

EFZG WORKING PAPER SERIES
EFZG SERIJA ČLANAKA U NASTAJANJU
ISSN 1849-6857
UDC 33:65

No. 19-05

Nina Pološki Vokić & Vinko Mostarac

**Is there a need for a change in
employer branding practices? – a
shift in employer attractiveness
attributes/dimensions during the
last decade**



Is there a need for a change in employer branding practices? – a shift in employer attractiveness attributes/dimensions during the last decade

Nina Pološki Vokić

npoloski@efzg.hr

Faculty of Economics and Business

University of Zagreb

Trg J. F. Kennedy 6

10 000 Zagreb, Croatia

Vinko Mostarac

mo.s.7@hotmail.com

Croatian Chamber of Economy

10 000 Zagreb, Croatia

The paper has been presented at the conference „An Enterprise Odyssey: Managing Change to Achieve Quality Development“ in Zagreb, 2018

The views expressed in this working paper are those of the author(s) and not necessarily represent those of the Faculty of Economics and Business – Zagreb. The paper has not undergone formal review or approval. The paper is published to bring forth comments on research in progress before it appears in final form in an academic journal or elsewhere.

Copyright June 2019 by Nina Pološki Vokić & Vinko Mostarac

All rights reserved.

Sections of text may be quoted provided that full credit is given to the source.

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to explore the shift in key employer attractiveness (EA) attributes/dimensions in Croatia during the last decade, as well as to explore whether preferred EA attributes/dimensions differ based on individual characteristics. In the theoretical part of the paper the concept and attributes/dimensions of EA are briefly unfolded, together with the elaboration of the shift in potential and current employees' EA attributes/dimensions preferences during the last period worldwide, and the elaboration of the impact of individual characteristics and contextual conditions on their preferences. In the empirical part of the paper, both the secondary data analysis and the primary research of preferred EA attributes/dimensions are presented. Firstly, 2006 to 2017 results of the national "Employer of the first choice" survey were longitudinally analysed. Secondly, a survey on a sample of 109 graduate management students from the Faculty of Economics and Business – Zagreb was conducted, and the collected data were compared with previous findings. Both secondary and primary data analysis revealed that preferred EA attributes/dimensions have changed over time. Furthermore, EA attributes/dimensions preferences were found to relate to respondents' gender and age according to secondary data, and to respondents' gender and income presence according to primary data.

Key words

employer branding, employer attractiveness, employer attractiveness attributes, employer attractiveness dimensions, Croatia

JEL classification

M12, M50, M39

Introduction

The business world of today is characterized by a very sharp competition for the best employees (e.g. Alniacik & Alniacik, 2012). This is a consequence of the constant rivalry for highest-calibre employees in our knowledge-based economy, the scarcity of knowledgeable and talented human resources, demographic changes (e.g. aging population) that reduce the supply of skilled labour, the paradigm shift from long to short term employee-employer bonding, the trend of switching jobs several times during the career, the search for the work-life balance and similar (e.g. Aboul-Ela, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Roy, 2008; Sedighi & Loosemore, 2012; Suhan, 2017; Tamoniene, 2015; Verma & Ahmad, 2016; Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010). Therefore, organizations try to differentiate themselves from their competitors as a great place to work – the employer of choice, which enables them both to recruit prospective employees with superior knowledge and skills (external employer branding), and to engage and retain their high-flyers (internal employer branding). One of the main tasks of employer branding, as a process of developing an employer brand – a term conceptualized by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 and defined as a “package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by the employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187), is to reveal which features make an employer attractive to its ideal current and future employees. Namely, by understanding employer attractiveness (EA) attributes/dimensions – the perceived benefits that a potential/existing employee identifies with an organization (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011), organizations not only model their employer branding activities and match them with various employee segments’ preferences, but win the “global war for talents”.¹

Moreover, as business environment constantly changes, it is expected that preferred EA attributes/dimensions change over time as well. A shift in employer characteristics preferred by potential and current employees is already envisioned by academics (e.g. Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Reis & Braga, 2016), but has not yet been empirically explored. Consequently, the aim of this study is to identify changes in employer characteristics preferred by potential/existing employees as time passes. Precisely, key attributes that made Croatian employers “employers of choice” during the last decade are being examined, through the longitudinal analysis of secondary data collected by the MojPosao.hr company from 2006 to 2017. Additionally, key EA attributes/dimensions for attracting the graduate management student segment were determined through a primary research, and Croatian students’ perceptions were compared with the available data collected by Deloitte Central Europe in 2015. Finally, the impact of several individual characteristics constituting various employee and student segments was tested, as previous researches documented numerous individual and contextual antecedents being relevant for differences in people’s EA attributes/dimensions preferences.

