



Guide

Employer branding

A no-nonsense
approach

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Foreword

Why is the CIPD interested in employer branding... and what is the link to HR?

Employer branding seems to be offering HR an intriguing model by which to link their people strategy and the company brand to achieve differentiation in the labour market. Results from CIPD research show that companies are struggling to attract, recruit, engage and retain talent for their organisations. These are reported as top priorities for HR in many countries around the world.

Brand management is a well-established concept – why can it not be directly transferable into companies to help drive internal value from a company's most valuable asset – its people?

A company brand is used to gain customer loyalty and therefore increased profits/success through market differentiation. An employer brand can be used for similar effect by HR and organisations, to compete effectively in the labour market and drive employee loyalty through effective recruitment, engagement and retention policies.

Employer branding is how an organisation markets what it has to offer to both potential and existing employees. A strong employer brand should connect an organisation's values, people strategy and HR policies and be intrinsically linked to a company brand.

The number of definitions and theories about employer brands can make your head spin. But we suggest here that the most sensible, workable definition goes something like this:

An employer brand is a set of attributes and qualities – often intangible – that makes an organisation distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience, and appeals to those people who will thrive and perform to their best in its culture.

What will this guide deliver?

This guide starts at the beginning and shows the HR practitioner how to develop and communicate an employer brand.

In support, case studies from a very wide selection of employers and organisations illustrate why and how they have developed and communicated an employee brand to attract, retain and/or engage both potential and existing employees.

This work is supported by an interactive practical tool www.cipd.co.uk/tools

If you would like to comment on this research then please email research@cipd.co.uk

Further research and insights on employer branding from the CIPD can be found at www.cipd.co.uk/research/_empbranding.htm

This guide has been written for the CIPD by Paul Walker, Head of Employer Branding, Barkers, and project-managed by Andrew Platt Higgins, Planning Director, Barkers.

Part 1: Introduction

‘The power of the brand in all its forms is likely to become even more deeply embedded in our cultural landscape.’ Dr Shirley Jenner and Stephen Taylor, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School

If you’re bracing yourself for a long, challenging, jargon-laden read, arguments and counterarguments that zoom back and forth like tennis balls on Wimbledon’s Centre Court, and theories that make your head spin, relax.

At the risk of mixing metaphors, the best way to think of this guide – and to actually use it – is as one of those ‘I can’t imagine life without it’ cookery books that you clutch thankfully in one hand while you stir the béchamel sauce with the other. And the more its pages become well-thumbed or metaphorically stained, the more it will have served its purpose.

But what is its purpose? And why is it appearing now? After all, with Amazon able to show you at least one hardback treatise on the employer brand, when the CIPD itself has already published on the topic, when virtually every recruitment advertising agency lists employer branding among the services it offers, isn’t yet another guide, well... just a little late in the day?

There’s no glossary of technical terms; something as logical and common sense as employer brand development shouldn’t need one.

Employer brands and the whole discipline and practice of developing and implementing them aren’t new. And that’s the reason why this guide is so timely. It’s based on the collective experience of many different organisations – large and small, public sector, commercial sector, ‘third sector’ – who shared their experiences with the CIPD and with the author and his colleagues in an extensive programme of research that, not surprisingly, used some of the techniques that feature prominently in brand development projects. It’s

also based on the author’s own practical, sharp-end experience of actually doing employer brand development for organisations ranging from multinationals to individual NHS trusts over a period of seven years.

So this isn’t a prescriptive, ‘this is how you must do it’ guide; it’s the accumulated experience, the knowledge, the learning points of dozens of people who have taken the plunge, done the work, faced up to the challenges – and derived the benefits. They’re in the unique position of being able to say: ‘This is how it worked for us, therefore this is how it can work for you.’

But if we look at the employment market, the economy and how the fundamental relationship between people and work is changing, this guide hasn’t arrived a moment too soon. The ‘war for talent’ – that HR catchphrase of the turn of the century – is turning hot again. The HR profession is seeking new ways to demonstrate the true value it brings to an enterprise. The CIPD’s own recent survey shows that recruitment and retention are big, big headaches for many organisations. It also says that, ‘Employer brands are very much in fashion at the moment.’ That’s both a good thing and a bad thing. It’s good to see they’re receiving the attention they deserve. But if people don’t fully understand what they are and what they can and can’t do, there’s a danger they’ll go the way of power breakfasts, big hair and padded shoulders.

So the time is right for a guide that lives on the same planet as every hard-pressed HR practitioner, that mixes the authority of collective experience with a degree of humility, that seeks to teach, not preach.

This is that guide. Read, react, learn, practise.

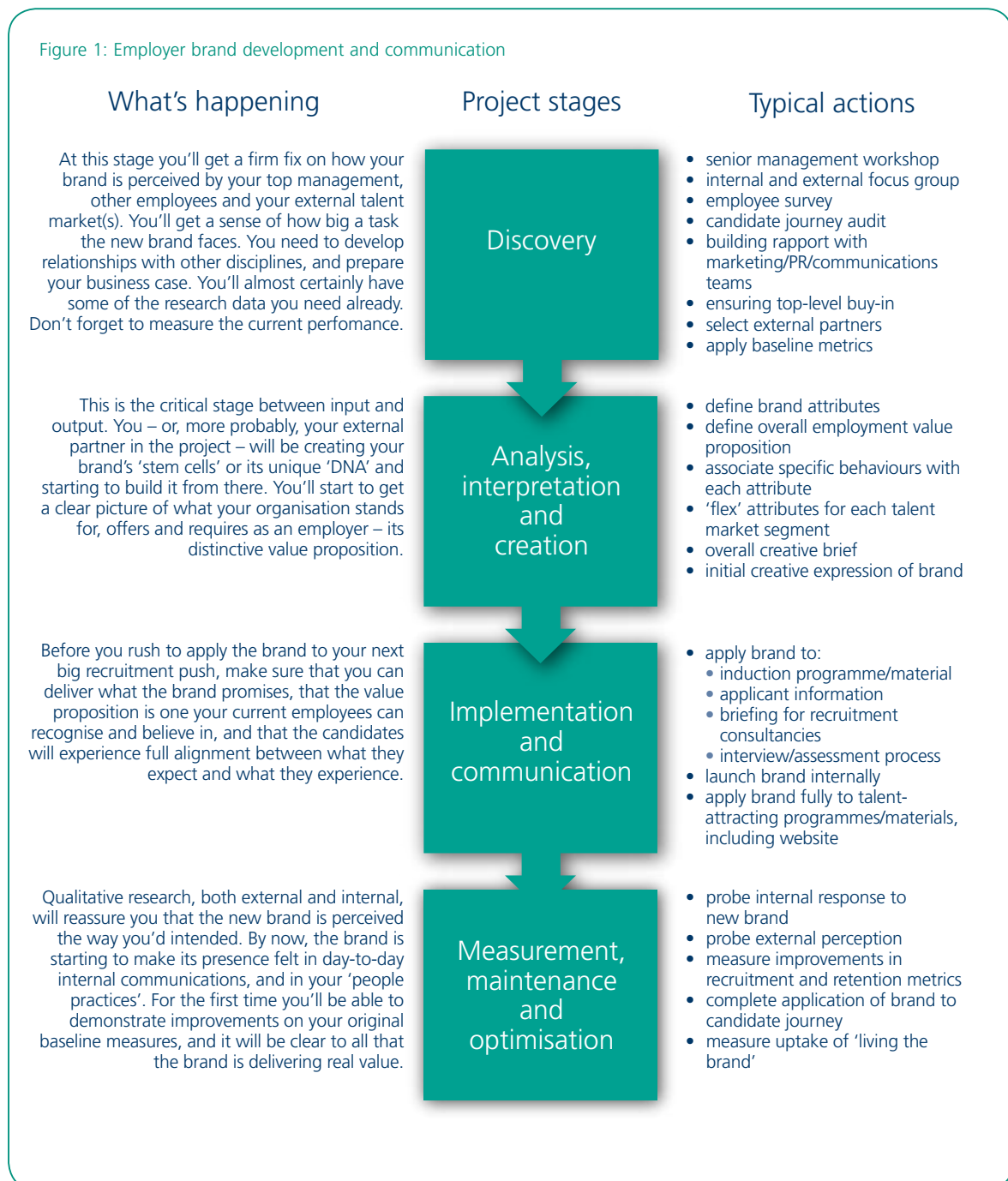
And enjoy.

