especially, I guess, with less qualified positions because, I'm not sure here, but I believe that like many from university and from a higher education background know more English. So that's the company's and aviation language.

S2: Yeah. This is even more challenging when, for example, the services we provide in hangars, people need to have some training. And that training is provided by our clients. And some of those trainings are only available in English. If they don't understand English, they won't be able to do the training and won't be able to work on that service. Also, for example, when we open the operation in Austria, we advertise vacancies on all the stations we are working for. As it is a requirement, you really need to talk in English. If you don't know how to talk in English, you can't go. So, everyone that we have there in Austria, is able to talk in English. (IN1_Par.52)

S1: That's great.

S2: Some better than others, but all of them are able to talk in English to communicate. (IN1_Par.53)

S1: Okay. So, that makes sense and, of course, the international part of Company A is probably very, very large. You said something about 500, more or less, employees. How many would you say are Portuguese and how many are other nationalities? Can you give me like rough numbers, maybe who works in Portugal and who works abroad?

S2: I can tell you that the majority of the workers are Spanish. That's normal, because from the 28 airports and operations we have, 14 of them are in Spain. (IN1_Par.54)

S1: Okay, so half of them. Yeah.

S2: But I would say in general, the majority Spanish, then the Portuguese, and then a mix of Brazilian, Argentinian and Italian. In UK we have many people from India and from Pakistan. (IN1_Par.55)

S1: Okay. Yes.

S2: And at the office well the majority are Portuguese. Now it's actually a bit balanced between Portuguese and Spanish. And we also have some people from England. (IN1_Par.56)

S1: Okay.

S2: Because in England if you want to hire for a job that requires higher education and all of that. It's different. Yes, you will find a cultural thing, it's a barrier because they are very different than the rest of Europe. But you will be able to find. So it's okay. Or not so much okay. (IN1_Par.57)

S1: Okay, I can imagine. Yeah. So that's the challenge in the UK I get it. You were talking about like Master students and the trainee program that is here in Portugal where you work together with another company or agency, I believe? Do you know what it's called?

S2: It's a state agency. I don't know the name. But I guess it exists the same way in other countries, the way it is in Portugal it's like an employment center that is from the government. If you are employed, you will do your registration there. And well, then they can give you some training and pay you a bit for those trainings. Every job advertising the companies will do their, they will inform the unemployed. But also they have these programs that are in place from time to time and we normally take advantage of that to get graduates. (IN1_Par.58)

S1: Okay. That's I understand, do you have a number of like how many in the last year? Maybe more or less. It would be great, if there is there a number, roughly, that you could share with me?

S2: I can tell you, for example, that we will start the summer operation next Monday. (IN1_Par.59)

S1: Okay.

S2: And for the past months we were recruiting for the stations. So all around I believe that from in the first stage, from the 25 of March, and then from the 1st of April, it will start to be again more or less 100%. (IN1_Par.60)

S1: Okay. So probably some seasonal workers are coming back from last summer.

S2: Seasonal workers. Yeah. But many of them are completely new. And it's also a challenge because, this is a very physical work, if you work at the airport doing aircraft cleaning and washing. (IN1_Par.61)

S1: Yeah, I can imagine.

S2: If it's cold, you must do it. If it's raining, you must do it. If it's a living hell with a higher temperature, you must do it also. So many people start and after three, four days say, this isn't for me, and they leave. So the process is also something that we always have in mind. (IN1_Par.61)

S1: Okay, okay I understand.

S2: People that go on maternity leave or paternity leave? People that go on sick leave. We need someone to fill in short notice. (IN1_Par.62)

S1: Yeah. Okay, I understand. So do you measure the success of your recruiting and employer branding initiatives? Is there something like the ROI, the return on investment? Or the comparing of costs to benefits. Do you have some different measures in place that are automatically reported, or not?

S2: Yeah, but very archaic. Well, they are very rudimentary. (IN1_Par.63)

S1: Okay.

S2: Okay. So what I used to do is to quantify the number of people that I needed to approach to be able to have or to achieve the numbers approved for each station. The time we spent with the recruitment of each station, and then the turnover of people. How many people we needed to recruit. How many of them left? Why they left, why they stay. But that's something that I was speaking with a colleague of mine at the beginning of this month, after the summer season started. Because this is impossible until the start of the summer period is finished. But once the summer started, we will take a look into that to see how we can improve that. Well, that way of analyzing the numbers, the success of the recruitment or not and also the integration of the new workers. So we are thinking about restructuring that part also. (IN1_Par.64)

S1: Okay. Now that's very interesting to understand how the key performance indicators are used at Company A.

S2: You need to take into account that we are talking of a company with 500, 550 workers. Now in the summer maybe we will go higher to 600, 650. But for example, at the Human

Resources department, just the department we are responsible for. We do things with the time we have. (IN1_Par.65)

S1: Okay, I understand.

S2: Very demanding. Yeah, it's very demanding. (IN1_Par.66)

S1: But I imagine, it is what it is.

S2: It is what it is. So you enjoy it. (IN1_Par.67)

S1: Well, you're head of human resources. So you probably have the best overview of who is required to maybe jump in for another vacancy. Yeah. I think actually that's about it from my side with my questions. Do you have anything you would like to add or that we haven't covered in terms of employer branding? And I don't know, you shared a lot also about the restructure process that's going on, but is there anything else you'd like to say?

S2: No, I think that's it. Look, I would have liked to arrive to this interview and be able to present you a more structured thing. But the truth is, we work with the needs we have. So it's not very structured, sorry. (IN1_Par.68)

S1: Don't worry. Thank you for your time. I've learned a lot, so I'll probably, stop the recording now.

Interview Transcript No. 2

S1: So, hello and thank you very much again for taking the time to do this interview with me. All the questions I'm going to ask are based on the model Employer Branding Roadmap by the author Minchington. So just for you to know this is the reason why I structured it into introduction, concept design, integration and evaluation phase. So can you, for the official recording, present yourself, what company you're working at, what you're doing at the company and how long you work there for?

S2: So my name is Person B. I'm 25 years old and my job title is marketing and employer branding assistant. And I work for Company B for about one year and a half. (IN2_Par.1)

S1: Thank you. So can you provide an overview of your organization's current employer branding project and scope? What's the focus at the moment? Is there a specific ongoing employer branding project? Are there like messages you're developing? Is there like a social

media focus right now, or do you, do a lot on, like, employer review platform? So what is more or less the overall approach currently going on at Company B?

S2: So I'll try to explain this like a better way because I never explained this to anyone. Okay. So as I think that I said to you like earlier, like our department, like the part of employer branding, we've been creating everything for like one year and a half, more or less. So it's like very new. And we started all this because hospitality is a very specific sector with people like, you have a lot of and very high rotation. I don't know how you said like it is because everyone is like coming in and coming out, so people don't stay that much on the hospitality sector. So it started to be like a necessity to like start, like to try to get people to stay more time in our organization and trying to be like, better than the other ones because, as you know, we have a lot of hotels here in Location B, we own a lot of them too. So you have to try to be different, like in some way and like the salaries are very low compared to other sectors. So you have to try other ways. So that was the point of starting to do all of this. We started like with this strategy. Now we're like, we rebranded our department this year. Our department is called Noun B Culture and Communication. So basically, we do like for you to explain, what Noun B means, it's because that is related with our employer branding strategy. Noun B is related with the word Company B which means Noun B in Greek. So the group it's supposed to be like a Noun B. So we put like that Noun B that is the group on our people. Like, for us to try to give a Noun B experience of working to our employees. (IN2_Par.2)

S1: Thank you, that's already great information that I'll be able to use. Maybe can you say a few words on the branding part of employer branding and your department's approach?

S2: Our slogan, I think that I can say that we put it in three words that are embrace, connect and grow. And you can say that is also our employer value proposition. Each one of them we tried to explain, like embrace is the part of attraction and all the recruitment, like what it's like getting on our teams and experience everything, like our culture. And then embrace and grow is like all the training and everything that we provide to our employees. So that is our main strategy, but now we can say that we're focusing more now on the part of embrace and grow. Not that much on the part of connect, because that is an important part of recruiting but now, since it's like very new and we're just two people working on this, we're focusing on the part of retaining our employees. Our employer branding strategy is more focused now

on our employees. We try to do initiatives. We try to come up with new benefits for them. So yeah. (IN2_Par.3)

S1: I understand, thank you for elaborating on this. So the focus at Company B is more on internal employer branding right now, in order to retain the current employees, than to attract many new ones from outside? Which would be external employer branding.

S2: Because what we do for attraction the external part, it's like we have the basic platforms here in Portugal where you put all the recruitment stuff, publicity and then we get a lot of candidates. Okay so that is what we do. And then we use LinkedIn too, but we don't put too much focus on recruitment and like some positions. Yes. Like some executive positions. But the lower positions like barman, housekeeping, you always get someone for that. So yeah. It's not like a big recruitment that we definitely do in the future. We want to improve that part. But now our focus is more internal with our current employees. (IN2_Par.4)

S1: Okay. Amazing. Thank you. That was actually a great overview for the start. So, my second question would be, who are the key stakeholders involved in the development, approval and execution of your employer branding initiatives? So, for example, senior leadership, human resources, marketing, the recruitment and talent acquisitions, the CSR team, maybe external partners, the legal compliance and finance team or who takes part in it, maybe just the departments or the roles.

S2: Okay. So, like my department, the DCC departments like what we call this here, but also the marketing department. Then all the directors have like a role on all of this because we share the information with our employees. But at the same time, we try for them to get involved in everything, so everything passes through them. And then they also communicate our actions to their employees, like to their teams. So basically, everyone, we try to get everyone involved because we are a big group, like we have over like 500 people. But at the same time, we are a family company. So that means that we're all close. We try to also do that with like our initiatives. Everyone, like every Employer Branding initiative that we do, my department has the first idea. Then we talk with the operations manager, and he talks with the directors too. And then they take all our ideas to the administration board and to the CEO of the group. And then we get approved. So, I say that everyone is like involved. (IN2_Par.5)

S1: Okay. So, the workflow includes most of the internal departments and some external partners as well that you have.

S2: Yeah, I actually forgot about that. We work with the company that helped us at the beginning to like try to come up with a structure for our department. And now, the company works with us in some details, like for example, we're starting to restructure our evaluation of our employees. Like at the end of the contract, during the contract, afterwards and everything. And the other company is helping us by doing all that process. So yeah, we work in some aspects with them. But yeah in the future the goal is not work with them. (IN2_Par.6)

S1: Okay. So, to be more independent and have it all internally bundled together. Yeah okay. Very good. Thank you. So now to the concept phase. In the initial stages of that phase, how does your organization define the scope of it? You've already mentioned that there is a workflow in your department about how to communicate and transport the different initiatives. Like what are the very first steps you do? Do you do like a basic Swot analysis, for example? And you spoke about the different projects or initiatives. How often are they? So like first steps, what analyses do you do?

S2: So what we start to do like every like this year we did like we started by doing a plan and we said this month we're going to do this and this. So we plan the entire month. So every month, for example, we celebrate the important dates. For example, last week we did the spring lunch. We gathered like every employee at a place that we have like it's an events place that is called Lake House. So instead of employees have their lunch in the canteen, they had their lunch there. Everyone was there and we had an Italian menu, so everyone was happy. That is like one example. And we try to do it at like all that special days that make sense for us, of course. But, besides that, we decide what to do besides those special dates, for everything else. We talk with the directors and see what they think that it could be interesting for the teams. Or sometimes it's like, besides what we have planned, sometimes it's like we see something on the internet, and we say this could be interesting to do for the teams. And then we do it like, yeah. So this plan, like, it depends. We usually try to, like, go through a plan, but sometimes we get too excited and go out of the plan and try to come up with other ideas. But yeah, usually, we organize everything. From the beginning. But I would say we do initiatives like every week because sometimes we just send something on WhatsApp. We actually created WhatsApp groups for every unit that we have, like for the

hotel, then for the restaurants and so on. So we separate it because communication sometimes is different from place to place. Like not everyone gets the same communication and message, sometimes because we do a lot of things for the hotel employees. And then for the other places, since there are further away than the hotel, we do less things, but we try to do and include them in some initiatives, but the hotel is where we do the most. (IN2_Par.7)

S1: Okay, Got it. So, it's a lot of incentivizing the employees along the way, every now and then to retain them at the company.

S2: Yeah, exactly. The other initiatives we try to do, probably like one time per month. Like for these big initiatives besides that, we always send something every week because there are always special dates to commemorate. So we always try to do this weekly, for example, we sent like I already sent like two and then I'll have two more to send this week. (IN2_Par.8)

S1: Okay. So you always think about what's been going on currently. What you could do for the employees. Yeah. Very nice.

S2: So I think that was it. Oh and we also communicate with them through email because we started doing everything by email initially. But then we saw that some people didn't go to their email that often, like barmen and people from the restaurant. They don't go to their email because they don't need to usually. So we started to do the WhatsApp groups because everyone has a phone. (IN2_Par.9)

S1: Great, thank you. So, how do you collect, insights for employer branding projects? Do you do like official internal and external research? Is there, for example, an employee survey or do you have like external market research? Are there exit interviews? Okay, I'll do one question at a time. Like is there an employee survey at your company?

S2: Like we collect for some actions that we do feedback, but for others, it's like more informal. Like we go to people that we meet during work, like, I'm walking to the kitchen, and I see someone and ask so how did you like it? Like, did you like the lunch and then they say yes. Usually. (IN2_Par.10)

S1: Nice.