In the next section, the concept and attributes/dimensions of employer attractiveness are briefly unfolded, accompanied by the elaboration of the shift in potential and current employees’ EA attributes/dimensions preferences worldwide during the last period, and the elaboration of the impact of individual characteristics and contextual conditions on their preferences. The theoretical background is followed by the description of the methodology and results of secondary and primary researches conducted, while at the end of the paper we discuss our findings and offer theoretical and practical conclusions.

¹ The most prominent effects of a good employer brand are an increase in quantity and quality of applicants per vacancy, lower recruitment costs, lower turnover rates, knowledge retention, favourable employee attitudes (such as higher job satisfaction, work engagement, organizational citizenship behaviour and commitment/loyalty), better employee relations and organizational culture, and even lower compensation compared to organizations with weaker employer brands, which all impacts positively employee productivity, customer satisfaction/loyalty, company’s expenses and revenues, as well as the investors’ interest in organization (e.g. Adler & Ghiselli, 2015; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon, Ewing and Hah, 2005; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Gozukara & Hatipoglu, 2016; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012).

Theoretical background

The concept and attributes/dimensions of employer attractiveness

The employer attractiveness is defined as the envisioned benefits that a potential or existing employee sees in working for a specific organisation (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005). The unique aspects of the organization's employment offerings or environment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), determine perceptions of job seekers relevant for their attraction, as well as of current employees relevant for their engagement and retention. The closer the attributes desired by the potential applicants to the employment value propositions offered by the organization, the greater the employer attractiveness (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

There are many attributes/dimensions that make an employer attractive. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) write about functional/instrumental (rational, tangible features like salary, benefits, job security, working conditions or promotion opportunities) and symbolic attributes (emotional, intangible features like organizational culture, organization's prestige, social approval or corporate social responsibility – CSR). Kucherov & Zavyalova (2012) group EA attributes into four groups: (1) economic attributes (high salary, fair system of rewards and bonuses, stable guarantees of employment, work schedule), (2) psychological attributes (strong corporate culture, positive interpersonal relations in organization, team-working, objective assessment of work), (3) functional attributes (content of work, training perspectives, career growth opportunities, opportunities to fully realize employees' knowledge and skills), and (4) organizational attributes (leadership in market segment, international scope of activities, organization's history, reputation of consumer brands, reputation of top-managers, management style). Pingle and Sharma (2013) number eight EA dimensions (EADs): 'Global opportunities', 'Economic value', 'Recognition', 'Application value', 'CSR', 'Learning & development value', and 'Interest/fun value'. Verma and Ahmad (2016) identify six EADs: social value, interest value, economic value, holistic value, cooperation value, and working environment.

However, the most known EA typology in academic circles is the five-dimension one determined by Berthon, Ewing and Hah in 2005, comprising: (1) 'Interest value' (exciting work environment, novel work practices and making use of employee's creativity to produce high-quality, innovative products and services), (2) 'Social value' (a working environment that is fun, happy, provides good collegial relationships and a team atmosphere), (3) 'Economic value' (above-average salary and compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities), (4) 'Development value' (recognition, self-worth and confidence, coupled with a career-enhancing experience and a springboard to future employment), and (5) 'Application value' (applying what employees have learned and teaching others, in an environment that is both customer orientated and humanitarian). Their five-factor structure is a refinement and extension of the three dimensions proposed by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 – factors 1 and 2 capture 'psychological benefits', factors 4 and 5 cover 'functional benefits', and factor 3 equals their 'economic benefit'.