Part 2: Before we get started...

You might find it useful to see the format a typical employer brand development and communication project follows. You'll learn more about the specific activities later

in this guide. But in the meantime, the four stages of a project, and what happens in each one, are outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Employer brand development and communication



Part 3: How did we get here?

Background to the project

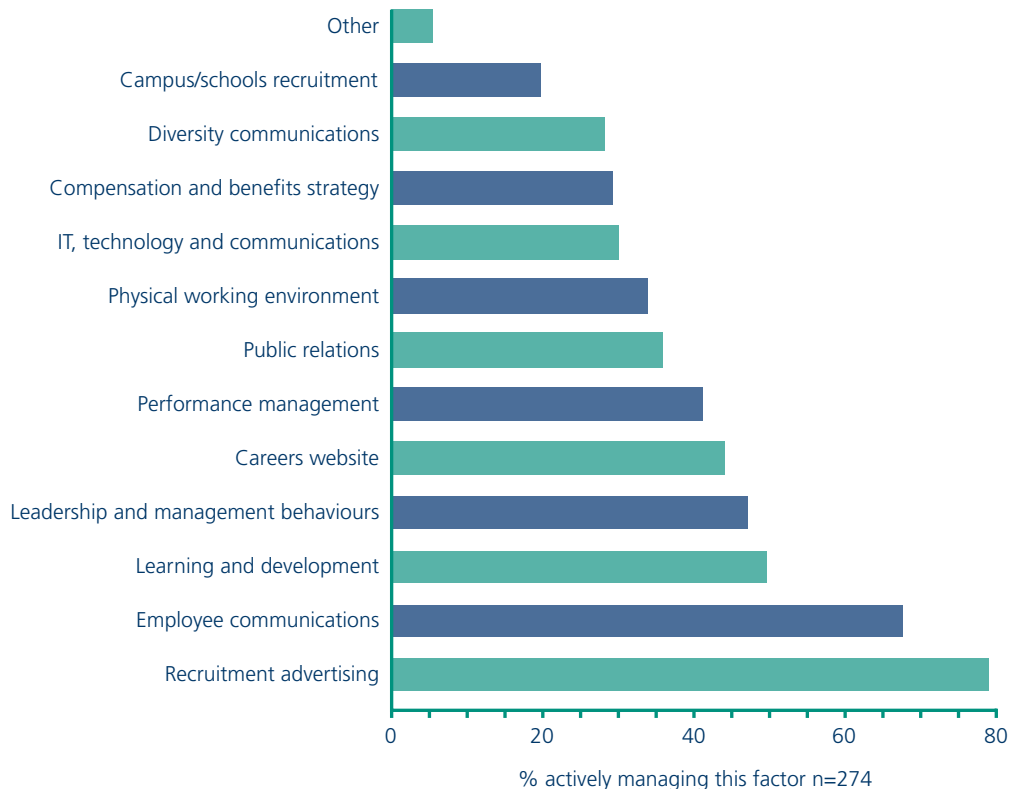
We conducted two discovery days in which senior HR people from respected, high-profile organisations in both the commercial and public sectors shared their experiences of brands and brand development, and worked to give us an idea of what 'best practice' might look like. They also supplied two of the three full-length case studies you'll find later in this guide.

We carried out an online survey on the CIPD website, asking for responses to key questions about employer brands and their development. 280 people took part in the survey.

We conducted telephone interviews with senior HR people who had direct experience of developing and communicating employer brands, with particular emphasis on small and medium-sized enterprises.

We searched through a wide range of papers and articles about all aspects of employer brands, including the CIPD's own published material.

Figure 2: Aspects actively managed through employer branding programme

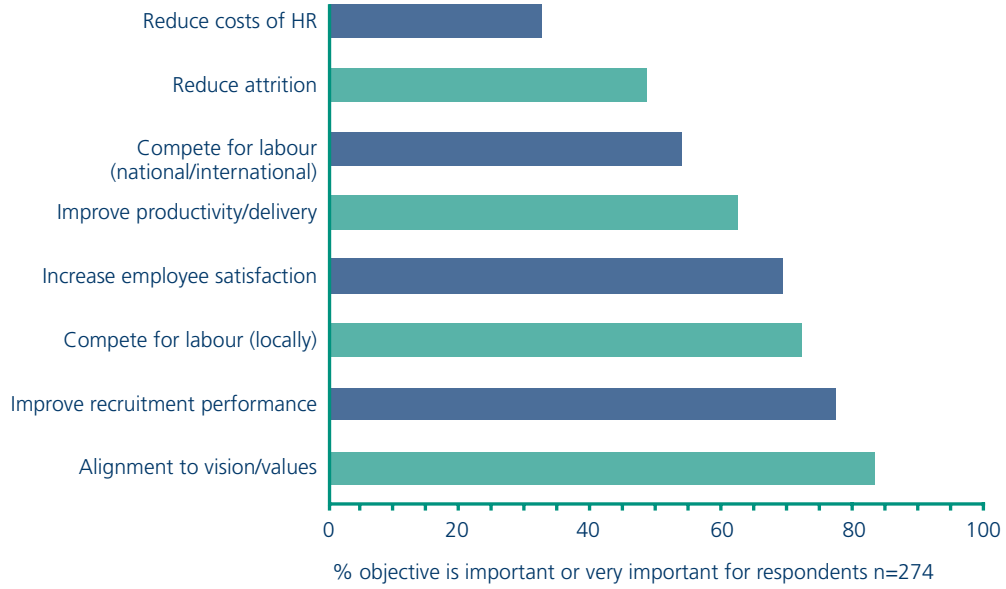


What CIPD members told us

The brand playing an active part in managing recruitment advertising and employee communications? Yes, you'd expect those two bars to protrude way beyond others in Figure 2. But look closer; notice how respondents believe that the brand has a relationship to, and an impact on, other issues like leadership and management behaviours, and performance measurement. This suggests that more organisations than one might expect recognise the importance of 'living the brand'. One surprise – and a disappointment – is that campus/schools recruitment seems to be relatively low on the agenda; a brand gives you the means to engage with both of these key audiences.