S2: Sometimes we also go the formal way, like with other actions. For example, when we do trainings, we do that. We always send a survey through Google Forms. But when it's like this communication measures, we collect informal feedback. (IN2_Par.11)

S1: Okay. So it's more about getting a sentiment survey by just talking to people, engaging with the employees to get feedback and have internal responses.

S2: Exactly. Like one of our goals to start doing in everything that we do is to send a survey to everyone. That is like another step that we need to do to get there. Yeah. Probably right now. But I think that for some things it doesn't make sense. Like if we do a lunch it doesn't make sense for me to ask someone if they liked the lunch. (IN2_Par.12)

S1: Sure. Yeah. If the company wants to embrace, grow and connect, I believe, they need constructive, positive and negative, feedback. Very nice.

S2: Yeah. Definitely. (IN2_Par.13)

S1: Okay. Do you do something exit interviews? Like when someone decides to leave the company, are there exit interviews?

S2: Oh, yeah. The directors, they do exit interviews. But I would say that it's not like very formal thing, so it's something that we're already doing now. So probably like in last June or something we already started doing it last year with our trainees. Like we send a link to the trainees and then they have a survey. And we started this year, but now we're going to prepare everything to start doing that with the rest of the employees. Like, when people leave, the directors have a conversation with them and ask what went well, what went wrong and everything. So that they get an idea and show it to their superiors. But it's not like a formal thing, I would say. Like I'm not 100% sure on this but I would say this is the way that we do it. (IN2_Par.14)

S1: Okay, Very good. Do you do also external market research, for example online to help with your employer branding? Is there something like a social media analysis from the outside on your reputation? Do you consider the latest employer branding trends or is there something where you externally do competitive positioning, evaluate industry benchmarks, to have a better perspective?

S2: Like ourselves, for example me, I'm always searching online to know what the other companies, what they do, what the other hotels are doing. But I think just that's what we do. Like we check other hotels, but also other companies because sometimes there're good ideas there. So yeah. To get inspired. I do that a lot. Yeah I think it's always very important. (IN2_Par.15)

S1: Very nice. So, what are some criteria that you use to identify targeted talent? For example, is there a skill set for every position or what are the requirements if you draft something in an employer branding or in a recruitment context? Do you go like okay, you have to have those skills, the cultural fit, diversity and inclusion, career growth potential and so on. Like what are those criteria that you use to target the right talent and first identify which group you want to target.

S2: I would say that we don't have general like criteria, but I would say for the hotels, for example, that we have one, as people need to live near the hotel because the hotel is far from public transport. So we always try to communicate that, which is a common thing in every area that you go to work at the hotel, you need to be near Location B or have an own car. Not all of the people that work at the hotel have this condition, but we try to look for that in people because that is a way for us to retain people as well. Because if people are like from the city of Lisbon, they stay here for months and then they get tired of getting here every day. Having to wake up like super early and everything. So we try to hire people near to the working place location. And then I would say, our directors try to look with each person if they have the right cultural fit since this is a familiar business. They always try to look for the values of the company in everyone. So I would say that is a thing that. And every director talks about that and like we are all close. I would say it depends on the people. So I would say like familiarity, then teamwork and then honesty and everything like that. Good values which they try to look for in a person, a candidate. (IN2_Par.16)

S1: Also diversity and inclusion? Do you have those criteria of diversity, equity and inclusion?

S2: Yeah, we are pretty inclusive and we have a lot of diversity. Many different nationalities, but I don't know like the numbers. But like two years ago we also did for our Christmas party the theme Christmas Around the World. And we asked all of our different employees, from

different nationalities, to bring one food from their country. So we had a lot of different dishes, like I would say that we are a pretty diverse company. It's not that we especially look for that, but we are very open to receive everyone. We also did last year – I don't know if you know that project that is called Girl Mover – it's like a project with people from countries in Africa. Yeah I believe Angola or Mozambique. No, it was actually Mozambique. A girl that was Portuguese speaking. We work with them every year and we receive one of their students. And it was actually a pretty good experience. Like she stayed with us, and it was good. Yeah. And I also think we won some awards because of that. I don't not sure, but I think that we did. (IN2_Par.17)

S1: Yeah, I can imagine that it's always nice that when there are guests from around the world at the hotel it's nice to see the staff being from around the world and having like an international representation. So moving on to the design phase, how is the employer brand identity and image defined with your organization and especially within your corporate culture? You've already elaborated a little bit about that at the beginning, like what the three slogan words are. And you also said that there are some employee engagement initiatives, the company events you talked about. So is there some like digital platform internally apart from WhatsApp? But something for the employees to exchange messages internally, like an intranet maybe?

S2: No, we don't have that. (IN2_Par.18)

S1: Okay, alright. Do you have a recognition program, so like the best employee of the month or whatever?

S2: We had that, like we did every month like the employee of the month. But then we ended with that because people would get mad if it was always the same person. But it was that everyone voted, and it was that person every month was like the most popular, probably. So people got mad and we ended that. And now what we do, it's something we started doing about two years ago and we do it at the Christmas party. We always do the best colleague in all units that we have. So we do that once a year. (IN2_Par.19)

S1: Okay. So there are some rewards where you can vote to also recognize probably extra effort and they get a prize for winning.

S2: Yeah exactly, so it's more than a thank you. Oh and we also give people that are working with the group for 25 years, we also give them an award. Like a watch I guess or something for long-term commitment. (IN2_Par.20)

S1: Nice. Okay. So you already also talked a bit about this question but could you share more insights on the involvement of senior management in reviewing and shaping the employer brand during the design phase? You said already that you together with the manager and with senior management, you talk and they sometimes propose ideas for Employer Branding and everything is filtered through to you department. So do they ever partake in brainstorming or developing the key messages? How close is the connection? Can you just say a few sentences more there maybe?

S2: Yes. So I would say that from the start we think of everything, like we plan the actions that we want to do. We plan all the communication first in our department. (IN2_Par.21)

S1: Yeah. Okay.

S2: So every time we discuss our plan with the operations manager and sometimes he gives some inputs but like we work with that. But usually, I would say we do everything after that independently. Then we ask the manager and then we inform all the directors. We have a rule that we send them everything. And if they don't answer within the next 24 hours, it means that they're okay with that and we can go through with everything. Sometimes they say like, oh, we should do this, or we should do that. And then we change something. Regarding the brainstorming of ideas – it's my department, we decide everything and then we just need approval from everyone, basically. (IN2_Par.22)

S1: Okay, nice. So they have kind of a veto power in case they don't like it or they have other ideas.

S2: Yeah, true. (IN2_Par.23)

S1: Very nice. So now to the integration phase of employer branding. How does HR align the employer brand management system with people management policies and practices? So, how much is HR involved with you directly? Like, there's probably a separate HR team and how do they implement, for example, the three words that are like the key to your

employer brand identity? You mentioned that there is a system they use or are there like guidelines they distribute or brand ambassadors? Do they support LinkedIn, encouraging or even paying employees be a brand ambassador and comment in Company B's name or something like that?

S2: Okay. So I would say that we are separate. It's like the HR department does all the administrative parts, like the salary process, contracts and all that part like the formalities. And then we do the fun part. I'd say our departments are separate on this. But I would say that they're not involved in everything, like from our strategy, because they just contact the candidates when they're already in the group. So when the employees have the first day, they go to HR to sign the contract and to do like all that bureaucratic part. But after that, it's all with us. Like we do the welcoming session and like everything. So they're not that much involved in Employer Branding. Just on that part. (IN2_Par.24)

S1: So the operational stuff lies with them, all the administrative parts. But you can decide the Employer Branding input and the probably creative approach to the topic, how to really engage with the employees. So employee engagement would also lie with your department then?

S2: Right, we try to engage with the employees and encourage employee engagement like amongst them. (IN2_Par.25)

S1: Yes, very good. So you already spoke a bit about communication, but can you provide specific examples of how your organization integrates employer branding in its communication plan, like as a whole? Are there channels or tools used? You talked about LinkedIn for external comms, but maybe first talk about internal comms. So there are like WhatsApp groups. And there is mainly email still. Is there something internally now, an intranet or a newsletter?

S2: We have a newsletter now. We're like working on it actually. I talked about that with my boss today because we need to start because we used to have a newsletter. But then we didn't have time to do that because it takes a lot of time to write the newsletter every month. So we ended with that. So now we're trying to come up with a better idea to do it faster. And then

we have a board in every hotel where we put information because when people go to the canteen, they pass those boards and they see the information there are. (IN2_Par.26)

S1: Okay. So with posters or the latest news or?

S2: Yeah more the old ways on that part, because we also have a lot of old people so they don't use the phone a lot. So we try to do nice generational inclusivity. (IN2_Par.27)

S1: Yeah. That's very considerate actually. That's good because I think that's actually a huge challenge in many companies how to not kick out the old people but include the young more and keep both. Yeah. So that's very that's very challenging actually. And now looking to the outside, like to the external part of communication, do you have a career website on your homepage?

S2: Yeah. We have it's not like actually it's if you go see it, it's not up to date because we haven't changed it yet. So you don't have our new strategy with the three words that I was saying because we firstly we started like with three different words and then we changed everything. (IN2_Par.28)

S1: Okay. So, it's still a work in progress. Yeah. Do you use like job portals? Like, in LinkedIn jobs?

S2: We use something like that. Okay. And then we use SAPO Emprego. And then we use LinkedIn and Instagram. Yeah, we sometimes use Instagram. I forgot to tell you about that. But sometimes we use like our Instagram to do some employer branding as well. Recruiting more or less. So social media, this part is not with my department. And I hate that because we have a TikTok now that it's a little bit off and currently outsourced actually. So it kind of is an employer branding strategy but the commercial team does the TikTok ideas. Okay, so LinkedIn and Instagram mainly because that's what we do like on our department and our good ones. Okay. Yeah. (IN2_Par.29)

S1: Well, yes, I get it. And for internal purposes do you have like webinars or industry talks or something to foster growth or opportunities like do you invite speakers for example?

S2: Sometimes when we do our apprentices training and events. Like we do the training sessions and sometimes we invite external speakers. But yeah, I think from what we do, that's mainly it. (IN2_Par.30)

S1: Okay, nice. So now for the evaluation part of employer branding. How do you define the metrics to measure the success of employer branding initiatives? So do you have KPIs? You know those key performance indicators? Or others like the time to fill vacancy quota, conversion rates from applicants to hires. Or is there another way of measuring, like okay, we put that Employer Branding strategy or initiative into, it worked and now we have these many employees that are happy working for us.

S2: Like yeah, that's the part that we're working on, because I think sometimes this is not the norm in companies because we're doing all of this from the start. So, yeah. It wasn't a thing that we did. See, I think that mainly it's because it's a family owned company. So we don't have to do all the sourcing because it's well known and its reputation is good. Compared to bigger companies, I think we have like some different things that we do, mainly informally. And now we're starting to do Employer Branding in the formal way, with surveys and then KPIs and everything. But since it's all a process and we started doing this for real like one year ago, we want to do it better, but that takes a lot of time. And yeah, so now I'd say that we metric everything informally. I'd say like we have the data of how many employees stayed and how many employees left. But I think that information with is with HR, not with us, so I don't know that much. (IN2_Par.31)

S1: Okay, gotcha. Yeah. I think employer branding wasn't that popular at least ten or twenty years ago because like, everyone assumed that you just need a job, and you apply. Now the war for talent requires definitely a change in the industry and on the job market.

S2: I think the changing industry is a very recent thing. Like really and I would say maybe two, three years, at least here in Portugal. (IN2_Par.32)

S1: Yeah. But that makes sense then with your department that it doesn't have long standing strategies. Do you have to do reports for either management or the directors to showcase what you've done?

S2: We do, like at the end of the the year, we do always do a presentation for our general manager and also for our CEO. And in there we put what we did and what we want to do for the next year. And then they discuss everything. And I would say most of these metrics I don't know about because it's with the higher positions and manager. So they take care of that. So I'd say like my department, we don't use many metrics, but I'd say that that they evaluate what we send them in their own way. (IN2_Par.33)

S1: I get it like they're probably have an informal way of doing it, or it's more a gut feeling if it works, or it doesn't. But you're still working on probably the statistics behind that to know better, right?

S2: At the end of the year, the HR know how many employees stayed and how many employees left. I don't know that, but I'm pretty sure that they look at that. (IN2_Par.34)

S1: Interesting. So, like for that way of measuring, do you get the statistics from your social medias, like do you manage the accounts on your own?

S2: Yeah, that we have, but okay that is more with my boss, so I don't know precisely. But yeah, we manage social media, just social media. (IN2_Par.35)

S1: Thank you. So, the next question number, this is just more the cost benefit numbers, the return on investment, reduced turnover costs and so on. So if you're working on measures like that I think that'll work nicely. Since we already talked about that, I'll skip that question. So question number twelve, how does your organization review and communicate all the results with senior management? We kind of tapped onto that too, like with the report. And then like after every initiative you send through. And the second part is, what is the organization's long-term goal in an employer branding? Like, why do you want to be an employer of choice? Or what motivates the organization to do employer branding?

S2: Okay, so do you want me to also answer the first? I think we did the first one. We do like all the reports. Yeah, so I think we want to do it because of what I said earlier. We want to keep the employees safe with us because they themselves are happy working here and they think that it's a good place to work. And mostly in the hotel industry it's very difficult, with day and night shifts. And some departments are very physical work, for example, housekeeping. So I think we want to make the individual experience better even though the

work is not that good because probably it can be difficult to work in housekeeping. But if they're happy and we give them the right conditions to be, yeah, happier or more satisfied with their work so we can make their life better. (IN2_Par.36)

S1: So under every circumstance, you want to try to get the best possible outcome in job satisfaction, that they feel valued even in those jobs.