The shift in employer attractiveness dimensions worldwide

Around 2010s, when looking at EADs, current and potential employees around the globe attributed the highest importance to social value when seeking for employment, while they attributed the least importance to market/application value of the potential employers (e.g. Alniacik & Alniacik, 2012; Biswas & Suar, 2013). When looking at individual EA characteristics, in the majority of researches personal and career growth, and relationship factors are being indicated as most important (e.g. Alniacik et al., 2014; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Pingle & Sharma, 2013; Sedighi & Loosemore, 2012; Terjesen et al., 2007), while the lack of interest is displayed in the actual products/services, customer-orientation and corporate social responsibility of organizations respondents wish to work for (e.g. Alniacik et al., 2014; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Pingle & Sharma, 2013). Altogether, development and social elements were the most preferred, and organizations' contribution to the society in general was the least preferred EA characteristic/dimension.

However, mid-2010s are imprinted with a higher focus of current and potential employees around the globe on the economic value as the most preferred EAD (e.g. Bhanot, 2016; Reis & Braga, 2016; Tamoniene, 2015). Predominantly they indicate EA attributes related to compensation and benefits, and job security as the most important ones (e.g. Adler & Ghiselli, 2015; Ciftcioglu & Gul, 2017; Deloitte Central Europe, 2015; Suhan, 2017; Tamoniene, 2015).

Individual and contextual antecedents of employer attractiveness attributes/dimensions

On the individual level, researches revealed significant differences in perceived levels of importance of various EA attributes/dimensions depending on gender (e.g. Alniacik & Alniacik, 2012; Alniacik et al., 2014; Deloitte Central Europe, 2015; Reis & Braga, 2016; Sedighi & Loosemore, 2012; Terjesen, Vinnicombe & Freeman, 2007), age (e.g. Alniacik & Alniacik, 2012; Reis & Braga, 2016), educational level (Alniacik et al., 2014), working experience (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Sedighi & Loosemore, 2012), sector of employment (Suhan, 2017), year of studies (Sedighi & Loosemore, 2012), and student achievement (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). However, research findings are not coherent. For example, some demonstrate little difference in preferences on the basis of gender (e.g. Alniacik et al., 2014; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011).

On the contextual level, it is propounded that socio-economic conditions of a country (i.e. culture, customs, economic trends or unemployment rates) may influence the level of importance given to various EA components (e.g. Alniacik et al., 2014). For example, nationality, affiliated with cultural and economic differences, was identified as a relevant feature (e.g. Alniacik et al., 2014; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011).

Methodology

Secondary research methodology

In order to explore the preferred EA attributes/dimensions and their potential shift in Croatia during the last decade, the secondary data, collected by the Croatian recruitment company MojPosao.hr from 2006 to 2017 through the voluntary web-based survey entitled “Employer of the first choice”, was analysed.

The survey asks from respondents to name three employers that they find the most attractive (their employers of the first, second and third choice), as well as to evaluate the attractiveness of each employer they have indicated using eight EA attributes by assigning values from 1 (unimportant attribute) to 5 (critical attribute). Additionally, the survey collects five demographic variables – gender, age, education level, working status, and geographic region.

Table 1 presents samples of the “Employer of the first choice” survey that MojPosao.hr started to conduct in 2006, and conducted in 2017 for the twelfth time.

Table 1: Samples of the “Employer of the first choice” surveys conducted in Croatia by MojPosao.hr, 2006-2017

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Sample size	> 2000	cca. 2000	> 2500	> 2300	> 2000	> 1000	> 1000	> 1700	cca. 7000	1348 4	> 1500 0	> 1700 0

Source: MojPosao.hr (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

MojPosao.hr reported the survey results related to eight EA attributes by ranking them according to the frequency respondents assigned the highest grade (5) to a particular attribute. Those results are analysed longitudinally for the purpose of this paper.

Additionally, the survey reports about EA attributes preferred by various demographic segments – until 2010 the top five EA attributes were reported, while from 2011 onwards respondents' preferences of all eight explored EA attributes are provided. In this study, we analysed the top five attributes for the whole time series to assure the consistency of our results. More to it, we explored only demographic segments common for the whole time series – women, men, respondents younger than 32 (<32), respondents between 33 and 43 of age (33-43), respondents older than 44 (44+), high-school graduates, university graduates, employed, and unemployed.

Primary research methodology

In order to explore preferred EA attributes/dimensions of Croatian university students, with the purpose of detecting a potential shift in students' EA attributes/dimensions preferences, a primary research was conducted.