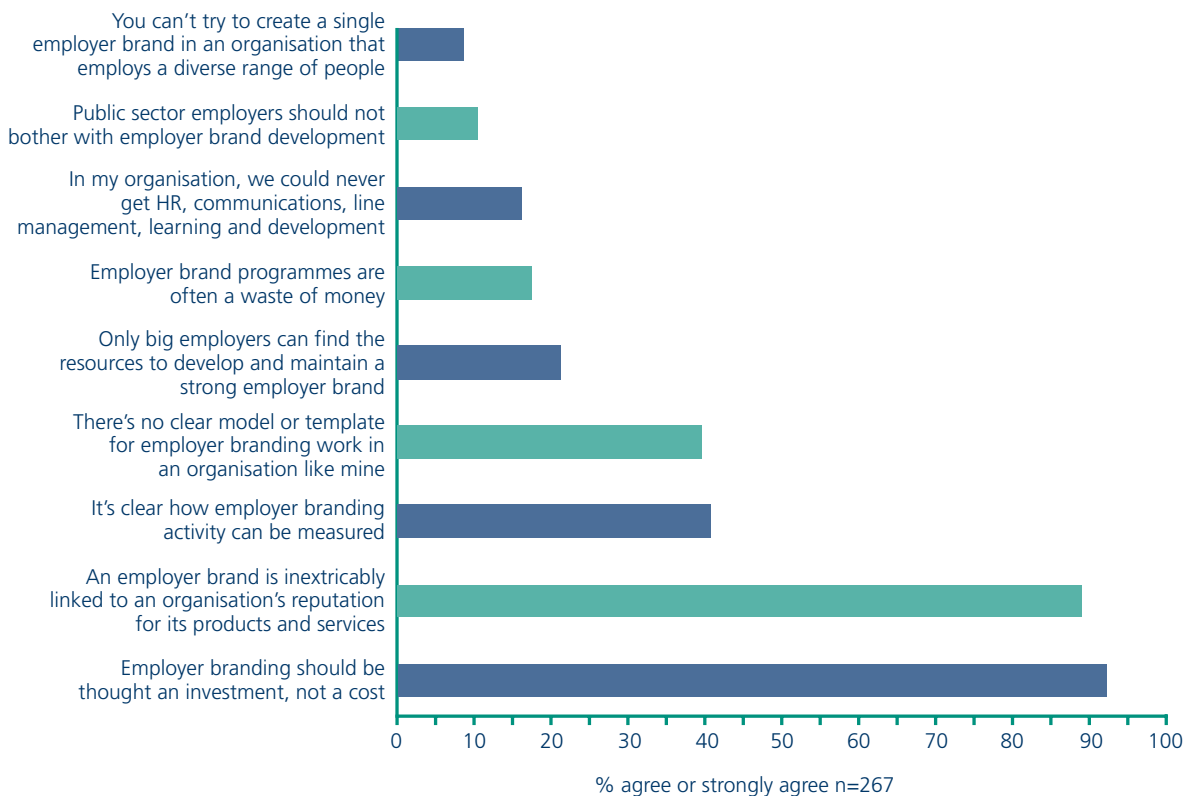
From the online survey results it's encouraging to see that responsibility clearly rests with the leadership team for most respondents. More worrying is the apparent imbalance between corporate/brand communications and the HR director, suggesting that he or she may not yet be quite 'up there' where the big decisions are made. More concerning still is that 'no real or definitive point of ownership'.

Figure 3: Employer branding objectives ranked by importance



Respondents were very clear about their objectives in developing, communicating and maintaining an employer brand. What's particularly encouraging is that so many clearly recognise the impact the brand can and should have on productivity and service delivery.

Figure 4: Characteristics of employer branding



Good news all round in Figure 4 – particularly the belief that brand performance can be measured and can therefore be shown to be an investment, not a cost. But some organisations clearly need to challenge their assumption of an automatic linkage between the employer brand and the reputation of their goods and services. For some organisations the two need to be, and can be, effectively de-coupled.

The challenges and problems respondents experienced included:

- fragmentation of ownership, with poor communication between departments involved in the process
- lack of recognition of employer branding as a vital element of corporate strategy
- size of organisation: paradoxically, bigger organisations reported more problems than smaller ones, even though there's a presumption that employer branding is only relevant to corporate giants
- HR not perceived having the 'clout' to get involved in strategic functions
- fragmentation of workforce militating against consistency of message.

Part 4: What is a brand?

'I'm part of the HR community, but I sit with my colleagues in brand. My job is trying to speak marketing to HR people and HR to marketing people.' David Roberts, Orange Employer Brand Manager

'The branded employment product simplifies choice, reassures prospective employees about quality and reduces risk.' Dr Shirley Jenner and Stephen Taylor, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School

'We can all have those performance conversations... but by trying to communicate the brand values, it's useful to have another way of saying, "This is what we expect of you." It's a more positive way.' Senior HR practitioner at first discovery day

Alongside the war for talent, there seems to be another fierce little conflict going on – for the ownership of the employer brand and its development and implementation.

There's no shortage of protagonists. The main forces take the form of an alliance between HR departments and their recruitment advertising agencies. And why not? After all, most organisations see the employer brand, initially at least, as a tool to help them recruit. But within those organisations there may well be a separate tussle going on between HR and marketing, particularly in organisations with prominent, valuable consumer brands. But then there's a school of thought that says that employer brands are not really about talent attraction, but about that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow: employee engagement. At that point, another army steps in to claim ownership – the management consultants (and even the actuarial practices), who have little interest in or knowledge of marketing and marketing communications, but who feel that such strategic issues are their natural fiefdoms.

It's all very confusing. And while the debate rages, HR practitioners agonise, time runs on, problems pile up and great opportunities are missed. What often gets lost in the mêlée is the fact that brands – any kind of brand,

What often gets lost in the mêlée is the fact that brands – any kind of brand, including employer brands – are *marketing concepts and marketing constructs*.

including employer brands – are *marketing concepts and marketing constructs*. It's significant that Orange, that supremely brand-savvy organisation that supplied the excellent case study you'll find later in this guide, say of their approach: 'We took the best approaches from the marketing community around brand-building and segmentation and applied them to the HR world.' Brands make people want to buy something and feel good they've bought it for a long time afterwards. And feeling good makes you want to tell other people about it; it turns you into an unsuspecting brand advocate. They're also about differentiation. Don't forget that was the main purpose of the original, physical brand burnt onto the rumps of several thousand head of cattle – to distinguish them from all those other critters from that ranch on the far side of the hill. And today, when technology makes products (and jobs) increasingly similar, the brand comes into play to give people a basis for choice, irrational though that process may often be. Finally, brands are about reputation, which probably explains why Oracle's

legendary founder and CEO, Larry Ellison, is on record as saying, 'Your brand is what people say about you when you've left the room.' And think of the way reputation has seen many great brands safely through a rocky patch. When Marks & Spencer seemed to have lost the plot a few years ago, their reputation, built up over long decades in the British psyche, saw them through. The engine may have stalled, but the flywheel of that massive reputation kept on turning.

Employer brands are more like consumer or corporate brands than many people realise or acknowledge. All brands function and deliver value in the same way, like this:

They achieve differentiation

One of the questions that people raised in our research and that clients have often asked me in the past goes like this: What are we offering that's different or special? How can I claim that our call centre/NHS trust/retail operation/civil service department/local authority is really any different to any other?

It's a good, valid question and it deserves a full answer.

Let's take the imaginary case of two apparently similar (in practice, nearly identical) call centres. Both offer excellent training, flexible shift patterns, and plenty of other good things that people look for in their next job. But one has taken the trouble to communicate these clearly and consistently over a period of time. It has taken steps to build its reputation among the local community. It has made sure that what it promises potential employees – how it actually feels to work there – is pretty much how it really does feel, and that external promise aligns with internal reality. Its recruitment advertising and all the material an applicant sees contain the same messages and share a common look and feel.

At the end of the day, the two call centres still remain as they always were, nearly identical to each other. Any differences may be of style rather than substance, but that's not the point. The point is that one call centre has pre-empted and outsmarted the other by painting a realistic picture of what it will feel like to work there. The real differentiation lies in the fact that the perception one has created is clearly delineated; the other is still vague and fuzzy.