S2: And I would say that we want to be a good employer brand for everyone. Also from the outside for people to look at our group as a good employer brand. (IN2_Par.37)

S1: Yeah. So not just like the product or consumer brand, but also like the employer brand.

S2: Yeah, I think that is a difficult thing to do in the hotel industry. I don't think that people generally look at like hotels and think they're a good place to work in. They see if they have a lot of clients or not. Like that the whole idea is like to have as many clients as you can. But at the same time, it's just clients. If you have good people working for you it's like a circle. With good employees, clients will be happier and then the organization will win. So it's like a correlation with everything else. (IN2_Par.38)

S1: That's true. So it's kind of an investment if you care about the employees' education and training this in turn probably leads to happier guests. When you have that, it's like a win-win.

S2: You have happier customers, and you also have happier employees. So I would say it kind of works the both ways. (IN2_Par.39)

S1: Okay, I get it. Very nice. So question number thirteen, you've also already tapped in that little bit. So this is the broadest question actually, to better understand employer branding as a whole at your company. Can you maybe share a case where you implemented a successful employer branding campaign, for example, one month you decided to do something special? What was the name of the campaign? What were the goals, the audience, the channels? Like when you would start something for a month or maybe you remember something in the past where you'd say that was successful and you remember that one campaign and its specifics.

S2: Let me think. Maybe the Christmas party can count as such? (IN2_Par.40)

S1: Yeah, maybe the first one you did.

S2: I'm thinking about that one. Yeah, I think I would say that it's an employer branding strategy. It started sometime before, when we started the Christmas party planning. Everything had to be sketched out. We did this as our first big I'd say campaign internally, like internal employee engagement action. Like since we started the department because I would say that was the first big thing that we did. And how I said earlier, we did the Christmas around the world theme, and we had a lot of initiatives that we did besides having all the food from different countries. We did like a themed party at the same time. Besides around the world, all the tables had a Portuguese band. So when everyone was at the dinner, we put a song from a Portuguese band. Yeah, we put the speaker on the table and then that table had to get up and dance. So we did a very Portuguese thing. And then we also did bingo, you know, like the game. And then we did a pretty great party I would say. And people were very happy because the other parties were just with a typical welcome drink. Then you had the dinner and then you had like the dance party. So always the same. And when we started with this apartment, we did like the first big party for years as before they never had that party. So I think it was like our first big thing. (IN2_Par.41)

S1: Yeah. Okay.

S2: I can try and think about because the others, I think it was like small things that it had impact. Like for example, on International Woman's Day, we did a self-defense class. Yeah, that was nice. (IN2_Par.42)

S1: Oh wow, really nice idea.

S2: And all the women went, well not all, because sometimes we have a lot of people coming. Sometimes we don't have that much. But this time we had like 30 women, in the class. And they enjoyed it a lot because it was a thing that you don't always get the chance to do. So I think that was good too. (IN2_Par.43)

S1: Very good. Yeah. No, that works perfectly as an example. Okay moving on to diversity, equity and inclusion that focus on internal employer branding. So question number 14. Since my study will cover employer branding targeted at master's students, especially international

master's students, do you at all like hire master's students or trainees, for example? Are there master's students working at Company B or not?

S2: We actually had one Master student this year for the events. But I would say they are mostly from Bachelor level okay. (IN2_Par.44)

S1: Mostly bachelor okay. And mostly Portuguese or not?

S2: Yes. But this year we're going to have a Spanish girl in the offices. And I don't think that we had that much like foreign students before. I'm trying to think because maybe with the internships. But not that much. Just from one year ago when we bought the new hotel that we have. And that also has accommodation for employees that we don't have here. And since we are a little bit far from everything people didn't have any here. Okay. For example, that Spanish girl is staying in our accommodation and then like the other girl from the program Girl Move that I talked to you about stayed there too. So now we have that option, which I think it's much better for international people coming here in the future. (IN2_Par.45)

S1: Yeah, okay. Do you offer also English speaking jobs or is Portuguese required because it's a Portuguese company? Or theoretically, if you only can do small talk in Portuguese but speak fluently English, could you apply to the group or would your department target them at all?

S2: I'm trying to think if we have someone that don't speak Portuguese, like we have a lot of people that don't speak Portuguese, but they're mostly on the like housekeeping team or jobs that are not customer related. Because we have a lot of like foreign clients. But at the same time, we are also Portuguese. So it's a requirement. As we can't have someone going to the table at the restaurant who doesn't know how to speak Portuguese, but I would say, like, I'm trying to think and I'm pretty sure that we have someone that don't speak or just little. But I'm not sure. Okay. I would say that it's a difficult industry for students that don't speak Portuguese. Though I guess for like Brazilians, Angolan and Mozambique it's much easier. (IN2_Par.46)

S1: Okay.

S2: Yeah. We have Portuguese clients and for the office jobs as well, probably because our internal communication is all in Portuguese so it's not like, yeah, easy. But sometimes we translate information to English. Like the most important communication we translate it to English because we, as I said, we have a lot of foreign employees. So we try to do that sometimes. Honestly, we just forget a lot because internally we're always doing everything in Portuguese. But externally, everything in English because we communicate everything in English on Instagram and everything. But besides that, we all do it in Portuguese. So that's what I said to you. We're not that much an employer for students or employees without Portuguese because in almost all positions, you need to contact Portuguese clients. Yeah, that part is kind of difficult. (IN2_Par.47)

S1: So, like you said overall about 500 employees within the group or what would you say?

S2: Yeah around 500. (IN2_Par.48)

S1: Okay. How many are, like what would say is the Portuguese share. And what is the international share. Can you like roughly say this.

S2: Let me think. Okay, I would say, two thirds' Portuguese and like one third international. (IN2_Par.49)

S1: Okay, very good. So last question, anything else you would like to add in terms of employer branding or. Is there, anything I haven't asked?

S2: You want me to say anything else? Because, no I don't think I have like anything to add. (IN2_Par.50)

S1: Sure, that's alright, I actually asked so many questions. I think it was super interesting, thank you.

Interview Transcript No. 3

S1: Hello Person C. Thank you again for taking the time to do this interview with me. It'll probably take about 30 to 40 minutes. For your information, all guiding questions all based

on the employer branding roadmap by the author Brett Minchington. I'm not sure if you're familiar with his studies?

S2: Sure, seems like a very interesting topic. And no, I don't think so. (IN3_Par.1)

S1: Okay. So, it's a semi-structured interview, which means that you can also provide additional information, or there might be some other follow-up questions from my side. However you like. And if you don't want to answer a question or want to skip it, you can just let me know. You can interrupt at any time. And, of course, everything you say is confidential, as you stated in the consent form. To start, if it's okay with you, could you please present yourself very quickly? What's your name? Your job title and the company you're working at? And how many years of experience you have in employer branding?

S2: Hi, I'm Person C. I'm currently an internal comms and employer branding expert at Company C here in Lisbon. And I started working in employer branding in 2018. I think it will be six years now. But 10 to 11 years of experience, in general. (IN3_Par.2)

S1: Okay. Perfect. Thank you. Looking at your projects currently, what is your main focus regarding employer branding at Company C?

S2: So, this is also something that, I always advocate, and I always mention everywhere that I go, is that for me, employer branding has two sides. It has an external side and an internal. I've always worked more externally. So more on the attraction parts. And the marketing and everything here at Company C. But I'm actually very, very happy to now be working on a more internal part of employer branding. It's more about the employee experience. However, I overview the full employee lifecycle from the first moment that someone hears about the company until the moment that they leave. (IN3_Par.3)

S1: Meaning that the focus is on, talent retention, rather than attraction currently in your work.

S2: Yes, correct. Talent retention and engagement. (IN3_Par.4)

S1: Okay. Very nice. Are there, currently any messages, any new employee engagement initiatives that are being developed within that main employer branding project?

S2: Right now, we are working on, like specifically in employer branding, we are working on a big project already for more than a year. I feel like almost two years now, a year and a half, I guess. We have mapped our personas that we will be using not only externally but also internally as well. They are motivational personas instead of like the typical ones where you see per role or per department. For us it's more about motivation. And we will use those personas externally to attract people and segment our communication, but also internally to understand how well we hope that this is possible. But, the goal to use the personas internally is to understand how those personas are distributed, amongst the teams, and use that to understand if there is a specific profile matching each persona. Which, based on focus groups, we can already tell there is, and also understand which teams are missing which type of persona. So that when we track people for certain job positions, then we already attract those specific personas. So this is one part of the project. And then the other part of the project is that we've mapped the entire employee life cycle. That's the entire journey, as I was saying, from the first moment that people hear about the company until the moment that they leave, become alumni or even return to the company. And right now, we are organizing workshops with key teams within the company that are directly involved with those touchpoints within the employee life cycle to try to map more in-depth, journey. So now, rather recently, we had a workshop to map the full candidate experience. So the candidate journey, and trying to find opportunities of improvement. (IN3_Par.5)

S1: Very interesting. It seems like a very narrow tracking of, how the employee, passes through the different steps and cycles within the company. That's very good to know. Thank you. So, the second question is, since you mentioned already the different teams and looking into where might a position needed to be filled, so which are the key stakeholders involved in the development, approval and execution of the employer branding initiative? Is it from senior leadership all the way to, finance, legal, the CSR team, to you, human resources, or maybe overlapping teams. Who's involved in developing the employer branding approach?

S2: We have four main groups. It's the People Experience and Rewards, which is one of the teams I'm part of, and we are the owners of employer branding in a way. But then we call it our stakeholders. Recruitment or talent acquisition. Talent development as well. So learning and development and communications. We have a communications team, where I'm also part of that team. So I basically work in two teams. I work in the people experience and in

communication. Those are also our stakeholders for an employer branding campaign. And then we have what we call contributors, which are people that are not involved in the strategy of employer branding, but they are our, yeah, helpers in a way. They actually implement what we say. For example, we have sometimes projects where we need the teams or the managers or the communities that we have at the company to reinforce certain messages or ideas or whatever. And we also have office managers, and they implement a lot of our actions as well as employer branding actions. (IN3_Par.6)

S1: Okay, very good. So they put into practice the guidelines and everything you initiate. You mentioned the communications team. Is there, a differentiated team for internal and external communication? I believe you work, as your LinkedIn profile says more in internal comms. Is that a separate one or is it one team that works on both ends?

S2: It's one team that works on both, but we have specific people for each type of communication. (IN3_Par.7)

S1: Okay. Thank you. So that was part of the first phase. Now the second one, that is in the initial stages of the concept phase, how does your organization define the scope of its employer branding projects? I think we actually tapped a bit on that part already. Are there analyses done? For example, a basic SWOT analysis? And how often do you initiate a new employer branding project? So first it'd be great to know about the analysis part and then maybe regarding the frequency, if you could dive a bit into that.

S2: Sure, I did a SWOT analysis. Because I did it like every year. Well actually I didn't do one last year. I did it only the first year that I joined the company. And I did it also for this year as well. The employer branding strategy for the year, I included indeed the SWOT analysis, the current situation at the company, opportunities, risks and everything. And then I planned, not only the goals for the year, but also the goals of like more years. I defined like three stages for employer branding in the long term and then per year what we need to achieve to get there. (IN3_Par.8)

S1: So how long are the long term planning goals? Is that a 3 or 5 year cycle or does that depend on the certain project?

S2: It depends. But I think it's about 3 to 5 years. (IN3_Par.9)

S1: Okay. Very good. Thank you. So, you mentioned already that you have for the life cycle tracking journey different focus groups. Are there additionally also, in order to conduct internal and external research, like general employee surveys or is there other external market research done?

S2: Most of the research that we did so far, it's internal also because, with my previous experience, this is a project that I already did in two companies before. I used also the knowledge that I gained from that time. But this part was mostly internal. But we do have other things that are external. But I'm not really involved in that. (IN3_Par.10)

S1: Okay. Very nice. Can you elaborate a bit more on the criteria used to identify the targeted talent? You said, there is, like a persona you create. For the alignment and regarding the required skill set for a position, do you recruit with that persona in mind, or in general, look more on the cultural fit or the diversity, equity and inclusion aspect? For example, long term career growth potential or general employability skills. Like where is your focus in terms of identifying targeted talent?

S2: The personas are still not being used. They're still being developed. So hopefully either at the end of this quarter or the next, we will be able to start using them. But, right now, the way that we target people is, well, it's very organic, to be honest. We do have a strong social media and a strong external communications that basically do all of the work. Then after all of that communication that attracts the people that we are looking for, then it moves on to the talent acquisition team to do all of the processes. And indeed, what we measure is based on our values. Yes, as a way to conduct, more or less, or guide the interviews and to understand if people match more or less the company values. And then, of course, we have a huge focus on diversity. But it is important to say that it's not about quotas or anything. It's just something that we really, really, really value. So we try not to be biased. (IN3_Par.11)

S1: Thank you. Yeah, that was already very detailed information. So, now moving on to the design phase. How is the employer brand identity and image defined within your organization? And especially a corporate culture? You mentioned already that you look for a person that aligns with your values. What is the employer brand identity and image? Do you have a specific, I don't know, slogan or logo that is associated with employer brand and not the product or service brand of Company C?