The preferred EA attributes/dimensions were assessed using the Employer attractiveness scale (the EmpAt scale), the most frequently used EA scale in academic researches (e.g. Alniacik & Alniacik, 2012; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Gozukara & Hatipoglu, 2016; Reis & Braga, 2016; Roy, 2008; Tamoniene, 2015) developed and validated by Berthon, Ewing and Hah in 2005. It is a multi-item scale consisting of 25 items measuring five aforementioned EADs. The instrument asks respondents to indicate to what extent they consider the listed items important when choosing an employer, using a Likert-type scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important). As the scale is in its original form devised specifically for students in their final year of studies (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005), it corresponds perfectly with our research. The second part of the questionnaire that we disseminated during the "Human resource management" course, contained eight questions which enabled the segmentation of students based on their gender, academic success level (as reflected by their undergraduate grade point average – GPA), presence and years of any work experience, presence and years of work experience in the field of studies (relevant work experience), presence of a monthly income, and perception of the sufficiency of the monthly income of the household they live in.

A total of 109 students participated in the study, which constitutes 82.6% of the total population of graduate management students at the Faculty of Business and Economics in Zagreb (FEB-Zg) during the academic year 2017/2018. Among them, 82.2% are female, 83.5% have a work experience (the average work experience in years = 3.4) and 56.0% a relevant work experience (the average relevant work experience in years = 2.1), 68.8% have a monthly income, and 76.1% of them find the monthly income of the household they live in to be "sufficient" or "more than sufficient", while their GPA at the graduate level is 3.48.

Besides using descriptive statistics for revealing average EA attribute/dimension scores, the statistical significance of differences in scores related to respondents' demographic characteristics was tested using non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests and Pearson correlation coefficient calculations (depending on the nature of variables). As well, the Cronbach's alpha for the overall EmpAt scale was computed. While Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) reported that the Cronbach's alpha for their overall scale is 0.96, the Cronbach's alpha in our survey was 0.858, which however satisfies the 0.8 criterion and implies the internal reliability (Bryman & Cramer, 2011).

Results

Secondary research results

Table 2 depicts the ranking of the leading attributes that make Croatian organizations employers of the first choice. The data show that from 2006 to 2010 the key EA attributes were the “opportunity for advancement in profession” (four times ranked first, and once second) and the fact that the potential employer is an “industry leader” (three times ranked first and two times second). From 2011 onwards, the undisputed winner is “job security” (ranked first seven years in a row), while the second rank is predominantly reserved for “harmonious relations at work”. The lowest ranked attribute throughout observed years was the “opportunity for hierarchical advancement”. It is also interesting to comment that till 2010 material rewards were among the lowest ranked attributes, while the “organizational image” was in the upper section of the ranking. However, 2011 onwards, the “organizational image” was among the lowest ranked attributes (even five times ranked seven), while material rewards climbed to the middle ranking positions.

Table 2: Ranking of the preferred EA attributes in Croatia, 2006-2017

EA attributes	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
CSR	6	7	5	4	5	3	2	3	4	4	4	4
Harmonious relations at work	7	6	5	4	5	4	2	4	2	2	2	2
Industry leader	2	1	1	2	1	1	4	5	5	6	5	6
Job security	4	4	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Opportunity for advancement in profession	1	1	1	1	2	5	6	2	3	3	3	2
Opportunity for hierarchical advancement	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Organizational image	3	3	4	4	4	5	7	6	7	7	7	7
Salary level and other material benefits	4	4	7	7	7	5	4	6	5	4	5	5

Source: MojPosao.hr (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

Appendix 1 presents differences in top five EA attributes related to respondents’ demographic characteristics. Differences between and among different demographic segments do exist, but they are not prominent.

Men’ and women’ top five attributes are generally congruent. They envision the same attributes three times, eight times they agree about four attributes, and once their preferences correspond in three cases. At the end of 2000s, the observed differences were related to women being more intrigued by “job security” and employer’s “CSR”, and men by “harmonious relations at work”. 2011 onwards, among the most desirable EA attributes women, compared to men, position “salary level and other material benefits”, while for men, compared to women, priority was being given to the “opportunity for advancement in profession” (at the beginning of 2010s) and employer’s “industry leader” position (in the middle of 2010s).