They support premium pricing

How often have you shelled out a few extra pence (or maybe many extra pounds) on a product whose brand you recognise, trust and admire? In consumer marketing, you can simply charge more on the basis of the strength of your brand.

In the world of employment marketing, the same benefit of a well-developed brand applies, but is expressed rather differently. With no brand, no profile, no reputation, you're forced to compete on money. Like many organisations, you may find yourself simply throwing money at a recruitment problem, and getting embroiled in some crazy kind of auction in which you and your closest competitors try to outbid each other on salaries. (Anyone who's ever recruited in the graduate market will know just how this feels.)

With a fully formed brand, you'll have plenty of other areas in which you can compete – successfully – for talent. You'll be joining the ranks of those fortunate organisations who can say: 'Of course, we don't pay the highest salaries, but people are queuing to join us. They like working for us and they know our name will look good on their CV.'

They inspire loyalty

Any marketer knows that the greatest value of their brand doesn't come with the customer's initial purchase but with the way that customer will stay loyal to the brand for many years to come. If you feel good about the car, mobile phone company, bank or holiday company you've chosen, if you feel that it's done what it said on the tin and actually delivered on the kind of promises that attracted you in the first place, you'll want to tell people about it. And when you do, your spontaneous advocacy will cut much, much more ice than any amount of that company's advertising, no matter how skilful and creative it may be.

An employer brand will stimulate that 'initial purchase' by attracting enough of the right kind of applicant. But the real value comes later, when that individual looks round after their first few months, feels that things are pretty much how they'd hoped and been promised, and starts to feel that affinity, that bond – often irrational but always powerful – that characterises the relationship people have with all the really important brands in their lives. They'll be more engaged in their

work, showing more of that 'discretionary time and effort' that's one of the basic measures of employee engagement. They'll feel proud of their organisation and what it does. They won't feel forced into the kind of defensive response that some of the participants in our discovery days described, in which in a social setting they dreaded the question, 'so who do you work for?' and felt furtive or evasive in their replies.

The notion of affinity is central to the concept of the employer brand – arguably to a greater degree than consumer brands. It's a sign of *psychological engagement* – that all-important aspect of overall engagement that, as the CIPD's own publication *Working Life: Employee attitudes and engagement 2006* points out, is one of the key drivers of superior individual and collective performance. Where loyalty is at least in part logical and often publicly expressed, affinity is something quieter, more intuitive and harder to articulate, more private and personal – but every bit as strong and as valuable to the organisation. It's simply

The brand creates an opportunity to identify and create a bond with the 'right' people – those who will feel an affinity with the organisation and who will thrive and perform to their fullest potential in its culture.

the feeling that the organisation I work for is somehow 'for me'. And the corollary of that is that, if it's right for the kind of person I am, it's wrong for a different kind of person. So, in the context of employer brands, affinity is another dimension of differentiation. And even at the earliest stages of talent attraction, in the first ad or webpage that initiates an individual's relationship with an employing organisation, the brand creates an opportunity to identify and create a bond with the 'right' people – those who will feel an affinity with the organisation and who will thrive and perform to their fullest potential in its culture. And at the same early stage, the opportunity also exists to gently dissuade and deter the 'wrong' people.

When I developed the employer brand for HM Prison Service, one of the outputs was naturally an articulation of 'the sort of organisation we are' and 'the sort of people we need to attract and retain'. On that basis, the Service's senior management team saw the brand as a much-needed opportunity to identify the type of person it didn't need and whose presence they felt was inhibiting progress and blocking change. As organisational or cultural change become increasingly frequent and radical, the constituency of people who won't or can't adapt becomes bigger. An employer brand can articulate to them what 'the new way' means in terms of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours: it can help them change and catch up. And if all else fails, it can indicate to them that the time might be right to start looking around. An employer brand has as much value in deterring the wrong kind of people from an organisation as in attracting the right kind – 'right' meaning not just natural members of a cabal of corporate clones, but people who understand and espouse its distinctive vision and values.

Part 5: How to tell if you need an employer brand

‘Our new chief exec opened the local paper and spotted five of our recruitment ads on the same spread – all different, some with just little captions managers had done for themselves. That created the platform to try and fix this thing.’ Senior HR manager, a participant in our first discovery day

‘If people apply for a job or when they come for an interview, and they have a bad experience, they’ll slag us off. And that impacts on our consumer brand as well.’ Senior HR practitioner at first discovery day

The first point to realise here is that you already have one

That doesn’t mean that one of your HR predecessors went out and developed one. It simply means that your organisation has a reputation as a place to work. It may not be the reputation you would want, or that accurately reflects the internal reality of what working for your organisation actually feels like. It may be stronger or weaker than you suppose. It will, in all probability, be more vague and fuzzy, more devoid of clear, distinctive features than you would wish – it may fail to do the job of differentiating you from your competitors in your talent market or markets.

But while you ponder the state of your brand and cogitate about what you should do with and about it, there are some classic symptoms that suggest something needs to be done. And for many organisations, these are the triggers, the catalysts that start the process of developing their employer brands and ensuring they derive full benefit from them.

Your chief financial officer asks to ‘have a word’ about escalating recruitment costs

Many organisations fail to establish their true costs of recruitment because the figures such an exercise would reveal would be pretty scary. The traditional cost-per-hire measure is useful – but only up a point. It may help to see how your costs compare with the usually accepted

average for your industry or for a particular recruitment category, such as graduates.

But the figures that really shed light on the state of your employer brand are more specific. One of the most telling metrics of all is how much you spend on recruitment consultants. There are many reasons why organisations use recruitment consultants and, at least in terms of yielding a shortlist of good candidates, they do an excellent job. But, in my own experience, many recruiters confess to using consultants because their own organisations lack the reputation, the presence, and the brand profile that would make their recruitment advertising fully effective. Their advertising would simply have too much to do – answer the basic question, ‘What would this outfit be like to work for?’ as well as generating response from enough candidates who fit the candidate specification.

Recruitment consultancies deliver the goods – but at a price. Where brand profile is concerned, remember it’s their logo on the ad, not yours.

Another key metric is the proportion of candidates who simply fade away during the application process – particularly those who, after several interviews and having shown bags of enthusiasm, then decline your kind offer of a job. The actual costs of such a failure need some work if they are to be fully quantified, but the effort will

be worth it since it shows the true cost of failing to excite and engage (there's that word again) the right candidates as you and they go through the courtship rituals of the application/candidate-management process. But consider the cost of having to re-advertise. Put a measure on the value of management time that must be devoted to reinterviewing. Depending on the nature of the role in question, you may even be able to point to the cost of lost business or delayed projects.

Your managing director wonders why your organisation doesn't feature in the *Sunday Times* 'Best 100 places to work'

A fixation with league tables has almost become a national disease. Nevertheless, there's real value in appearing in this and any other tables that identify and recognise good employers and good employment practices, to say nothing of how good it feels as you make your first entry into the charts.

The *Sunday Times* survey is, for my money, one of the most valuable, not just because of its high profile, but because it's based on how real people genuinely feel and what they actually say about working for their organisation. What still surprises me is how many smaller, almost niche organisations regularly appear in the rankings, and often towards the upper end. They won't have spent a fortune on high-profile, brand-based talent attraction advertising, because their relatively small size means they don't need to. Instead, they've focused on defining what they want their distinctive employment experience to be, and ensuring that it becomes an everyday reality for their employees.

And in so doing, they've given themselves three of the greatest benefits of an employer brand – loyalty, engagement and advocacy.