S2: We are, well, in a way, our own company. But we don't have different types of communication. We are a subsidiary of Parent Company C, which means that we work solely for them, all our products and services we sell to them. So we don't have services that we sell externally, which means that all of our communication is like at Parent Company C. It's just us. We just sell the company. In terms of specific communication, design, branding or anything. We are very consistent in the sense of that we try to be as real or at least as consistent as we are internally, externally as well. That's why we use our values as our EVP's, because they are very important to us internally. So we also use them as our EVP's externally. In terms of a slogan, we don't have one yet. It's actually a project that I will be developing this quarter. Which is our value proposition, which will be, more or less just a tagline, of who we are as a company. And then design wise, it's the same. It's our brand. It's the same as our brand design internally. We use for consistency, the same design externally. (IN3_Par.12)

S1: Okay. Very nice, thank you. Are there, regarding the elements you just mentioned, are there any employee engagement initiatives or company events, where this is being portrayed internally?

S2: What do you mean? Sorry, I didn't understand that question. Could you please rephrase? (IN3_Par.13)

S1: Sorry. Of course, I'm going to rephrase. So my question is about the employer brand identity, where it's lived in the company. Are there any employee engagement initiatives, digital platforms or advocacy programs for employees to engage with the corporate culture and the employer brand identity internally? Is there something organized by your department or any others?

S2: Yeah, many. Employee engagement is really important at our company and culture as well. So we are a very tight, very tight, tight, tight company. We have many initiatives. I think maybe one that I can mention, just for you also to have an idea of how we connect. Everything is based on our values that we've updated last year. And what we did to make sure that they were truly lived within the company, and not just words on a wall, is that we created a big launch campaign where we played, we created this game. It was amazing, actually, and everyone had a lot of fun to memorize the values, to understand how the values

are to be used. So we have the values, but then per value, we have behaviors attached to each value so that people understand what they mean. And then, besides that, we've made sure that in our performance review we analyze how everyone is following the values. So our performance review is just that. It's our five values collaboration, customer-centric, excellence, impact and tribe. Or actually we only measure four. Okay. Where people are reviewed on their performance per value in a certain way. And then we also use it on the on recruitment as well as I mentioned previously. (IN3_Par.14)

S1: Okay. Interesting. So the values have a direct behavioral association that's attached to that. That's actually lived corporate culture. Amazing. So the next question would be, how much is senior management involved in the final part of reviewing and shaping the employer brand during the design phase? Are they involved in any way directly, proposing any EVP's or developing key messages? Or is it mostly your team? As you already mentioned a bit earlier, but now with specific focus on senior management. Can you share something there?

S2: So senior managers there are very involved. If not directly within the development of the projects, they validate it at the end. So that's why also the personas are still not being used, because I still need a final round of validation from senior leadership. But for the rest, like for example the values, they were involved in the workshops to define the values. It's something that they are also very passionate about and that they take seriously as well. So they actually want to be involved. (IN3_Par.15)

S1: Okay, good. Thank you. So now, to the integration phase. How does HR align the employer brand management system with people management policies and practices? I believe you said there is a certain department that looks into it – I think it was the office managers – and that employ the employer brand like that? Do you employ a brand advocacy internally? Is that correct?

S2: Yeah. So employer branding at the company is a bit different. We don't have a team directly working with employer branding. It's not just me, but the company is. So how do I say it? Employer branding is intrinsic within the company. A lot of teams are doing it without realizing it. Okay. So, for example, the office managers, they do a lot of initiative engagement initiatives on inclusion and belonging. So that's why I also work very closely with them. Okay. And I will also be doing a workshop with them to. Yeah, to also help them

understand their parts more in depth within the employee life cycle. Then we have learning and development, which has a big, big, big chunk of internal employer branding since career growth is one of the main reasons why people leave the company. And then we have other communities, but I think this is more specific to our company, so I'm not entirely sure how much I can share about that. (IN3_Par.16)

S1: Of course. Don't worry. That's already very helpful. So you already mentioned a bit about communications and that you use social media. Could you provide maybe an example of how your organization integrates employer branding into its communication plan overall? So which channels and tools do you use and why? And, if possible, to split the information between internal and external.

S2: So externally, to be honest, I'm not part of the communications team. But I collaborate a lot with them. And in terms of employer branding, I don't track it with them because they do such an amazing job that it's wrong for me to just go there and say this is employer branding. Yeah, it makes no sense. What they are already doing is employer branding. And basically, what we defined for employer branding is more a strategy of communication throughout the year. How we want to organize the different parts of the marketing part in the employer branding for attraction. Then in terms of channels, externally we only use 3 or 4 if I'm not mistaken. It's LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube. And then of course we have our websites. And internally we have the typical ones. I believe we have our intranet, teams, email and then confluence. (IN3_Par.17)

S1: Okay. Yeah. Do you have something like a newsletter or is that too old school? I'm not sure if you have company news, for example.

S2: We have weekly updates for all employees. (IN3_Par.18)

S1: Okay. Very nice. What about career website or job portals, do you use them? Like, I don't know, Indeed or LinkedIn jobs, like, there are several ones.

S2: So for the job portal, we use Recruit. And then, yeah, of course, we use, kununu in Germany for reviews but not for recruitment. It's just for company reviews. And the Teamlyzer in Portugal. (IN3_Par.19)

S1: Okay. Thank you very much. How does your HR define metrics to measure the success of employer branding initiatives? Do you have any KPIs that you use or other measures, for example, conversion rates from applicants to hires or time to fill vacancies? Could you talk a bit about the measures in place, to have a better understanding of the success of employer branding initiatives?

S2: Yeah. So right now, the company, has been going through a lot of changes, which means that now we also changed a lot in the ways that we track things. (IN3_Par.20)

S1: Okay.

S2: So in terms of metrics, a lot of the metrics are still being defined also because of the employee life cycle. It's still quite recent. I'm still in the process of defining the overall metrics to measure its success. (IN3_Par.21)

S1: Okay. Thank you. Do you also do something like social media monitoring or an online sentiment analysis regarding the employer brand?

S2: Not for the employer brand per se, but we do social media monitoring in terms of like a general very in-depth one, yes. (IN3_Par.22)

S1: Okay, thank you. Do you also have a calculation on the ROI, like return on investment? Is there something where you compare the costs to benefits like in hard numbers, facts, statistics or where you have a presentation or a report to senior management, to understand which measure leads to which outcome?

S2: From my side no, but I believe that in a more in depth from a recruitment and other parts of the organization. I believe that they have something in place, but I don't have access to it. (IN3_Par.23)

S1: Okay. Thank you. So how does your organization, review and communicate the results of employer branding initiatives with senior management? And what is the organization's long term goal in employer branding? So that's actually two questions in one. So let me rephrase the first one. Do you report directly to someone from senior management and who would that be? And is it like a regular presentation or how does that work?

S2: Yeah, I do reports. I have two managers in a way, because of my two teams internal communication and employer branding. And I do report to both of them the results from each project and the ongoing state of the project. It's not a presentation per se unless there is like a big project that I need to show to the managers. Actually, tomorrow I do have a presentation to the HR circle. (IN3_Par.24)

S1: Okay. Thank you. Is there some aspect as what Company C wants to be known for as an employer of choice. What makes it different than other employers? Is there something specific that you pursue?

S2: That is a fun question because every time we ask that to our employees, we call them Company C'ler, they always answer the exact same thing, which is people. Okay, so we do agree with that. Our people are the most important thing, but indeed we have a lot of flexibility as well. But now when we define the value proposition, that's where we will solidify exactly what makes us different. (IN3_Par.25)

S1: Okay. Perfect. So it's still an ongoing process here. So, I'm not sure how much detail you can provide there also due to confidentiality, but to better understand employer branding at your company, is there a case or a certain campaign that you could share with me? Like the entire process, from the goals, the audience and the channels employed. I don't know if you can speak a bit about that. Maybe a certain campaigns has had much success.

S2: I think the biggest that was really very successful, it came actually from a colleague of mine in comms. (IN3_Par.25)

S1: Okay.

S2: And you can find it on YouTube. It's called Campaign Name C. And it's, it's a set of videos focusing on different types of diversity. So we have topics like neurodivergence, mental health, LGBTQ and we have another one that I cannot remember anymore. But it was a huge success both internally and externally. And we are going to the second season now. (IN3_Par.26)

S1: Okay. Wow. Thank you. I'll look it up and then I can include it. Perfect. So now to the focus of this investigative research actually, it's the target group of students. You've already

mentioned in our exchange on LinkedIn that you have a summer internship for technology students. Could you speak a bit about that and how that works? And who exactly are you targeting there?

S2: Yeah, of course. So, we have summer internships every summer. It's like three months, if I'm not mistaken. And it's open, if I'm not mistaken, from the second year of university I believe. And last year we had, I think it was 15 or 16 interns. This year we won't have as many because it's not our focus for recruitment for recruiting this year. But we had like developers and data analytics graduates at least last year. (IN3_Par.27)

S1: Okay. Nice. Do you have a specific university or faculty in mind or is it just open to anyone to apply?

S2: It's open to anyone. Although we have partnership with Técnico and Universidade do Minho. (IN3_Par.28)

S1: Okay. Thank you. So all are those internships in English or Portuguese language?

S2: The official communication language at Company C is English, so they do need to know how to speak English. (IN3_Par.29)

S1: Okay, perfect. So that is actually very interesting since, if it's not mandatory to speak perfect Portuguese, I guess the audience is a bit bigger. I mean the group of people who can apply. Do you specifically target also international students that do a Master's here in Portugal at different universities in those fields, or is it more the general audience of programs like the summer internship?

S2: Yeah, it's in general. So if there are students from abroad studying here, they can they can apply here. (IN3_Par.30)

S1: Okay. Do you happen to know, more or less, how many international and non-Portuguese colleagues are working at Company C compared to how many Portuguese? Like the ratio, if possible?

S2: I used to know the ratio. Now I don't know, but we have around 40ish nationalities at Company C. (IN3_Par.31)

S1: Okay. Wow. So a very diverse team. Okay. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add? We're actually at the end of the interview already. Anything you'd like to add in regard to employer branding that I haven't asked already?

S2: Oka, so one of the things that I really like about employer branding at Company C, at least compared to how I used to do employer branding in other companies, is that it was all in one person and then you had to communicate. Before you had to push employer branding, really push it throughout the company. Here it is so intrinsic, as I mentioned before. Yes. That's quite helpful because I don't know everything. I don't, at least in depth, and it's great to have stakeholders who are doing an amazing job in their respective areas. (IN3_Par.32)

S1: That's so nice that it's, as you mentioned, about the people and it's like, not like a one man show and trying to or one woman showing your, your case to try to push that topic because I believe, I'm not sure if you would agree, that employer branding is rather a newer approach too. Now the employer also has to so argue why, why it's great to work for them. I don't know if you'd argue also that it's rather a newer and not that in-depth explored like for decades. What would you say?

S2: Yeah. I mean, employer branding has been around for many decades. I think it was coined in 2011 but it has been around for many years. But from the conferences that I go to and the conversations that I have, I do feel that employer branding is evolving more and more, especially with Covid. I think it gave a huge push to employer branding. But I do feel that it's still not yet to its full potential, especially because we always hear about attraction and attraction and attraction. But employer branding is so much more than that. But I think it's growing. I can see a lot of importance given to it. (IN3_Par.33)

S1: Very nice. And I agree on that. I've already conducted several interviews and done lots of research. So it's very interesting to understand how much more awareness there is. Also at the beginning, I feel like if I'd asked maybe 5 or 10 years ago, people wouldn't naturally know what the term employer branding actually means. Thank you for your time to do this interview with me.

Interview Transcript No. 4

S1: So thank you very much. I'll start the recording now, if I may, and I'll be doing the interview based on the author Brett Minchington and his model of employer branding roadmap. I'm not sure if you heard of it. It sorts the employer branding process in four phases, which is the concept phase, the design phase, the integration phase and the evaluation phase. And this is more or less how I structured my interview guide. So, to start, I would like you to tell me your name, age, job title and company and how many years of experience you have in employer branding just as an introduction.

S2: Okay, so my name is Person D. I work at Company D. I'm 39 years old. My job title is employer branding and talent sourcing analytics senior manager. And I've worked in in employer branding since 2020. (IN4_Par.1)

S1: Okay. Very nice. Since when are you at Company D?

S2: Since 2011. So I graduated later than then, but my academic background is in civil engineering, so nothing related to HR. And then later I applied to the training program and I joined the company. (IN4_Par.2)

S1: Okay. Very interesting. So now regarding the employer brand project and scope, what is the current focus in Employer Branding or a project that's currently ongoing, where you could, maybe, tell me something about? And is it focused on external or internal employer branding?