When looking at respondents' preferences according to their age group, some differences are noticeable. Compared to other age groups, as expected, youngest respondents (<32) find the "opportunity for advancement in profession" among the top five EA attributes during the last ten years (exceptions are only years 2006 and 2007). Compared to other age groups, till the end of 2000s, "CSR" and "organizational image" were high on the list for middle-aged respondents (33-43), while "salary level and other material benefits" were among the top five for this age group since 2009 (exceptions are years 2011 and 2012). Finally, similar to middle-aged respondents' preferences, but differing from youngest respondents' preferences, for the oldest age group (44+) "salary level and other material benefits" are a traditional top five attribute.

Compared to university graduates, high-school graduates consider "CSR" and "salary level and other managerial benefits" to be notable EA attributes, while university graduates more frequently position the "opportunity for advancement in profession" and "harmonious relations at work" among the top five.

Employed respondents give voice to "salary level and other material benefits" and "harmonious relations at work" as top five EA attributes more frequently than those unemployed, while those unemployed more frequently expect from their preferred employers to exhibit a "CSR".

What can be deduced from the previous is that as years passed, slight changes in respondents' EA attributes preferences occurred related to their gender and age, but not to their education level or working status.

Primary research results

Table 3 shows that for graduate management students in our sample the most favoured EA dimension is the Development value, as well as that among top five EA items three pertain to this dimension. The rest of top five EA items form the social and the economic dimension (one per each dimension). In the same time, the least demanded EA dimension is the Application value, with two items on the lowest five list (two interest and one economic item close the group).

When looking at the effect of demographic variables, Mann-Whitney U tests and correlation analyses exhibited that respondents' preferences differ based on their gender only for the Application value ($U = 1087.5$, $p = .039$), with women perceiving this dimension statistically significantly more favourable than men ($M_{\text{women}} = 3.88$, $M_{\text{men}} = 3.59$). Respondents' preferences differ also statistically significantly between respondents with or without income, but only for the Interest value ($U = 1611.0$, $p = .27$), with income-possessing respondents favouring more the dimension ($M_{\text{with income}} = 3.97$; $M_{\text{without income}} = 3.71$). All other explored demographic variables (GPA, work experience, relevant work experience, and sufficiency of household's income) were not found to be relevant for respondents' preferences.

Table 3: *Ranking, mean scores and top three EA items per EA dimension*

EADs	Ranking	Mean score	Top three EA items
Development value	1	4.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation (M = 4.63)* ▪ gaining career-enhancing experience (M = 4.62)* ▪ feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation (M = 4.51)*
Social value	2	4.33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ happy work environment (M = 4.62)* ▪ having a good relationship with your colleagues (M = 4.50) ▪ having a good relationship with your superiors (M = 4.39)
Economic value	3	4.19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ good promotion opportunities within the organisation (M = 4.58)* ▪ job security within the organisation (M = 4.31) ▪ an above average basic salary (M = 4.26)
Interest value	4	3.89	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the organisation both values and makes use of your creativity (M = 4.30) ▪ working in an exciting environment (M = 4.01) ▪ innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking (M = 3.86)
Application value	5	3.82	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ acceptance and belonging (M = 4.34) ▪ opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution (M = 3.86) ▪ humanitarian organisation – gives back to society (M = 3.77)

Note: * = the top five EA item

Discussion and conclusion

Theoretical contribution

There are four main contributions of our study on the theoretical level. First, it is the first scientific study that longitudinally assessed the preferred EA attributes collected through the largest EA study ever conducted in Croatia.

Second, it is one of the first empirical studies that used the EmpAt scale in the Croatian setting. As the scale enables the detection of critical EA factors, Croatian academics, as well as practitioners, now have a validated insight into dimensions that make Croatian employers attractive to graduate management students – development and social values are the most demanded, which denotes that attractive employers are those who enable professional progress and encourage an organizational climate of good interpersonal relations.