Some of your best people are leaving after less than 18 months

You've got serious problems. Because what's happening is that newcomers experience a disconnect between what they assumed (or were led to believe) working for your organisation would feel like, and what they actually discover. This lack of alignment is one of the cardinal brand sins: any brand that doesn't deliver – from the airline that leaves you stranded to the credit card company that leaves you fuming – is shooting itself in the foot. And the bigger the purchase decision, the more

complex and important the 'product' (like a new job), the greater the sense of disillusion and let-down. And the greater the likelihood that you'll tell people about your bad experiences. And that they'll tell someone else and...

In that way, people who should be brand advocates become brand saboteurs.

You feel uncomfortable telling people who you work for

'I've given up telling people I work for the local council. I just tell them I work in HR and leave it at that.' That was the comment of a participant in one of the discovery days that provided so many insights for this guide. Okay, local authorities are always going to be the butt of carping criticism, but so are many other organisations. And the saddest thing of all is the sense that many people, in many different organisations, have simply thrown in the towel and opted for the soft option, instead of fighting their corner and saying, 'Yes, I do work for so-and-so organisation. And do you know what? I really love it.'

In a recent CIPD-sponsored survey, less than half of the respondents said they would encourage friends and family to do business with their organisation: just over half would recommend it as a place to work, but with barely 19% prepared to do so without being asked.

Working Life: Employee attitudes and engagement 2006

Many people instinctively feel good about the organisations they work for, but they struggle to articulate why. What the process of developing an employer brand does is to identify the reasons why: it gives shape and coherence to what would otherwise remain a powerful but unfocused feeling. People who like the job they do and the place they work want to become advocates for it. An employer brand arms them with the arguments they need.

You admire your competitors' recruitment advertising more than your own

I suppose it's only natural that the one community that has done more than any other to claim ownership of employer brands and their development is recruitment advertising – or 'employment marketing', to use a term

Defence Internal Audit: from villains to heroes

Within the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and in the accountancy profession generally, Defence Internal Audit (DIA) was seen as those nasty people whose job it is to point accusing fingers, rap overspending knuckles and find scapegoats. A modest employer brand project based on some simple focus groups and resulting in a bold, innovative (and highly successful) creative approach to recruitment advertising revealed a very different picture and effectively repositioned DIA as the team that helps managers manage financial risk.

When the brand was launched at the DIA's national management conference, two delegates claimed that the new representation of their organisation had initially surprised and even shocked them. 'Our first reaction was, "that's just not us". But a few minutes later we realised the new brand was *exactly* us – it's just that we'd never seen it that way before. It made us feel better about the organisation and our own jobs.'

that more accurately describes what this corner of the marketing communications industry does these days.

But this has created problems. For a start, it's created the widespread impression that employer brands are mainly, or even exclusively, about the look and feel of your recruitment ads. You still hear clients asking for 'a really well-branded campaign', when what they really mean is little more than a new house style. And with some honourable exceptions, even some of the entrants in the 'best employer brand' category of the various award schemes that lighten up the HR calendar are

You still hear clients asking for 'a really well-branded campaign', when what they really mean is little more than a new house style.

really better defined as campaigns – sophisticated, creative campaigns, but campaigns nonetheless.

The other problem is that too many organisations have rushed to express their shiny new employer brand externally without having made sure that it accurately and honestly reflects the internal reality of what it feels like to work for that organisation.

But having said all that, recruitment advertising (or rather, employment marketing communications) is one of the most powerful and important manifestations of

an employer brand. Remember, we said at the start that an employer brand is a *marketing* concept or construct.

But why do so many organisations feel that their recruitment advertising, in whatever medium, is disappointing and lacking a certain something? Are they right, or is it just the same human instinct that says one's next door neighbour's picnic or barbecue is always better than one's own?

I suspect they *are* right, and the root of their disappointment is the fact that, for all its impact and originality, for all the display of consummate creative craft skills, there's little clarity in what the advertising is actually saying – there's no clear proposition. And that's because they haven't identified the essence of what their organisation is and offers as an employer. No brand, therefore no distinctive identity for the organisation. And no consistency, either. Your instinctive disappointment will almost certainly lead you to try something different next time and ask your agency for yet another set of creative proposals. And so you'll miss the steady build-up of your brand – its distinctive features, values and personality – in the minds of your target audience. People relate to the brands in their lives almost as they relate to other people. They seek and enjoy a long-term relationship that may spring a few pleasant surprises as the brand develops and grows in clarity and confidence. But they don't want shocks – the feeling that the person they thought they knew and liked has somehow changed.

For your last big recruitment drive, you sent out 267 application packs... and got 48 back

What's almost certainly happened here is that your recruitment advertising, in whatever form or medium, has created certain expectations – which subsequent material and the candidate's experience have failed to meet.

For the candidate, the whole application process (which, even in the days of online application forms and applicant tracking systems, can still be long and complex) should be one of growing familiarity and engagement (see Figure 5). It should be a smooth, incremental process, culminating, ideally, in the candidate feeling they have psychologically joined the organisation even before they turn up in the flesh on their first Monday. In reality, the candidate will undergo an emotional roller-coaster ride in which the initial high is quickly followed by a sense of disappointment and uncertainty.

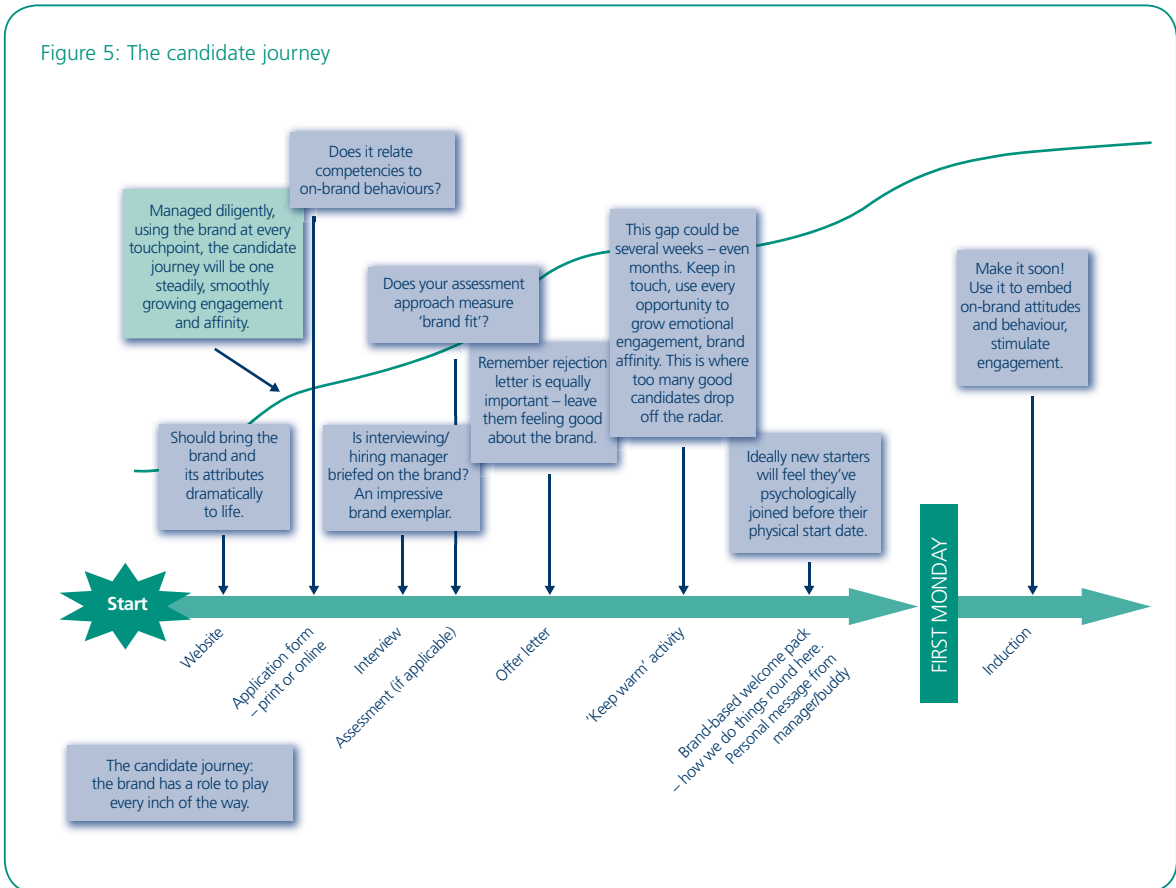
What's needed is absolute consistency of message, style and tone at every contact between the organisation and the candidate. And it's the brand that makes that