S2: A bit of both actually. So, maybe I started a bit earlier, further back. Yes. So we first started looking more attentively to employer branding in 2018 when we partnered with Universum. And so we did an internal, a global survey in the company, to understand what were the drivers, what was the perception of our employees? And also from externally, what was the perception of our brand as an employer? And so from that study, we had some insights and we developed our employer value proposition. This employer value proposition was revised and rewritten in 2020. So I was already in that project with an external agency. And so we defined the pillars for Company D in 2020. So from that we also developed the visual identity of the employer brands. So, that's where we started to formalize or at least establish in stone what the position was. Okay. So this has been a work in development, a

project that's being developed. We have the pillars on our website. And so they exist externally and also internally. In terms of big projects at the moment, externally, we are defining the employer brand identity and narrative for the end talent, the target group. So we know that we are very focused on internal developments here at Company D. And the people usually are directors and people at higher positions. They have grown internally. And so the biggest mass recruitment that we have for structural positions is through the talent programs. Graduate programs. And so we are redefining the way that we communicate with this target. Because just to give you an example, up to this point, we have several programs. And each program had its own identity. They were not very related. And so what we are doing now, we are standardizing a bit and making sure that they are more cohesive, more related with each other so that we have a stronger presence for the start. And so this is what we're doing externally. So this is more in terms of narrative and visual identity. But we have also, in the past year and a half, we have been establishing protocols, formal protocols with universities to deepen our connection with academia. And so we do this related to attraction, obviously. But we don't just do job fairs and classes. We also do project based learning. We do a lot of initiatives with and in universities. And also, for example, I don't know how much you know about us, but for example, we have started and opened some stores and some more technological stores in some universities such as Técnico and Nova. (IN4_Par.3)

S1: So that's that sounds like a huge, huge focus on student attraction through universities. So, may I ask which universities specifically you have a cooperation with?

S2: Many. So I cannot say precisely. We have protocols. So I'm just talking about the Portuguese reality because we are present in many countries. But because we attract locally, we operate locally as well. We have a lot of protocols, like we have one with Católica. We are establishing a more formal one now. We have already some informal protocols and we have a partnership that we have had it for many years okay. Not only for student attraction but also, for example, in executive education. But we are formalizing this. And we have this with Nova SBE, sb with Nova IMS, with Técnico and with a lot of universities outside of Lisbon as well. Yeah. (IN4_Par.4)

S1: Okay, so all across the country. Because I'm looking specifically at Portuguese universities and academia and how employer branding is done like in cooperation with the companies. So you said that you're doing job fairs. You're doing classes. I saw on your

website that you're having students who are like ambassadors for Company D in the universities. Can you tell me a bit more about that, how that works and why you chose to employ that?

S2: Yeah. So the idea behind the program is that, you know, we believe that we're in the social media generation, you know. We think what your peers will say is much more valued by students. And so what we have, is that we, every year, we recruit a group of students from the universities that we feel make sense to us in terms of attraction. And so there's no contract but it is a completely informal relationship. They become our ambassadors for that year within their campus. They help us, you know, to be closer to the campus. They are given some challenges that they have to fulfill within the year. And every month, we provide a development initiative for them, either just a visit to the business, or talks, workshops, etc.. And so we accompany them through their studies from October to May, every month. We are with them, but we continue to speak not only on a particular day, but throughout the year. And we give them challenges. They can win prizes. (IN4_Par.5)

S1: Very nice. And so yeah, they're expected to also then apply at the company or is there a certain standard route to be recruited for the ambassadors? Is it usually the case that they then later work for Company D, or is it rather an exception? What would you say?

S2: It depends a bit. So to give you an example, this year we started with around 39 campus ambassadors at the beginning of the year. You know usually we lose some. It's normal. Some of them don't show up as much. And so we ended the year with around 25. And of those 25, two of them will probably integrate into the summer internship program. One of them actually had a fast track access. So the one that stood out the most in terms of the challenges that we set throughout the year because he, it was a boy, he received a fast track access to the summer internship program for the interview phase. And we have another one that applied and that joined that phase too. Others applied too, but it didn't go through to the end. But usually, you know, what we find is that they at the end of the year, the student ambassadors are much more engaged with the brand. They become natural ambassadors from that point onwards and throughout the year. And many of them wish to integrate into the company because they gained knowledge about us, that otherwise they wouldn't. And there's a lot of what we do that they relate to. And so they end up applying later on. (IN4_Par.6)

S1: Okay, nice. Very interesting. May I also ask about the summer internship? You said and I saw on your website that there's a trainee program and there're like different graduate and student programs. Could you maybe name them and explain one sentence about it so that I can, like, differentiate between them?

S2: Okay, so the campus ambassadors I told you is like an informal relationship. And we just, you know, it's what we say is that you can know us, but still continue your studies and it's not a formal relationship in any way. The summer internship is a two month experience for those that want to seize their summer and learn a bit more and have a first professional experience. And in this particular sense, there is already a work contract, there's a payment, so there's a salary etc. The trainee program is for the people that want to start working with us after graduation. But we also have another program that is not yet on the website, separate for people that want to start working. We have two programs. One of them is on the website for people that are finishing their bachelor degree and do not want to continue to the master's degree. We have a professional internship program. Okay, so it's not on the website because we had a proof of concept this year. We always had a lot of interns, but it was not very structured. So we created a program for it to be more structured. And so that one is for bachelor graduates and then for master graduates, we have the trainee program. That is a bit of a difference. While the professional internship program is for people that want to have a first professional experience in their area or field of study, the training program is for people that want to build a career at Company D. And it's an acceleration program for future leaders. And it's something where you can end up doing something very different from what you studied. And you have to be comfortable with that idea. (IN4_Par.7)

S1: Okay, thank you. That sounds really interesting. Especially the information that there is something that's been recently approved, the professional internship program, you said. Do you know when it's due to launch? If it goes through all the internal checks, when will be the first round of interns for that?

S2: I think probably September. (IN4_Par.8)

S1: Yeah. Okay. Very nice. So now may I ask some general questions on your employer branding approach at Company D. Who's actually involved with that at Company D? Like, which departments are involved in the development of employer branding initiatives? Is it

mainly you with your department or are there others like HR, marketing, corporate communication, legal?

S2: Yeah. So, in some companies the employer branding is a branch of marketing. In other companies it's a branch of HR. At Company D, we are within the HR structure. And we belong to the Portugal structure of Company D because – I'm not sure how deep is your knowledge about us – but we are a multi-brand company operating internationally. So in Portugal we have Subcompany D1 and Subcompany D2. Also agrobusiness. So what we do is that Company D is the employer for the individual employer brands. For the young talent. And so what we do is within this structure in a more conceptual way employer branding within the team, which is distributed by many people at the brands, like at Subcompany D1. So I personally do the more conceptual side of employer branding in the sense that I define the narrative, our positioning, where we want to be, who we want to attract, etc. Then we have a team member that does the academic partnerships that I was telling you about. She does the protocols; she has the attraction part and she also manages the company's ambassadors. Last year I was doing part of that. This year we restructured the team and she's doing that. You know, I'm the conceptual phase and she's more on the practical phase of putting things forward. Yeah. And then we have a talent programs team and also a recruitment team. All of us participate in events within academia. (IN4_Par.9)

S1: Okay. How many people in total do you think work on employer branding at Company D within Portugal? Do you have like more or less a number, how big the team is with everyone involved?

S2: Around 20 people. Yeah, more or less. But then, you know, not always everyone participates, you know, they're not responsible for it all. But everyone is engaged in it somehow. And also we have a lot of people from the business unit as well. So because we also do project based learning, we have people in the business part involved and they are accompanying projects from those protocols with students. So there's a lot of people involved. But directly responsible or people that actually are doing the employer branding, we are five people. (IN4_Par.10)

S1: Okay. Five people are mainly involved. Okay, I understand.

S2: But then the companies have their own employer branding as well. (IN4_Par.11)

S1: Alright, okay. So you're doing the overhead structure and then there are like individual teams of employer branding at Subcompany D1 and others.

S2: Yes. Correct. (IN4_Par.12)

S1: Okay. If you're starting a new employer branding initiative, you said that you're more in the conceptual phase writing the concepts etc., what are some typical first steps? How do you brainstorm? Do you do analyses like the typical SWOT analysis? Is there a workflow structure in place? Could you tell me about the start of a new initiative?

S2: I think it depends. You know, I think before the initiative there's a problem to solve or needs that you identify. And so I think that's the first stage. What are we lacking. Where we are not being so effective okay. What do we want to achieve and how can we get there. So I think the first thing is establishing what you want to achieve. What's the problem or what's the goal from that you devise the strategy of how you can reach that goal. And so that's mainly how we work. So if I have the goal of being better at the employer rankings or being more attractive to a certain target group or for a certain program, that's where I come from. That are my first steps establishing that. And then I go from there and then it depends a bit. So if we're talking about an attraction campaign, for example, we have to know very well the target. We have to define personas. We have to understand where the best channels are. So what are the drivers for them and then move from there. It depends a bit on the initiative, you know. Okay, to your question I think the first step is establishing a goal or problem and then moving on from there and defining how we want to achieve it, who is involved. You know, okay. (IN4_Par.13)

S1: I understand. How do you define the target group of each initiative? Is it also based on the vacancies within the company or a new group of people you want to attract for a certain area or department? Do you have personas or something? I'm not sure if you work with that sometimes.

S2: Sometimes we do that, yes, but usually it stems from business needs. So I'll give you an example that is transversal to many companies. Okay. So all the companies are fighting for tech, data and IT profiles. Right. Because data is the new currency. And so everyone is

looking for those data talents. So that comes from a business needs. So the business needs create those profiles. So we as employer branding need to learn or know how to reach them. And so that's how you define the targets at first. You know, it's the business that tells you what targets you need. And then you characterize those targets into personas for your attraction purposes. But the first step is what does the business need? And that's how employer branding should work because we don't work disconnected from the business. We work for the business, for the company. So it's all about where the business is going and what the company needs. That is the first step to find the target we want to attract. And then we've characterized that target according to personas. (IN4_Par.14)

S1: Got it. Do you also conduct internal research among employees, for example? To improve employer branding initiatives? Do you have, I don't know, a sentiment survey or something like that in place?

S2: So, yes we have something that happens every three years or less, which is the employee engagement survey that gives us some insights on the employer brands, and temperature inside. But for example, for campaigns and now for this project in particular, we are defining the employer brand for the talent, we are conducting internal focus groups with the people that we attracted in the last few years. So they give us insights onto why they chose our company, what keeps them from not leaving the company so that we can look at those insights and broadcast them externally so that other people can relate to them, and maybe join the company as well. So yes, we do that. We have the standard that is the engagement survey that is every three years or sometimes less than that. And it's one specifically for employer branding, it feeds somehow the employer branding. And we have particular ones for particular needs that we want to explore. So yes, we do that. (IN4_Par.15)

S1: Okay. Thank you very much. Do you have, a certain employer brand identity and image defined with your organization and especially your corporate culture? And do you have like a name for the latest initiatives in employer branding?

S2: So we have, as I said, we are defining the image for external attraction because mainly we recruit young talent. So that will be defined externally. Internally we use the brand image okay. You know we are the company so it's the employer image. We don't have a specific image for employer branding. So at the end of the day the company image is everything.

Every action is employer branding. So we don't have specific image insights I can share. (IN4_Par.16)

S1: So it's a holistic approach in that regard.

S2: Yes. But we do have an employer branding signature, which we use both internally and externally, called EB signature Company D. (IN4_Par.17)

S1: Okay, interesting. Thank you very much. One question now about the involvement of senior management because I think that's always very interesting to consider and also their role is often mentioned in literature. Are they somehow involved in reviewing and shaping the employer brand during the design phase, or do they entirely trust your department and only approve a concept at the end?

S2: So we developed it with our GPU officer. So, HR top management is involved, and they accompany every step of the process, they don't only approve the end result, okay. (IN4_Par.18)

S1: HR top management. Okay. Amazing. Thank you. Which communication channels do you use for employer branding mainly? Is there a communication plan for external branding, for example? Do you have and do you use like social media? And are there like, I don't know, newsletters sent out or how do you attract interested people externally?

S2: Okay. So, we use social media. Our main channels are LinkedIn and Instagram. But we know that probably it is not enough for younger targets. So maybe graduates are looking at LinkedIn, but the people before that, like students, are not. We have Instagram. But Instagram is not working as well. We're not very happy with Instagram. But for young talent in terms of social media, not just LinkedIn for campaigns, but we work very closely with career offices within the schools. Okay. So yes. There are a lot, and they help us a lot to reach students. So that's one way that we reach the younger talents. Newsletters, we are developing one. We don't have it yet, but we are developing one. But so that we can speak to the students that we have in our database, we do sometimes press too. It depends on the times, but we do sometimes press, and we also sometimes do physical posters in the universities. So I think that's mainly it. We are looking at doing Spotify as well. So we are

trying to reach the audience in a different way. The younger audience. But we have to revise that a bit. (IN4_Par.19)

S1: Yeah. Spotify sounds interesting. Is it like a podcast or what do you have planned there?

S2: We would like to do a podcast, but I'm not sure how that would work. We would definitely like to do a podcast, but also just using the ads. (IN4_Par.20)

S1: Yeah, okay I understand.

S2: For the unpaid subscribers. (IN4_Par.21)

S1: Okay. Thank you. So do you have also internally, like I don't know, an intranet platform that internal employees use or how can you distribute employer branding messages? Do you do like virtual town hall meetings? I'm not sure how this is structured within your company and among the employees.

S2: Yeah, we're very big. So we have a lot of different communication channels. We have an internal portal. We have apps and play apps that employees have on their phones. It depends, because we have such a broad range of people, we have so many different profiles working at Company D, so we use a lot of different means. We use, for example, in the stores, we use store sound, we use billboards, we use email, we use websites. So there are a lot of different platforms there. Magazines, physical and virtual. Yes. So we have a lot of things. (IN4_Par.22)

S1: Okay. Very nice. So, are there some KPIs you use to measure the success or how do you monitor how well the employer branding campaigns are running? Is there something you could share about this?