Third, our study exhibited that preferred EA attributes/dimensions change over time. Couple of years ago, Arachchige and Robertson (2011) evoked a longitudinal study of changing perceptions of job seekers in relation to their preferred employer attributes which would reveal trends, while Reis and Braga (2016) posed the question whether EA attributes vary over time, what has been proven both by our secondary and primary data analysis. Our secondary data analysis indicated that EA attributes popular in Croatia changed from development and affective ones (“the opportunity for advancement in profession” and “pride because of working for the industry leader”) to more pragmatic ones (“job security” and “harmonious relations at work”), which is aligned with the world trend. This is presumably a consequence of the Croatian economic situation, as the economic crisis that began in 2008 just recently ended. However, it is an insightful finding implying that preferred EA attributes/dimensions do change. When comparing our primary research results with Deloitte’s findings, we can deduce that students’ preferences slightly changed during the last three years. While our results imply that the three most demanded employer attributes are “pride because of working for a particular organisation”, “gaining career-enhancing experience” and “happy work environment”, according to Deloitte Central Europe (2015) the most important criteria for students in choosing a job in 2015 were “the opportunity to acquire and develop new skills”, “great opportunities of advancement” and “work-life balance”. While development and social value features imprint our primary research, Deloitte’s findings accentuate economic value features. The difference could be attributed to the well-known younger Generation Y members’ need for constant development.

Fourth, three demographic variables were found to be associated with EA attributes/dimensions preferences, which implies that employer branding activities should not be standardized but customized. Relevant independent variables according to our secondary data analysis are gender and age, and according to our primary research gender and income presence. This is in line with previous findings providing evidence that EA attributes preferences diverge based on those people characteristics (e.g. Alniacik & Alniacik, 2012; Reis & Braga, 2016).

Managerial implications

Generally, as there are many benefits of a good internal and external employer brand, organizations should invest heavily in employer brand promise – a total of the organizational culture, policies, systems and work environment that deliver an organization’s value proposition. As Ambler and Barrow (1996) stress, employer brand equity, as an intangible asset in the minds of potential and existing employees, is built up of good HR practices and marketing. “Best employers” and “Employers of choice” rankings are often developed based on information about the organizations’ HR practices (such as compensation, training and development, job design, work-life balance programs, career management), as well as a result of sophisticated internal and external communication, which all results in a positive word-of-mouth (of employer brand advocates/ambassadors) and organizational reputation. However, specific employer branding practices should be planned for (developed using Adler & Ghiselli, 2015; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Mandhanya & Shah, 2010; Tamoniene, 2015; Turban & Greening, 1996): (1) college/university recruiting – e.g. company presentations, company visits, materials about the organization for student career centres, internships, scholarships, career fairs, sponsoring student associations/sport clubs, and (2) employee recruiting – e.g. well thought-through recruitment campaigns, high-quality organizational career web page, well designed website, presence on job portals, social media activities, “why work for us” videos, job fairs. Additionally, of a considerable relevance for a good employer brand are organization’s CSR activities, which should be extensively communicated but realistically described in order to meet people expectations (e.g. Gozukara & Hatipoglu, 2016; Turban & Greening, 1996).

Specifically, managers have to understand which EA attributes are important for various desired current and potential employee segments, as well as whether those attributes change over time, what is acknowledged by our results. In other words, they have to integrate in their activities, both within and outside the organization, those elements that make them desirable as employers, promote widely what

they are doing, as well as align their employer brand propositions with the “EA characteristics demand”. As Gozukara and Hatipoglu (2016) suggest, organizations should first determine the aspects that are considered attractive and those non-attractive to its current and future employees, and then formulate an employer brand strategy based on these aspects.

Limitations and future research

The empirical study conducted was aimed at a specific population of Croatian graduate management students from the FEB-Zg, which implies three basic limitations of our study: the sample size, the heterogeneity of our sample, and one country context. A larger sample, a research covering students from other study fields/universities, employed and unemployed individuals, as well as the replication of our research in other national/cultural, but as well other social, political and economic contexts, would enhance the reliability of our findings. More to it, as researches imply that there is a significant difference between graduating students and experienced employees in the degree to which employer attributes attract them to an employer (Arachchige & Robertson, 2013), future studies should compare EA attributes/dimensions preferred by various stakeholders.