possible, by identifying not just the messages the candidate needs to receive, but the style and tone in which it receives them.

Your workforce lacks the balance and diversity you want and need, with too many applications coming from the same communities they've always come from

Amazingly, even in the days of fragmenting communities and high personal mobility (although not, apparently, social mobility), you still come across organisations that can boast employees from three generations of the same family. There's something quaint, cosy and faintly reassuring about such a phenomenon – something rather traditional and British.

And let's face it, it suggests the organisation must be doing something right if mums and dads are happy to see their kids following in their footsteps – and maybe even joining their *own* parents who are thoroughly enjoying part-time work as they head towards retirement. The organisation's PR machine will love it; the local paper will print it.



But all is not as well as it seems – not nearly as well. And in the seeds of such apparent comfort, future discomfort lies. A situation in which successive waves of applicants arrive, almost by a process of osmosis, from the same communities means the organisation will lack any profile outside those communities. Because the supply has always been there, the organisation has never felt the need to spread the net wider, to explore alternative pools of talent. And because we're talking about a generational phenomenon here, one that goes back several decades, those communities will be predominantly white.

But diversity – or lack of it – isn't the only issue here. What's happened is that the organisation's employer brand – the articulation of the distinctive employment experience it offers – will have been created and communicated not by the organisation itself, but by the communities from which it draws its talent. Its reputation will have been made not by any concerted, brand-based communications initiatives, but by countless conversations over the garden fence. And the aspects of the employment experience that become the stuff of local folklore may not be those that the organisation needs to emphasise and promote. And local perception may lag well behind the changing reality, with the result that subsequent starters may experience a sense of shock that 'it's not a bit like what my dad said it would be'.

And a situation in which organisations have allowed their employer brands to be determined and communicated not by themselves but by the markets they seek to recruit from isn't an exclusively local phenomenon. For years, the BBC allowed itself to be seen as the natural destination for liberal arts graduates who didn't want to dirty their hands with anything too overtly and squalidly commercial. Right across London, the London Fire Brigade had to fight long and hard to reduce its dependence on applicants from white males from families where joining the brigade was almost a tradition, like driving a black cab or getting a job in 'The Print'.

In this context, the function – and the value – of an employer brand is as much to say 'this is how it *won't* be if you work here' as to paint the picture of how it will be.

You sense that your workforce has more cynics than optimists

Cynicism is the corporate equivalent of Japanese knotweed – insidious, pernicious, and hard to get rid of once it's established.

Its seeds can be sown early in an individual's employment with an organisation, with the misalignment between what they anticipated and what they actually experienced. For some, the sense of let-down will be so strong that they'll simply vote with their feet. But others may not be so lucky in finding their next job. Their sense of disillusion may stop just short of the point at which they write their resignation letter, and in some ways this is even more damaging. 'Oh well,' they say. 'It's a job, isn't it? I guess I'll stick it out for a bit.' And as they do stick it out, they start to infect those around them, including new arrivals.

The employer brand can address this issue in two ways. First, it can create that all-important alignment between the anticipated and the actual experience. Through carefully planned, consistent messages, style and tonality right the way through the application process, joining, induction and beyond, it can set detailed, realistic expectations of what it means to work for that particular organisation, what it offers and demands, what it will actually feel like on a day-to-day basis.

(The brand) can create that all-important alignment between the anticipated and the actual experience.

In addition, the research that distinguishes the development of an employer brand from any other kind of employment marketing initiative will reveal any gaps between how the senior management team sees the organisation, the values it espouses and the employment experience it offers and how things appear to those working closer to the coalface. The bigger the gap, the harder the brand has to work, and the more caution needs to be exercised over any claims or promises the brand may make.

And at the very least, the brand development process, particularly with a proper creative input, will express

that organisation's vision and values in ways that people can relate and sign up to, and that's far removed from the stilted, limiting and frankly naff vocabulary with which such key issues are all too often expressed.

Your recent merger has resulted in mutually suspicious tribes, not one focused, homogeneous team

Multinationals and big PLCs aren't the only organisations who regularly undergo the shocks of mergers or acquisitions. It's happening everywhere – to central government departments, not-for-profit organisations and NHS trusts.

Each party will have its own distinctive way of doing things, its own ethos and culture, even if it never went down the route of formally developing its employer brand. And perhaps it's because the issues of its vision and values – the precise nature of the employment experience it offers – have never been fully resolved or properly articulated, that the organisation's people will

feel threatened by the impact of what they may instinctively feel is an alien culture.

There's a bizarre paradox at work here: the closer the two organisations get to each other in structural and operational terms, the more their employees will start to notice differences rather than similarities – and the more they will feel separate from 'the other lot'.

Any merger situation represents a golden opportunity to develop and communicate an employer brand; there's simply no excuse for not doing it. Technical, structural and operational issues will still take time to resolve. What the brand does is to give all employees a sense of what the new organisation adds up to as an employer, probably with greater clarity and certainty than they'd experienced under the old, separate regimes. They'll feel more confident and less suspicious. And they'll feel more engaged not just with the enterprise *per se*, but with their new colleagues, who are now 'us' and not 'them'.

ScottishPower: securing buy-in to get results

What prompted you to develop an employer brand?

ScottishPower is actually made up of four businesses that have evolved quite separately for a variety of regulatory and other reasons. While taking account of the required separation, there has been an increasing desire from our executive to enable us to exploit the ScottishPower brand in terms of market positioning and opportunities that present themselves through economies of scale. In terms of our people brand, a catalyst was five ScottishPower adverts appearing in one local newspaper, all with a very different look, feel and tone.

War for talent was already hurting in some roles requiring key skills, such as engineering. And demographic trends tell us that in some of our businesses we need to recruit fresh talent. Our contact centres face typical industry challenges of recruitment and retention.

All of this led us to question our employment proposition and people branding. Do we really understand perceptions both internally and externally? Is the employment proposition as compelling as we want it to be? Are there any negative perceptions we might be able to manage out?

We decided we wanted to create a consistent and safe employment proposition that clearly articulates what ScottishPower stands for as an employer of choice. That – together with the management of existing perceptions – would inform the employment brand design.

How did you measure your organisation's status before taking action?