S2: Yeah. So when you talk about social media, we talk about impressions, likes, posts, repost, etc. and click rates. So how many people are clicking the link that we are advertising for in campaigns. We look at the quality of candidates and the number of candidates. Okay. So we are looking at how many people applied and from those how many fit the profile that we're looking for. (IN4_Par.23)

S1: Okay. Yeah okay I understand, the person-organization fit is important and therefore the quality of the candidates.

S2: Yes, and then it depends a bit. If we have a target of attracting people from STEM, we also look at that. If we have reached the number aimed for, if we have increased the number of people that have applied from STEM for that category or not. So it depends. (IN4_Par.24)

S1: Okay. Thank you very much. Do you present those KPIs or the employer branding campaign's success within the company? Like, do you do reports or presentations? How is that shared with your supervisor or also with other colleagues?

S2: It depends. So we have meetings with colleagues where we informally present that. And everybody is aware of it because it's a group effort. So we attract initially but then the talent programs team recruit. So they are the ones feeding us also the KPIs. And so we are all knowing of that. Yes. And then we transmit them. We do presentations mainly for top management okay. They always know the status quo. (IN4_Par.25)

S1: Thank you. Yeah. You already said in your LinkedIn message that you only recruit Portuguese speaking individuals. Is that correct? So the company language is also only Portuguese within Portugal, I imagine.

S2: Do you know the official language? Yes, the official group language, because we are we are not only in Portugal, but also Poland, etc., yeah, it is English, but it's necessary that you speak Portuguese within the Portugal structure because most people speak Portuguese. (IN4_Par.26)

S1: Okay. I understand.

S2: Only for very specific positions within the IT that are very technical, there maybe we can look the other way or facilitate that, but for other things, Portuguese is necessary. Yes. Because at the end of the day, it's a bit related to the business. You know, we work in retail. At the end of the day, we all work for the stores. And at store level, many people don't speak English that well. So it's important that everyone can speak Portuguese. (IN4_Par.27)

S1: Yeah I understand, is there a differentiation between Portuguese nationals and people from or like specifically students from other countries that speak Portuguese like Brazil or Angola?

S2: No, not really. (IN4_Par.28)

S1: Okay. So everyone can apply as long as they speak Portuguese, but they have to have a knowledge of English also to operate internationally.

S2: Yes, exactly. So just to give you an example, we had a few years ago, we had a trainee that's from Spain, but he spoke Portuguese, so it's not a problem. You know, it's not so much where you were born but if you speak Portuguese or not. (IN4_Par.29)

S1: Okay, I get it. Do you have, a rough number of how many recruits through university programs you have had in the last year? Is there like an estimation from the initiatives you've done or from the cooperations with the university career centers?

S2: I can tell you that every year we recruit around 30 to 35 trainees. Okay. And this year we recruited around, I think, 15 professional interns. For the summer internship we have around 30, but, you know, they come and go, so it's a two month experience and not a recruitment. So it's around 40 to 50, okay. (IN4_Par.30)

S1: Okay. Around 40 to 50 student and graduate recruits. Thank you. That's already a great number to know. Yeah. I think we're almost at the end. Do you have anything else you'd like to share about the organization's approach to employer branding that we haven't covered yet?

S2: I don't know, I don't think so. If you have any question that you feel wasn't answered as well as you'd like or any curiosity, just ask away. (IN4_Par.31)

S1: I think we were actually very quick and efficient in going through the questions. Maybe one thing about the EVP's. I looked at your website where you name them and do you articulate in your employer branding campaigns certain EVP's stronger than others? Like employee value propositions for students and graduates?

S2: Yes, good question. So our EVP pillars are: EVP D1, EVP D2, EVP D3 and EVP D4. And we give them individually more focus. It depends on the target that we want to attract.

So, for example, for young talent, we highlight a lot more the EVP D3 and EVP D4, because of the purpose and the ability to grow at Company D. Then, for example, EVP D2. Even though it's important to differentiate, we usually cover all four, but we give more strength on one depending on what the target wants and who the target is. What are the target's drivers? We play the EVP's with different intents like I explained. So yeah, for young talent we probably go more for the EVP D3, that is the biggest one. Then a bit of EVP D2. Also a lot of EVP D4 and a bit of, EVP D1 in the EVP's we include and messages we want to send. (IN4_Par.32)

S1: Okay, very nice. Yeah, I understand, so it's modified depending on the target group. Super. Thank you so, so much. That was very and I've gained a lot of new insight. Yeah. Every company has a slightly different approach. And I also know that the topic of employer branding is rather new to some companies. I don't know how you feel about this with your experience. In my experience from research it's a novelty to some.

S2: Yes, that's true. Talent is, especially in STEM, now much more important to attract early on. (IN4_Par.33)

S1: And the best ones, the best talents, are very much sought after and many companies try to attract them. That's why you also start at universities with on campus recruitment. Thank you so much Inés for doing the interview with me as an expert on employer branding. If you have any questions afterwards, please let me know. Would you like to see the results? Like I'll probably include like an overview sheet with the results and recommendations, also including the survey among students.

S2: Yeah, that'd be great. Please send it to me, when you're ready. (IN4_Par.34)

S1: Okay, I'll do it. Probably in July or August.

S2: Thank you. So a pleasure talking to you. (IN4_Par.35)

S1: It was a pleasure. Equally. Have a nice day. Thank you.

Interview Transcript No. 5

S1: Thank you for participating in this interview, which aims to explore the employer branding strategies within your organization. I've developed a semi-structured interview guide with 15 questions – possibly extended by individual follow-up questions –, which are based on the Employer Branding Roadmap by the author Minchington (2006). This interview is planned to take about 30-40 minutes and will be conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for flexibility and depth in your responses. Feel free to interrupt at any time. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked and if you wish to not answer a question you may say so. Thank you for your time and contribution. Do you consent to the recording of the audio of this interview for transcription purposes?

S2: Yes, I do. You may start. (IN5_Par.1)

S1: Perfect, thank you. Are there any doubts or questions you would like to ask?

S2: No, all good. (IN5_Par.2)

S1: Ok, great. So, in preparation for our interview today I read the article “Company E: O lado humano” from Human Resources Portugal where you were interviewed about Employer Branding at Company E in April 2022. As this took place two years ago and shortly after the pandemic, which undoubtedly brought many changes, I'm curious to know about the status quo of Employer Branding at Company E today in June 2024. So, my first question would be, how long are you working in employer branding already? Like, what's your experience? Since I know this is not the, most, yeah, most known topic for years and years.

S2: Of course. So my name is Person A. Being 53 years old, I have about 30 years of professional experience, mainly in the HR sector. I've started to focus on employing branding in 2020. So just after the start of the pandemic, which was when I joined Company E. Back then part of the challenge was to rethink how we would position ourselves as an employer and an employer brand. So the majority of the work is since about July 2020. (IN5_Par.3)

S1: Okay. Thank you. Who are the key stakeholders and departments involved in the whole process, like during the development, approval, execution phase?

S2: Okay. The responsibility for employer branding is within the human resources department. And this is where the majority of the initiatives are developed. Now, the thing is that it's very, very hard to separate employer branding from just company branding or

from product branding. So inevitably you have to also consider a lot of other initiatives that are done not specifically for employer branding, but that contribute to employer branding. And these will be run by things like, external relations or the innovation center or even marketing. The key decision makers are, definitely, Head of HR, but above all, the CEO. So my boss, the head of human resources, reports directly to the CEO. As the ultimate instance, there will be the CEO. We try as much as possible to create a collaborative approach to employer branding, namely with marketing and with external relations. But it has been a challenge to do this. Slowly, but we have, I think, most successfully done it with marketing. (IN5_Par.4)

S1: Okay. Thank you very much. So, this was the introductory phase, now moving on to the concept phase of the Employer Roadmap by Minchington, specifically the initial stages of writing a concept. Can you tell me about the first steps of how the scope of an employer branding project is developed? Is there a fixed workflow? Do you brainstorm as a team different ideas? How are the concepts written? Like what are those first steps to get something going, like a new idea, a new campaign?

S2: I think before we even talk about concepts or ideas or approaches, I think one has to look at what do the insights tell us? So for me, the first steps, and that's what I brought into Company E, is to do a market study and understanding how as a brand, an employer brand, we are perceived. And I think this is something that should be done throughout. How are directly competitive brands perceived. So if they work in the same sector or if they are brands that we consider to be competitive. They don't necessarily work in the same sector, but they will be competing for the same kind of talent. (IN5_Par.5)

S1: I understand.

S2: So the first thing is actually to do, a market study. And I really think it has to be a combination. And that's what we did between, qualitative and quantitative market study. (IN5_Par.6)

S1: Okay, so this is the external part. Do you also do, like, internal studies of how to develop the internal employer branding approach with employees?

S2: Yeah. So what we did is we took this market study and it had, an internal sample and an external sample. And this gives us, on the one hand, what we are perceived as from the outside, but also what is perceived within. And this allows us to match. I think one thing that is very important as well is when you're talking about employer brand, there isn't a single perception, an external perception. There's a perception of recruiters. There's a perception of those that work in other companies. There's a perception of students and as well as teachers of students. They have very different perceptions that need to be taken into account. (IN5_Par.7)

S1: Okay. I understand, thank you. Can you elaborate a bit on the criteria used to identify the targeted talent during the assessment phase? Is there, I don't know, is there a certain persona that you pursue? I mean, depending on the profiles you're looking at or required skill set or something. Do you work with this in employer branding and recruiting?

S2: Yeah. We didn't go for personas. We actually went for, regarding talent, we identified what are the greatest needs of talents that we have. So what is the training and what kind of experience or non-experience. What are the universities or schools that are particularly relevant for us, or then people who fit that criteria but had been in the work market for about ten years maximum. So not so much as personas, but more as in academical or experience background, it just makes more sense than personas. We have tried to use personas especially for internal people, but it's very difficult to build representative personas, because of the magnitude of the differences that we have within. So we've quickly dropped that. (IN5_Par.8)

S1: Okay, I get it. Thank you. How was the employer brand identity and image defined within your organization and especially your corporate culture while promoting internal employer branding? So looking to the internal side of employer branding now, how do you do this? With, for example, events, digital platforms, employee advocacy and so on.

S2: Okay, so what do we do it internally, how we materialize it. So in employer branding was still at, I would say, very early stages. Because the employee value proposition that we had, we found out that it was actually not strong enough. So we had to go back and strengthen our employee value proposition. And that takes a lot of time and effort because you have to look at things like benefits and rewards and career. So a lot of heavy stuff that has to be

done. So what we did was we sort of parked our initiatives on employer branding and focused on that, but we work on a constant basis to keep what we know are the principles of our employer branding alive. So communicating our purpose, reinforcing what our culture is, our values, what we expect from each person, ensuring that, for example, when we participate in external events that we take the best internal people that we have that represent this culture. So we try to make this, this connection. (IN5_Par.9)

S1: Perfect. Thank you. So, what types and tools of communication do you use? Are there a certain channels, like if we start externally? I've read that you use like different social media, like tools, like, LinkedIn, Instagram, something else. So externally, how do you use them? And what was the initial motivation to reach maybe different target groups in terms of employer branding. So looking at external communication now.

S2: Looking at external communication. And this is where conflicting interests arise. So a lot of the times when you have a brand that has the same name as the company. Then the social media channels are mostly done in product marketing. So that's the first thing. So you have to compete with marketing and marketing actually take these channels. The other thing that I think it's important to note is and I'll talk you about the channel, is we are a group of 11 companies in Portugal, but actually we don't have a legal or external identity as a group. So we always talk as a group but we don't exist as a group. So we use mostly LinkedIn. This is a channel that we have worked to try to improve. It's not managed by us. We haven't gone into Instagram or into other social media or these younger social media channels, except for very specific, talent attraction, training programs that make sense for that, for those channels. We've used a lot of podcasting. So podcasting for us has been one way to do this. And then it has to do mostly with things like the articles you saw, participation in conferences. So not a lot of external communication in terms of employer branding. (IN5_Par.10)

S1: Okay. So it's very intricately involved with the brand, communication itself. So looking internally, is there are there platforms like is there an intranet, different websites or, I don't know, chat groups where employees can connect.

S2: We have intranets. Well, we have one main intranet and then we have channels like teams. We're starting to use Yammer. We use a lot of podcasting for the insight. So when

we produce podcasting, we make sure that it's external and internal. Webinars, posters, office decoration and things like that. (IN5_Par.11)

S1: I understand, how do you define metrics to measure the success of employer branding initiatives? Are there certain KPIs? I don't know, conversion rates from application to hire and something like this. Do you have certain success metrics in place?

S2: Yes. The first one that we have is that we redo the employer branding study in a shorter version, what we call "atracking". And so we do that about every two years to understand how this is evolving. And probably this is the most relevant metric that we have, because not only allows us to see how we are positioned and whether we have improved or not, but also how direct and indirect competitors have improved. So this helps us a lot. We have started to look into the effort of conversion in talent attraction. But because of internal issues about measuring the certain instances in the funnel, we haven't actually pinpointed it. We are also looking into the exit rate as well, and the generic difficulty in attracting a number of profiles that are very sought out in the market. (IN5_Par.12)

S1: Okay. Thank you. So are these also the main points for measuring the return on investment in employer branding or are there different measures in place? Since you said you report directly to the CEO, if I remember correctly.