References

- Aboul-Ela, G. M. B. ED. (2016), Employer branding: What constitutes “An Employer of choice?”, *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research*, Vol. 11, no. 1, 154-166.
- Adler, H., Ghiselli, R. (2015), The Importance of Compensation and Benefits on University Students’ Perceptions of Organizations as Potential Employers, *Journal of Management and Strategy*, Vol. 6, no.1, 1-9.
- Alniacik, E., Alniacik, U. (2012), Identifying dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding: effects of age, gender, and current employment status, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, no. 58, 1336-1343.
- Alniacik, E., Alniacik, U., Erat, S., Akcin, K. (2014), Attracting Talented Employees to the Company: Do We Need Different Employer Branding Strategies in Different Cultures?, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, no. 150, 336-344.
- Ambler, T., Barrow, S. (1996), The Employer Brand, *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol., 4, no. 3, 185-206.
- Arachchige, B. J. H., Robertson, A. (2011), Business Student Perceptions of a Preferred Employer: A Study Identifying Determinants of Employer Branding, *The IUP Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 8, no. 3, 25-46.
- Arachchige, B. J. H., Robertson, A. (2013), Employer Attractiveness: Comparative Perceptions of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students, *Sri Lankan Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 4, no. 1, 33-48.
- Backhaus, K., Tikoo, S. (2004), Conceptualizing and researching employer branding, *Career Development International*, Vol. 9, no. 5, 501-517.
- Berthon, P., Ewing, M. Hah, L. L. (2005), Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding, *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 24, no. 2, 151-172.
- Bhanot, S. (2016), External Employer Attractiveness: A Study of Management Students in India, *SIES Journal of Management*, Vol. 12, no. 2, 32-44.
- Biswas, M., Suar, D. (2013), Which Employees’ Values Matter Most in the Creation of Employer Branding?, *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 93-102.
- Bryman, A., Cramer, D. (2011), *Quantitative Data Analysis with IBM SPSS 17, 18 and 19*, Routledge, London.
- Chhabra, N. L., Sharma, S. (2014), Employer branding: strategy for improving employer attractiveness, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, Vol. 22, no. 1, 48-60.
- Ciftcioglu, B. A., Gul, S. (2017), Employer branding descriptions of university students: a business to business firm example, *Journal of Management and Economics Research*, Vol. 15, no. 1, 150-170.

- Deloitte Central Europe (2015), First steps into the labour market – International survey of students and graduates, <file:///C:/Users/Nina/Google%20disk/Radovi/Employer%20branding/Članci/Deloitte%20-%20First%20steps%20into%20the%20labour%20market%20.pdf>, retrieved: 08/12/2017
- Gozukara, I., Hatipoglu, Z. (2016), The Effect of Employer Branding on Employees' Organizational Citizenship Behaviors, *International Journal of Business Management and Economic Research*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 477-485.
- Knox, S., Freeman, C. (2006), Measuring and Managing Employer Brand Image in the Service Industry, *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 22, no. 7-8, 695-716.
- Kucherov, D., Zavyalova, E. (2012), HRD practices and talent management in the companies with the employer brand, *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 36, no. 1, 86-104.
- Mandhanya, Y., Shah, M. (2010), Employer branding – a tool for talent management, *Global Management Review*, Vol. 4, no. 2, 43-48.
- MojPosao.hr (2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017), *Poslodavci prvog izbora* [Employers of the first choice], MojPosao.hr, Zagreb
- Pingle, S. S., Sharma, A. (2013), External Employer Attractiveness: A Study of Management Students in India, *The Journal Contemporary Management Research*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 78-95.
- Reis, G. G., Braga, B. M. (2016), Employer attractiveness from a generational perspective: Implications for employer branding, *Revista de Administracao*, Vol. 51, no. 1, 103-116.
- Roy, S. K. (2008), Identifying the Dimensions of Attractiveness of an Employer Brand in the Indian Context, *South Asian Journal of Management*, Vol. 15, no. 4, 110-130.
- Sedighi, F., Loosemore, M. (2012), Employer-of-choice characteristics in the construction industry, *Construction Management and Economics*, Vol. 30, no. 11, 941-950.
- Suhan, N. S. (2017), Antecedents to employer branding: a strategic focus on the information technology (IT) sector in India, *Polish journal of management studies*, Vol. 15, no. 2, 143-150.
- Tamonieni, D. (2015), *Employer branding: current and future employees' perceptions of employer's attractiveness attributes*, Dissertation, National College of Ireland, Dublin.
- Terjesen, S., Vinnicombe, S., Freeman, C. (2007), Attracting Generation Y graduates: Organisational attributes, likelihood to apply and sex differences, *Career Development International*, Vol. 12, no. 6, 504-522.
- Turban, D. B., Greening, D. W. (1996), Corporate social performance and organizational attractiveness to prospective employees, *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 40, no. 3, 658-672.
- Verma, D., Ahmad, A. (2016), Employer Branding: The Solution to Create Talented Workforce, *The IUP Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 13, no. 1, 42-56.
- Wilden, R., Gudergan, S., Lings, I. (2010), Employer branding: strategic implications for staff recruitment, *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 26, no. 1-2, 56-73.