Having secured Executive Team buy-in in March 2006, with our chief executive as overt leader of the ScottishPower employment experience work, he invited 350 people from across all four businesses to

ScottishPower (continued)

participate in 'What Matters to You?' workshops. Delivered by people with *gravitas* in the business – not senior managers or HR – we took them through a series of questions: Why work? Why work at ScottishPower? How would you rate us against these? The outputs gave us the first detailed employee feedback plus the rationale behind the creation of our first, all-company, externally managed and benchmarked engagement survey that went to all 9,000 employees. At the same time, we commissioned a piece of market research among people looking for work in the geographies and sectors we operate in. We took them through a similar exercise to our 'What Matters to You?' workshops, with the addition of gathering data on who they saw as great employers as well as their perceptions of ScottishPower. All this data helped us identify key messages based on positive perceptions and action, and management of weaker perception in the development of the creative brief that formed the basis of the ScottishPower employment brand.

What did you hope that employer brand development would deliver for your organisation?

Energy around the opportunity of working with a major energy company! An opportunity to present the company as exciting, varied in terms of opportunity and forward-looking – future-proofed! In turn this would improve attraction to the many varied roles at ScottishPower – some of which lack visibility. The knowledge the research gave us about employee issues stimulated more leadership 'listening' to inform employee-led change. This would improve engagement and so lead to better performance together with better retention and reduced sickness absence rates in our high-churn businesses.

Was the employer brand developed as part of an overall HR or leadership strategy? Please describe.

Absolutely. The ScottishPower HR strategy was articulated in 2005 and, while it has been fine-tuned since, remains fundamentally the same now as described then. Given our recent acquisition by Iberdrola, it remains to be seen whether this strategy will take us forward into next year.

What risks were involved in embarking on the project?

- Executive buy-in might have been lip-service only. Tried to develop a brand before with external consultants but did not gain business support.
- Ability to convince all key stakeholders of risks of doing nothing and opportunities to the businesses if we were to do this well.
- Potential takeover – appetite to deliver this might be different.
- Some of the businesses were familiar with engagement and branding principles and had action under way – to which they were attached. Others did not. Trying to find a common approach across four diverse businesses would therefore be difficult.
- Stakeholder management – so many stakeholders with competing priorities and different views.
- Ability to convince employees that there was value in their participation – action would occur.
- Lack of marketing awareness in the team.
- Lack of brand management or focus outside of the retail business.

How did you develop your employer brand? Were any formal models or processes used?

We developed the approach based on work we knew Severn Trent Water had carried out in terms of employee engagement and used our own approach to market research and creative briefing on the back of that.

(continued)

ScottishPower (continued)

Who had ownership over the project?

Genesis from the HR Director who tasked the Head of Employee Engagement and Resourcing (me) to lead activity but signed off by the Executive Team and Chief Executive, and the directors fronted communications to the business – as a business-led initiative.

What other functions (if any) were involved from your organisation? HR? Marketing? Other functions/disciplines?

Group Communications; Marketing; HR Consulting Teams and the business; Procurement.

Outline the basic stages of the project

- research and competitor benchmarking
- proposition definition and executive sign-off
- employee workshops
- employee surveys
- market research
- creative agency brand development
- stakeholder sessions throughout design
- communication and training

Does your solution encompass changes to management behaviours, competency frameworks, assessment and development processes?

Not yet. We had developed a series of employment commitments – through ‘diagonal slice’ in terms of level, pan-business focus groups and planned to present them to the board. These articulated an employment ‘deal’ – the two-way nature of what the company commits to with its employees and also the commitment employees give in return. These would have informed behaviours, competencies, communication... At the same time, our board had recommended the takeover by Iberdrola and we knew our CEO would be leaving when the transaction took place in April – his commitment to this was crucial to credibility that we would do something about this. We took the decision to hold the commitments until/if we could secure the commitment of our new CEO. This has not yet been proposed, as the focus right now is on integration and ensuring the transaction delivers its numbers. We will make a decision on whether to take this work forward once there is more clarity around how the business will look going forward.

What do you regard as the most successful aspects of the project?

- buy-in from the Executive Team
- presenting the entire programme of activity as a major piece of business – not exclusively HR-led – and using business leaders to communicate and managers with *gravitas* and influence to run the focus groups
- willing participation and honest feedback from people at ScottishPower
- external benchmarks and survey response toolkit to inform actions by using a third party – Best Companies
- single look and feel to advertising recruitment is a fantastic achievement – in pilot now
- the modular design of the adverts and the advert builder that allows managers to choose their own photography (if they want to), strap-line and energy line, together with size and shape of advert – designed but launch planned for July post-pilot so lots of interest in this from managers who have seen it but no actual feedback on use of this yet

ScottishPower (continued)

And the least successful? What problems did you encounter?

- less scope for quick wins to respond to both the focus groups and survey than I would have liked
- should have kept the community who delivered the focus groups more informed after the events and tried to keep that community together as a way to manage information into the business
- resistance from the businesses who had their own survey
- some survey distribution challenges cost us some credibility
- too long between running the survey – November/December – to announcing the results – March takeover!

What were the key learning points from the project?

The importance of stakeholder buy-in and management across the levels.

What budget did you have?

- approximately £30,000 to run the focus groups and survey last year
- approximately £45,000 to deliver the market research and creative advertising this year

What were the project timescales?

One year from focus groups to single look and feel to advertising recruitment delivery.

In what ways did the project differ from your original expectations?

Began as an engagement programme and widened to incorporate the brand.

How are you measuring the effectiveness of the brand – the return it yields on its original investment?

Major deliverables are the action plans around the survey and the brand. Both of these have delivered in the last two months, so it's too early to measure results. We have developed an engagement model that we plan to use to look at feedback – from joiners, leavers and existing employees – going forward. We will also track attraction and retention as well as absence management data. Ours will not be the only initiatives informing movement in these numbers, but they will help us to understand the effectiveness of what we have done. We're hoping this will work post-integration with Iberdrola.

Looking back on the project, what would you have done differently?

- more stakeholder management – never seem to be able to get enough
- used different communication channels and involved all managers in delivering information/instruction rather than landing on them at the same time as their teams
- might be easier in an organisation that had more of a brand focus

Information supplied by Alison Balantyne

Case study learning points

Two points occur to me after reading this excellent case study. The first is the absolute necessity of getting wholehearted support (note the phrase: 'executive buy-in might have been lip-service only'.) from as high a level as early as possible – an issue

that surfaced time and time again in the research we conducted for this guide.

The other is the way this HR team made it abundantly clear from day one that they were the people in the driving seat – no ownership issues here!

Part 6: Making the case, getting the cash

'We estimate that we are saving £2.5 million per annum as a result of these changes.'

Peter Absolom, King's College NHS Trust

People's estimates of what it actually costs to develop, implement and communicate an employer brand vary wildly. A few years ago, we tacked some questions about employer branding onto *The Economist's* regular survey of the movers and shakers of British business. One of the questions we asked was how much they supposed a full-scale employer brand development project would cost. The average figure, I seem to recall, was £250,000 – a figure, you'll be glad to learn, that's miles wide of the mark (even though it left my colleagues and I muttering 'if only...').

Admittedly, a brand development project for a well-known, global IT company that I managed some years back came out at around that figure – due largely to an exceptionally intensive programme of research conducted in a dozen different countries. More typical, in my experience, would be an £18,000–£30,000 project for an NHS trust or a local authority. A project for a major UK automotive brand (one of the very few, sadly) cost the client £47,000, including full-scale creative development. But it delivered, in his unprompted estimate, a value of £250,000 in terms of its ability to attract better-quality engineering graduates, and, for the first time in the company's history, women and graduates from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. By my somewhat shaky maths, that represents a return on investment (ROI) of 290%.