S2: Well, my boss reports directly to the CEO. So the head of human resources reports directly. We don't look at return of investment. Why don't we look at retirement investment? We don't invest enough to even consider it, as part of return of investment. So we are in a very early stage. So we are building the employee value proposition and we are working onwards on the employer branding. Not a lot of companies in Portugal work or focus on employer branding. And especially just to give you a little bit of context about, I don't know, ten, 14 years ago we were a public owned company, so employer branding wasn't an issue. So this is this is a road that we're taking. (IN5_Par.13)

S1: Okay I understand. Is there a long term goal in employer branding for Company E? And what is the time span you're looking at, like for different initiatives, employer branding measures?

S2: Yeah. We defined our ambition as to be one of the best places in Portugal to grow. To grow, to be in and to grow. Yeah. So what we're looking at is not so much as retention. So we don't want to focus on retention. We want to focus on a valuable relationship between employer and employee during the span of time that makes sense for both. So we thought about initially about something like 25, so in 2025, but we started working on this in 2020. So we have come a long way. So I'm not sure we will reach the ambition in 2025, but we have considered considerably improved since 2020. (IN5_Par.14)

S1: Okay. Thank you. So my main topic of my research is employer branding targeting also international master's students here in Portugal, which I am part of. So my question would be do you also offer English language positions at your company? Online I've read that there are mainly Portuguese offers, since it's probably the required language at Company E. But like, what would be the minimum level of Portuguese required to work at Company E or is it 100% fluency native speakers?

S2: No, I mean, it's not 100% fluency native speakers of English. It's not even working English. The average age of Company E is around 46. And the average tenure is around 20 years. So there are a lot of people within the company that have no English levels. Okay. What happens is that it's basically depending on each of the, you know, on each person or each manager that's hiring to decide, of course, that for some positions, for example, position that don't imply direct contact with a client, that is mostly done in Portuguese, the language shouldn't be a problem. But what happens is that when the majority of bosses don't speak English, they will very rarely hire somebody who is mostly English. This is something we're trying to change, especially as a global company. So just to give you an idea, Portuguese isn't the most spoken language within Company E. It's actually Spanish. We have more Spanish speaking workers in the world than we have Portuguese. But I have pushed forward to have English as the main language. But it's a process. It's a route that we still have to go. (IN5_Par.15)

S1: Sure. I understand. Okay, so speaking of international employees, do you have a percentage of international and non-Portuguese employees, like roughly what's the what's the ratio here?

S2: I think we're talking about something like 6% or something within Portugal. Maybe 9%. It's very, very low. (IN5_Par.16)

S1: Okay. I understand. You explained also in the article and the interview that you have certain cooperations with the universities in place at the moment. Which universities are you partnering with? And I read that there are like different initiatives, workshops, job fairs, talks and also the trainee program Traineeship E. So which universities do you partner with and which Employer Branding and recruiting initiatives, if you could elaborate a bit on that.

S2: Okay. So we have I would say three types of initiatives. So we have the Traineeship E, which is a talent program for 10 months and in five different fields. We have what we call participation in workshops, in student fairs, whatever. And then we have another one which are more technically driven programs to actually form and train people. Okay. And to having, so actually building with the university specific education programs. So those three, we work mostly in the third one with Técnico and Nova usually. So it has to do a lot with data science and programming. So a lot has to do with Técnico there. And then also with, I don't know if you heard, Escola 42, which is about training people that have no experience. The one in the middle, we go to, we are present in, I would say roughly all the universities in which there is, either IT, data science and actuarial studies. The third, we tend to go to the same universities as well. So there's a big focus on public universities, mostly, a big focus on management, IT, data science, tech universities. That's where we tend to focus. (IN5_Par.17)

S1: Okay. Perfect. Can you say roughly, through the trainee programs, through the initiatives at the universities, the collaborations, how many non-Portuguese Master students you've recruited in the last 12 months?

S2: That I am aware we have not recruited through the master's and the young trainee programs any foreigners. I can check that for you and get back to you. But no, I don't think we have. (IN5_Par.18)

S1: Okay. Thank you. You know the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa, the CPLP? What role play students from like Brazil, Angola, Mozambique who are native speakers in Portuguese? Are there a lot applying to your program as well?

S2: No, there aren't. Because what happens is that when you tend to go to the same universities, you tend to always to have the same kind of personas. So they are white, they are Portuguese, they tend to be middle class. And when you go to universities where this is predominant, then the applications are predominantly these. Yeah. So there's a simple cause and effect. (IN5_Par.19)

S1: Okay. You also mentioned that you use podcasts for internal and external communication. Can you talk a bit about them like how many are running at the moment and how often do you publish a new episode? Is it more factual knowledge or is it more storytelling about what is it to work at Company E?

S2: We are in season three. It's called Podcast E. It's actually running now, so we do it once a year and it's about ten episodes. It has nothing to do with Company E. It has to do with the challenges in managing people and working with people and just working. So, for example, this year, we had things like, we had a comedian talk about mental health. We had two people that do social integration of people with disability and to train them to go into the marketplace. What is the importance of actually training these people and giving them the opportunities? We talked about people who had serious accidents and then their life just completely changes. And how do you go back into finding your focus? So it has nothing to do with the company? Sometimes we have examples in the company. We had one, in the first year, which was really nice. We picked the eldest person and the youngest person in the company. They actually could be grandmother and grandson. And to actually talk about what are the challenges. So we use this to talk about topics. Not about us. (IN5_Par.20)

S1: Okay. I understand. Very nice. In terms of collaborations, do you work mainly with the university career centers or with the professors, the teaching staff in place when you offer lectures or business cases? You said mainly here with Técnico and Nova in Lisbon.

S2: We work, so that's actually run by the external department, and we work directly with the deans or with the teachers. So that is a direct relationship. We don't actually do it through career offices. We want to improve and to have a more direct connection with career offices. We just have postponed it in terms of priorities. When it's about running things like Traineeship E, we actually use an agency that works very closely on the field with the universities, either the student associations, the career offices or other things. (IN5_Par.21)

S1: Thank you. Regarding the program you just mentioned, are there others, like summer internships, professional internships for students from bachelor or master's degree, like especially looking at students right now? Which programs do you have in place?

S2: We launched last year, and we will be launching the second year of a summer internship. So for undergraduate students for one month in the summer. We have professional traineeships that are part of the end of the professional role that we have. So we might open training opportunities or traineeship opportunities for professionals, as part of the education. Or they actually might contact us and then we look into building that. So for summer, it's a program, for the other ones, it's as it arises through internship openings and then applications. (IN5_Par.22)

S1: Okay. So, my central topic of investigation is the role of international master students, because, in my experience, many just leave the country again after completing a two years master here. Do you have any internal idea of developing something to attract also this group of students, which is considerably large. I've seen the statistics and looking at my fellow classmates. Is there any initiative planned in the future to target them specifically?

S2: We do not have an initiative planned in the future to attract foreign Master students and graduates. I think it's definitely something that makes a lot of sense and is very important. I don't think that we will be creating a specific initiative, say, in 2025. I think it's something that we need to look into, but it's not on the roadmap at the moment. We need to be able to bridge the issue of the English speaking. (IN5_Par.23)

S1: Ok, I get it. First solving this internally, since otherwise the communication would probably not work with the longer standing and older employees, right?

S2: I think sometimes it's not so much about communication actually. I think it's more about the confidence of having somebody that works with you that, that you don't understand entirely what they speak. (IN5_Par.24)

S1: Yeah, I get it. Okay. I understand. That were actually already all my questions. I don't know if you want to share something that we haven't mentioned or discussed yet.

S2: No, I was trying to think. No, what I would say is that a lot of the times companies and I presume you're looking into companies in Portugal, a lot of the times there is a very big overlap between employer branding and just branding. Yeah. And when that happens, it's really hard to separate who does what within. What is the impact of something that is done on one side to another? And the other thing is, especially when you have, like us, I don't know if you're talking to EDP, for example. They also have an external, so Chinese based shareholder. Then you have another layer on top and it is a challenge. (IN5_Par.25)

S1: Thank you. Yeah. I've spoken to various professionals from the largest companies within Portugal because I think that's where, if at all, measures would be taken to target international master students as well. Probably these companies would allocate budget to Employer Branding, and not like very small companies. Thank you so much for taking the time to do the interview with me. I will stop the recording now.

Interview Transcript No. 6

S1: So, for the start, could you please present yourself a little bit? Your years of experience in Employer Branding, your current job role and maybe some responsibility you want to share.

S2: Yes. I'm Interviewee F and I joined Company F five years ago. I started my journey here as a business partner. And I worked in that role for maybe two years. And then I changed my role for a more strategic one in the corporate center of Company F. And we were more focused on communication and now we aggregated the part of communication because communication of the people experience is very linked to employer branding. So now we are looking at everything, integrated, and working also in the employer branding strategy of the company. So, we had here some reorganizations inside the company recently. So now my team is the talent attraction team. We are responsible for communicating Company F and positioning Company F as the Employer of First Choice, not only here in Portugal, but in all the markets where we operate. As I explained to you, we are already present in around 30 markets. So it's a big challenge. Here in Portugal the company is already known. Everyone knows the brands and they employer branding is linked tightly with the brands.

But in other markets it is a bigger challenge to position Company F and to get to know our employer brand too. So yeah, we have this global scope. (IN6_Par.1)

S1: Okay. That's very interesting to know. Do the individual countries have a company base where there's also employer branding done? Like do you work with colleagues and partners in the countries or do you decide and do everything for the countries.

S2: No. We define the global strategy and then the business partners, which are the local teams that operate in each country, implement the strategy. (IN6_Par.2)

S1: Okay. So the concept is defined by you. And then in cooperation with the people in the country it's implemented.

S2: But of course, it is flexible. And we always try to adjust the strategy to the local needs to meet the local needs of each country, which are different. (IN6_Par.3)

S1: Of course, I understand. Thank you very much. So within Company F in Portugal, who are the key stakeholders involved in employer branding? You already mentioned communication and People and Organization. What about finance, marketing, legal or compliance?

S2: So, I work in the people and organisational department. It's the people management area. HR if you prefer. And here in our units, and especially in our talent attraction team, we work very closely with the brand global unit and the communication global unit because they are key stakeholders when we talk about employer branding. (IN6_Par.4)

S1: Thank you. What is Company F's employer value proposition? What are the key elements of it? And which company values especially are you looking for to promote with your employer branding strategy?

S2: So, okay, our employee value proposition, our EVP, is very aligned with our narrative, with the narrative of the company. We have a purpose defined, which is "our EVP 1 and EVP 2 EVP 3 a better tomorrow". And our core values are aligned with this purpose. Our values are, the EVP 1, the EVP 2 and the EVP 3. These three keywords from which derive 12 human skills that we want to develop in our employees and attract in potential candidates. And our employee value proposition is very aligned with these three key pillars of our

purpose. In the pillar of EVP 1, our value proposition states that we want to empower our employees to do their best to be autonomous in making decisions, to work in an agile ecosystem with all the tools and resources that they need to do so and to perform at their best. And also in this pillar, we promote a culture of collaboration, digital collaboration and global collaboration because we are a global company and we need to work closely with everyone, whether they are here based in Portugal or in other countries around the world. (IN6_Par.5)

S1: Okay, I understand.

S2: On the second one, on the EVP 2 axis. Here our value proposition states that we provide our employees with well-being, with a balanced workplace, with a diverse workforce and with attractive benefits. And then on the EVP 3 axis, we promote the development of our employees with the worldwide opportunities in our internal mobility policy. So we have many different options for our employees to develop themselves. And we try to create a culture of feedback and continuous development with all the resources they need to do also their best in the company. (IN6_Par.6)

S1: Okay. Very nice. Do you have a vision and mission for the employer branding department? Do you have, short and long term goals? What is something that you strive for to seek and to build in the future?

S2: Yes, of course. Our employer branding strategy is always very linked with our business plan, with the business plan of the company. And we have a business plan defined until 2026. So our strategy is always aligned with the business cycle. And for 2026, we predict that the company is continuing to grow. So we of course need to attract talent, aligned with the business needs that are predicted until 2026. So we have talent personas identified. According to the workforce planning and everything of the company. We have also targets defined to achieve and to attract these specific personas, to meet the business growth needs until 2026. (IN6_Par.7)

S1: Okay, amazing. Thank you. Do you conduct external research for your employer branding projects and if yes how? Are there, for example, external market research, trends

analysis, competitive positioning, industry benchmarks or other things? How do you approach the external research question here?

S2: So when we defined our employer value proposition, we did also an external, research to understand what potential candidates value in companies and what was the their perception of Company F. And when we launch specific campaigns, sometimes we do research to understand the perception of potential candidates when they see the campaign. And we also, when we apply to, for example, awards and certifications as a top employer, we receive a lot of insights from them and benchmark, that allow us to do continuous improvements of our strategy, of our employer branding strategy. So we use different sources. (IN6_Par.8)

S1: Okay. So that answered in part also my next question regarding internal research. Do you collect internal feedback or have employee recognition programs? How do you get the internal perspective?

S2: Yes, we do. When we defined the EVP, we did an internal survey. We also looked at our climate survey, which is done annually. But we did a specific internal survey to understand the perception of the employees and what they value in the company. Then we did that external benchmark. And when we already had the employer value proposition almost established, we did focus groups with our employees and interviews with executive managers and leaders. So we try to complete the picture of the different needs and perspectives. (IN6_Par.9)

S1: Very interesting. So which criteria do you use to identify the targeted talent? I mean the target audience that you want to reach with your employer branding. Not the general external communication, but a specifically employer branding. Who are you looking for?