Appendix 1: Differences in top five EA attributes related to gender, age, education and working status of respondents according to the "Employer of the first choice" study, Croatia 2006-2017

Year	Gender	Age	Education	Working status
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 5, different ranking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ "job security" for <32 and 44+, "CSR" for 33-43 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ "job security" for high-school graduates, "opportunity for hierarchical advancement" for university graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ "salary level and other material benefits" for employed, "CSR" for unemployed
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ "job security" for women", "harmonious relations at work" for men 	Idem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ "job security" for high-school graduates, "harmonious relations at work" for university graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ "salary level and other material benefits" for employed, "harmonious relations at work" for unemployed
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ "CSR" for women, "harmonious relations at work" for men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 2, different ranking ▪ "opportunity for advancement in profession" for <32 and 44+, "harmonious relations at work" and "company image" for <32 and 33-43, "CSR" for 33-43 and 44+, "salary level and other material benefits" for 44+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 3, different ranking ▪ "CSR" and "opportunity for advancement in profession" for high-school graduates, "company image" and "harmonious relations at work" for university graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 3, different ranking ▪ "job security" and "harmonious relations at work" for employed, "CSR" for unemployed
2009	Idem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 2, different ranking ▪ "opportunity for advancement in profession" for <32 and 33-43, "harmonious relations at work" and "CSR" for <32 and 44+, "company image" for 33-43 and 44+, "salary level and other material benefits" for 33-43 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 3, different ranking ▪ "CSR" and "salary level and other material benefits" for high-school graduates, "opportunity for advancement in profession" and "harmonious relations at work" for university graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ "harmonious relations at work" for employed, "CSR" for unemployed
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 5, different ranking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 2, different ranking ▪ "opportunity for 	Idem	Idem

		<p>advancement in profession” for <32 and 44+, “harmonious relations at work” for <32, “company image” for <32 and 33-43, “CSR” for 33-43 and 44+, “salary level and other material benefits” for 33-43 and 44+</p>		
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 3, different ranking ▪ “CSR” and “salary level and other material benefits” for women, “opportunity for advancement in profession” and “company image” for men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 3, different ranking ▪ “opportunity for advancement in profession” and “salary level and other material benefits” for <32, “harmonious relations at work” and “company image” for 33-43 and 44+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 3, different ranking ▪ “CSR” and “salary level and other material benefits” for high-school graduates, “opportunity for advancement in profession” and “company image” for university graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 3, different ranking ▪ “harmonious relations at work” and “salary level and other material benefits” for employed, “opportunity for advancement in profession” and “company image” for unemployed
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “industry leader” for women, “opportunity for advancement in profession” for men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “opportunity for advancement in profession” for <32, “industry leader” for 33-43 and 44+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 5, the same ranking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 5, different ranking
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “salary level and other material benefits” for women, “industry leader” for men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “opportunity for advancement in profession” for <32 and 33-43, “salary level and other material benefits” for 33-43 (two attributes ranked as fifth for this group) and 44+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Idem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 5, different ranking
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Idem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “opportunity for advancement in profession” for <32, “salary level and other material benefits” for 33-43 and 44+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “salary level and other material benefits” for high-school graduates, “opportunity for advancement in profession” for university graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 5, different ranking

2015	Idem	Idem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “CSR” for high-school graduates, “opportunity for advancement in profession” for university graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “company image” for employed, “industry leader” for unemployed
2016	Idem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 3, different ranking ▪ “opportunity for advancement in profession” for <32 and 33-43, “industry leader” for <32 and 44+, “salary level and other material benefits” for 33-43 and 44+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “salary level and other material benefits” for high-school graduates, “industry leader” for university graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 5, different ranking
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 5, different ranking 	Idem	Idem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the same 4, different ranking ▪ “salary level and other material benefits” for employed, “industry leader” for unemployed

Note: Idem = the same as in upper box.