S2: We always look at the workforce planning. It's the basis. The workforce planning is where the teams identify the recruitment needs for the next year or until 2026, when we do the business plan exercise, which is more long term. And we always use this tool to understand what the main needs are globally and for each country, because they are different, to identify the key areas. And profiles that we want to attract. So that we can build customized strategy to impact the right people we want to attract. (IN6_Par.10)

S1: Okay. Do you differ between, for example, young talent, already experienced workers and other candidates from the market?

S2: Yes. So, we have like six main personas identified, which is students and graduates, experienced profiles – because in the last years we did a generational renewal. So many young profiles entered the company, and now we are doing like the reverse to have more balance among the employees. We are looking also for more experienced profiles. But we have many programs for young talents and students and graduates because we keep trying to recruit them for the company. So we have these two personas and then we want to attract STEM profiles. So science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which are profiles that until 2026 are needed, because the business is growing more in the renewable sector and we need this kind of profiles, the STEM profiles and also the technical profiles. So people that are in the field of believing in the energy transition. And we have also targets or personas of diversity and inclusion. So we want to continue to increase the representativeness of women in our workforce and also include people with disabilities. (IN6_Par.11)

S1: What are typical first steps when looking at the scope of employer branding projects during the concept phase? Where do you start?

S2: It's always a team effort. We brainstorm a lot and we, always hear also the business partners, because they are in the field, they understand what works best in their country. And as I said, the basis is always who we want to attract. If it's a STEM profile and if we have like 20 positions to recruit STEM profiles. Then we try to build an initiative that is going to impact these people specifically. So we build it around what the key interests are. And we have this mapped, according to the external research that we do. For each persona we know specifically what they generally value in a company to work. What are their main needs? And then we build the initiatives to try to impact and attract them. (IN6_Par.12)

S1: Okay, I understand, thank you very much. How is the employer brand identity and image defined within your organization, especially your corporate culture? So promoting internal employer branding, how does that work? For example, through employee engagement initiatives or events platforms. You already mentioned employee advocacy programs. Are there any other things you'd like to mention?

S2: So how we build the employer brand image? Like the perception internally?
(IN6_Par.13)

S1: Yeah. Like, how do you reinforce that into the corporate culture? So towards the existing employees, not to potential attract talent.

S2: Yes. So it's obviously that our employer brand needs to be real. So the way we work, the employee experience, it's key to ensure that then we can communicate it externally. We have a strong internal communication, and we have different internal channels like our intranet, which is where we post daily news about the company. On the intranet we have a source page. For example, on the external website, we have the careers menu and in the internal channel, we have a people menu, where all the employees can find out more about the employee journey. And we have a specific page for our attracting strategy and how our employees can be our main ambassadors. And people attractors. (IN6_Par.14)

S1: Okay. So do you have company brand ambassadors from your employees on like social media? Do you have employees that post, for example, on LinkedIn about their experiences at Company F?

S2: Yes, we have an advocacy platform, which is the storytellers, where we have content for our employees to share, and they can adapt the message to their own personal tone of voice. But we have this platform so that our people can be our main ambassadors and share, how proud they are to work in a company that is leading the energy transition. And, of course, we always try to link the three narratives, which is the people narrative, the brand narrative and the business narrative. So every time we communicate, we try to link everything so that our employees feel this culture and the common purpose. So our purpose “our EVP 1 and EVP 2 EVP 3 a better tomorrow” is very aligned with our business narrative and also the brand one, which is the earth. (IN6_Par.15)

S1: Interesting.

S2: The brand signature is earth. So our purpose is very linked with the brand signature.
(IN6_Par.16)

S1: Okay. Thank you. So that means that there's a lot of overlap between branding and employer branding as well.

S2: They need to be very linked, yes. Because if they are not, it's not going to work. The employees are not going to understand the story we want to tell. (IN6_Par.17)

S1: I understand. So you already spoke of the intranet for internal communication channels. Are there other channels like newsletters or do you have social network groups?

S2: We have the newsletter too, which is sent by email. And we have Viva Engage, which is a tool from Microsoft. It's like an internal Facebook. (IN6_Par.18)

S1: I heard of it. Very nice. Okay.

S2: There we have groups, specific groups for each business platform. We have general groups; we have people group where we post things regarding the employee experience. So yeah, these are the main challenges. (IN6_Par.19)

S1: Nice. And externally, which channels do you use to speak to the target audience, to address the different personas you want to reach with your campaign and everything like social media job platforms? Which are you using?

S2: We have we have our website which has a career menu. But then we often use LinkedIn and Instagram. But Instagram is more used for commercial purposes. But sometimes we always we also use Instagram. But mainly LinkedIn. When we do specific campaigns and invest, for example, in paid media, we also use other platforms, for example, TikTok where we have something, like advertising, but we don't have a page for or by Company F on TikTok. (IN6_Par.20)

S1: Okay. So it's just about paid advertising on TikTok. It's not, for example, that you do follow me arounds as an employer branding initiative from a colleague of yours.

S2: No, we still don't have an Company F page on TikTok. But, when we do big campaigns, we always try to be in these different platforms to do Google advertising, Glassdoor and Indeed. (IN6_Par.21)

S1: Okay. Very nice. What metrics do you use to define the success or measure the success of employer branding? I believe you invest a certain budget probably in employer branding and my question is how do you measure it? Is it for example, KPIs that you defined or conversion rates applicants to hire?

S2: Precisely, all of that. So it's internally that we always look into the results of our climate survey to understand how proud our employees feel to work at Company F. And, if they would recommend Company F as a place to work to a friend or a family member. These are internal metrics that each year we will look after. And externally, yes, of course, when we launch a campaign on social media, we always look at the impressions, the click rates, the conversion. So how many people enter our website from another website. How many enter our job page because we have a "jobs.edp.com" page where we have all the opportunities, the recruitment opportunities, and then how many applications do we receive in the end. Because at the end of the day, what we want is we have two purposes. Sometimes it's more awareness. Yes. And when we do awareness campaigns, we look more for the impressions. How many people did we reach with the campaign and then the conversion. And when we do conversion campaigns, the final goal is how many applications do we receive? (IN6_Par.22)

S1: Okay, very nice. Do you also have to report statistics like the return on investment regarding employer branding for example, towards senior management? Is there like a report or presentations internally where you have to argue what it was invested and what was achieved by EB linked to the metrics question before?

S2: Yes, at the end of each year, we have a meeting with the executive board of directors and key stakeholders where we present the whole strategy of people and organization, so my department. And when we present that, we also present the part of talent attraction, with what we achieved and the ROI that we had, and always also, in the beginning of each year we report externally and we have that report on our website, which is the P&O report, where we communicate what we achieved in the previous year in all the experience, but also in the attraction site. (IN6_Par.23)

S1: Very nice.

S2: I also look at the experience since we attract talent until they enter the company, the onboarding, the development and the wellbeing experience that they have, the diversity that we promote until they leave. So our teams are organized according to the employee journey. And we look at it at like the entire employee life cycle. (IN6_Par.24)

S1: Could you share maybe a case of a successful employer branding campaign that you did, for example, on awareness which you mentioned. Was there a recent one where you could see that it was very successful? And why maybe. And like, what were the goals for this specific campaign?

S2: Yes, I have a very recent example. So in the beginning of the year 2024, we communicated our EVP to the market. We did that internally and externally and we produced a manifesto video. It's called EVP manifesto and if you research online, you will find the video. We recorded that video with our own talent, so our employees were our actors. (IN6_Par.25)

S1: Okay, nice.

S2: And we shared it on our social media, and it was an awareness campaign. But also while we were promoting the awareness, we included also a call to action for people to apply to work at Company F. And we did that in the beginning of the year to meet the recruitment needs that were predicted for this year. So we did this big campaign to attract talent. And now during the year, we are recruiting the talent that we attract through that big campaign. (IN6_Par.26)

S1: Okay. Very nice.

S2: Which is, I think I haven't mentioned it, but when we launched this campaign, we had a claim which is: "EVP 2 is calling you to work with us. Are you answering this call?" Once again, as you see this employer branding claim and campaign is very aligned with our purpose and the EVP. Everything is aligned. (IN6_Par.27)

S1: Very nice. As I told you in my email the topic of my master thesis looks especially at international students and their role when applying for jobs in Portugal. Is the company's

language English or Portuguese? Like just looking at Company F in Portugal. Could I, for example, apply for a job at Company F?

S2: There's no barrier at all for international students to apply. Our common language here at EDP Group is English because, as I mentioned, we are operating in different markets. We have people from all around the world. We have around 13,000 employees worldwide. From 70 nationalities. (IN6_Par.28)

S1: Oh that's very diverse.

S2: Yes, we have a huge diversity. Many languages. So our common language and the official language is English. And of course, in each country, people also talk their language. But every time we have someone from another country that doesn't speak, for example, Portuguese, we switch to English. And all our documents are in English. Even though in the teams, for example, if I'm here at the office and everyone is Portuguese, I'm going to speak Portuguese. But all the presentations that we do, all the official documents, they are all in English. (IN6_Par.29)

S1: Okay. So that generates the inclusivity that also people from other nationalities could potentially work at Company F Portugal. On another note – Do you also work with, and do you also have university partnerships in place? And do you work with specific public and private universities?

S2: Yes. So part of our employer branding strategy is doing those partnerships with universities and participate in events that they promote. We also try to build a relation with student unions. But yes, we have many partnerships with universities, for example, Católica, Técnico and others, and we try to have this close relationship with them to be closer to the students. And attract them to work with us because for students, we have many different programs. We have scholar internships, professional internships, we have the training program, the student ambassador program and the summer internship. (IN6_Par.30)

S1: Nice.

S2: Okay. Many opportunities. And many of them then stay in the company. So it's a way in. (IN6_Par.31)

S1: Did you also come from university being a graduate and then started one of the Company F programs?

S2: Yes, exactly. For example, I started my journey here at Company F with a curricular internship, which were only three months, and I was thinking, okay, I'm going to have this three months at Company F and I'm doing my best. And then after this internship I had the opportunity to do a professional internship. And then when I finished the professional internship, I entered the company and I stayed. And we have many different examples of people that went this path to their current profession. (IN6_Par.32)

S1: Okay. Very nice. Do you also do cooperations with the career centers, for example? I don't know, offering workshops, lectures, other activities, bootcamps, and something like that. Which do you offer?

S2: So we receive many partnership requests for long term, and then sometimes they are just invitations for us to participate in workshops, presentations, career fairs, I mean job fairs. We also do job shadowing. So employees at Company F receive students who accompany them in their tasks throughout our day. We sometimes also manage business cases. So we are always open to respond to what universities might need and open for suggestions. And we always try to correspond and have our employees involved in all these initiatives. (IN6_Par.33)

S1: Okay, very nice. Do you happen to know an estimate number of non-Portuguese working at Company F? Or international students that have applied to your programs within the last 12 months? Do you maybe know any cases or statistics?

S2: I don't have the number, but I know that there are a lot. For example, for the trainee program mainly, we have students from all around the world and specifically here in Portugal. Also, if we have students that are studying here, we receive many applications from them. But I cannot give you a number, I'm sorry. The majority of student applications for the programs are Portuguese students. But we also receive applications from international students. But sometimes when we receive those applications they are starting to work in other countries where Company F is present. It's very international the applicant pool in general. Yes, we receive applications from all around the world. So also here in Portugal we

receive and we have people working, speaking in English and from other countries, for example, here in the headquarters working with us. But I think the majority are still Portuguese people. (IN6_Par.34)

S1: Okay. What would you say is the role of the employees and candidates from the CPLP, the Comunidade dos Paises da Lingua Portuguesa? So Mozambique, Brazil, Angola, is there a significant group of students and other employees, that are first being attracted and then start working in the company?

S2: Yes, sure. Because here at Company F we have a diversity and inclusion policy. So everyone is welcome in the company. And we have many people from those countries. Once again, I don't have any numbers. Everyone is welcome here. And we really want to build this diverse workforce because we believe that is diversity, that we have our main asset to promote the innovation that we need to continue being a leader in the energy transition. (IN6_Par.35)

S1: Is there anything regarding employer branding you would like to say? About Company F as striving to be an employer of choice? Anything that we haven't discussed yet.

S2: I think we already covered the main, the main topics. I think our biggest challenge now is to position Company F and consolidate our image as a top employer in the other countries, because here in Portugal, we already have a solid reputation as a great place to work that we want to maintain, and we keep working hard to keep that position. But we are also trying to replicate and position Company F in the other markets where we are present worldwide. We are already certified as a top employer, which is a key recognition that we have to gain some credibility in those markets where people don't know us. So we are trying to expand this certification and win other local awards and things. (IN6_Par.36)

S1: Yeah, that's right, I understand. Just one last question, as I'm remembering something. So you mentioned that the current business plan is until 2026. How often do you renew it and what is the like the year span that you create a business plan for? Is it always three years or five?

S2: Yes, normally five years. (IN6_Par.37)

S1: Five years. Okay.

S2: We launched the new business plan in 2021. And then every year we update that business plan until 2026, and then we are going to do, another one. And, of course, we are going to review our employer branding strategy to meet the long term needs of the company. (IN6_Par.38)

S1: Okay. Very nice. Thank you so much for the added information. It was amazing talking to you. Thank you so much for taking the time. I will be stopping the recording now.

S2: It was lovely speaking with you. (IN6_Par.39)

S1: Equally and thank you. I will finish the thesis hopefully at the end of August and will send you my results, if you're interested in September or October. It was very nice talking to you. Thank you and have a nice day.