The fundamental difference between any talent attraction or internal communications initiative that's based on a brand and one that's based on the traditional platforms of instinct and rule of thumb is research. So it's hardly surprising that research is the major cost element in developing an employer brand. And the good news is that research costs are readily quantifiable.

It's one thing to hear someone's comments on a brand-related issue; it's something else to actually see their body language as they make those comments, and to observe the dynamics between them and the other group participants.

Only a few years ago quantitative and qualitative research lived in two distinct worlds. Qualitative research, incidentally, asks relatively deep questions, explores more complex brand-related issues with relatively small numbers of people: think focus groups. Quantitative research does the opposite: think street or, increasingly, online surveys. But today, technology makes it possible to factor qualitative questions into quantitative research – for example, prompting participants to respond to a brand proposition or even a brand-based design in their own words, as well as ticking boxes and agreeing or disagreeing with certain statements. For anyone contemplating developing an employer brand and wondering what the bill will come to, this is good news because, as in so many other business activities, smart technology means lower costs.

Having said that, there's still no substitute for focus groups. It's one thing to hear someone's comments on a brand-related issue; it's something else to actually see their body language as they make those comments, and to observe the dynamics between them and the other group participants.

If you're thinking of running focus groups (and there's nothing to stop you doing this yourself, using outside specialists simply to recruit relevant participants), the cost variables will be the time it takes to locate suitable participants and the size of the incentive you have to offer to persuade them to turn up. A word of warning –

if you're planning on running focus groups in mainland Europe or other parts of the world, the cost of incentives rises dramatically. Having said that it's possible to give a reasonably detailed breakdown of the

main cost elements of research – and remember, these will almost certainly be the major cost elements of the whole brand development project.

Guide to research costs

The following guide is based on 2007 prices and is intended to illustrate the average costs you can expect to incur when commissioning a reputable research or communications business to deliver the research component of an employer brand programme.

External focus groups

A programme of focus groups made up of the kind of people that you want your employer brand to reach and influence will be made up of a number of components:

Recruitment costs reflect how difficult it will be to find people who match your target profile and how much persuading and project management will be involved in getting a group of them together to discuss your issues. A relatively easy target profile, say people working in customer service jobs in the Leeds area, might cost as little as £250 per group to recruit. A more complex profile, such as senior female managers within major technology businesses, would present a much harder job for a recruiter and could take several days' work to populate even a single session. So recruitment fees in this case could be £750 or more per group. It's often the costs and practicality of group recruitment that dictate whether focus group work is the right approach for your project.

Incentives are the rewards paid to the respondents themselves for turning up to your focus group. They range from around £10 per session for students, through to perhaps £25–£40 for contact centre and general staff, to £100 or more for professionals, managers and specialists. In some cases, respondents can be motivated by a non-cash incentive such as a box of wine, store vouchers or a donation to charity.

Venue hire costs will depend on whether you use a community centre, a hotel conference room or a purpose-built viewing suite. A neutral venue is often essential if people are to feel comfortable talking about working for employers other than their own, so it's worth the investment. Allow £150 for a mid-range hotel venue and perhaps another £30–£50 per group for refreshments.

Moderation fees will usually be based on the day rate of the person who's running the groups for you. An experienced moderator will be able to run up to four groups in a single working day (but remember to allow for travelling time, preparation, and so on), which can bring costs down, but in practice you should allow for up to a half-day per group. Day rates might range from £400 to £1,000 and more, depending on the moderator's experience and speciality. Some groups (including those among people with disabilities, or longer workshop sessions) may require more than one person to run them properly.

Analysis and reporting will often be done by the same person who moderated your focus groups and will probably be based on the same day rates outlined above. You can expect to receive a report of what respondents said at the groups (suitably anonymous to protect individual confidentiality), together with some conclusions and recommendations. This takes time and thought to put together, and for a programme of groups will usually take a few days to complete.

Project management will involve discussing your objectives with you, developing your respondent profile, writing discussion guides, booking venues and so on. It might range from £100 to set up a small project to several thousand pounds over a large sampling programme.

Internal focus groups

Groups made up from among your current employees will obviously be cheaper to run, since you don't have to recruit or incentivise your own people – or pay for a venue. If you're using external help, though, you can expect moderation, analysis and project management charges to be calculated in the same way, although they can be minimised if you can provide administrative support.

Other sampling methods

If focus groups aren't the way forward, there are a few other ways in which you can build insight into employee and potential candidate attitudes:

Telephone interviews can allow you to reach a larger number of people than focus groups and can often be conducted more quickly, since people don't have to be brought together. While a telephone sample is quicker and sometimes cheaper to conduct, researchers agree that it will provide less depth than focus groups – not a problem if you're looking to get a snapshot of awareness and perception of your status as an employer, but less useful if you want to explore attitudes in more depth. One hundred straightforward interviews with fairly easy-to-reach people might cost around £4,000, including project management and a report.

Online surveys are increasingly used to build insight within an organisation and are very quick and comparatively inexpensive to use. They can also be used among people outside the organisation, although the challenge then is to identify the right people and persuade them to complete the questionnaire. This is one of the easiest techniques for employers to use without external help. There are a number of proprietary online survey tools to choose from and some of these allow users a limited version of their package free of charge. If you're using an agency, allow £1,500 for survey design and deployment plus any costs for finding a suitable external sample.

Street surveys have become harder in the age of the mobile phone and iPod, but can still offer real insight into employer perception among local people. You'll need to use qualified researchers and they'll need permission to conduct the survey if it's around a school, college, in a shopping centre or other private land. A good survey, conducted over a couple of days in a number of sampling locations might cost £3,000–£5,000.

Omnibus research offers a way in which a number of different organisations can conduct market research at the same time, each asking a few questions of the same sample. Some omnibuses are done online, others by telephone and others in-home or on-street. Essentially, you buy space on the survey question by question, so if you only want a simple answer to a straightforward question, an omnibus could be the most cost-effective way in which to do it. Single questions on an omnibus reaching 2,000 people can cost from £300, while more complex question combinations could reach £5,000 or more.

That covers the *inputs* to your employer brand development (we'll discuss the relationship between input and output and the whole structure of a brand development project later in this guide).

As for outputs, many of these will be activities that are ongoing, or initiatives you're contemplating or that you may even have scheduled for action. And on that basis, any additional cost could well be minimal or even non-existent.

For example, you will still need to recruit, and therefore to attract, applicants through one form of employment marketing communications or another. Your newly developed employer brand will obviously have a big and immediate impact on this. It's not just a question of new messages, a new look and feel. The brand will probably change the whole relationship between the offline and online elements of your employment marketing. The other thing it will do – should do, must do – is to reduce your costs by reducing your dependence on traditional, reactive, 'distress purchase' recruitment advertising.

The new brand will have to be applied to a broad range of other employment marketing or internal communications initiatives and materials – applicant information literature, campus marketing programmes, induction materials and programmes, the organisation's intranet or staff magazine, and so on. It may be that your initial research, particularly a communications audit, reveals that there are glaring gaps in your communications armoury, or that the messaging and tone of certain items is in conflict with the new brand. If that's the case, action needs to be taken, and the funding needs to be found to fix an urgent problem. But otherwise, you don't need to scrap and replace

You need enough to enable you to compare how your organisation is perceived as an employer externally, and internally. That's the bottom line.

your existing materials – just wait until Stationery tells you that existing stocks are running low.

All this may still leave you wondering, 'Yes, but how much money will I actually have to find? What's the minimum I can get away with?' Only you can determine the budget you need to set for the exact circumstances of your own organisation. But there's a simple answer, a pretty accurate rule of thumb – enough to enable you to compare how your organisation is perceived as an employer externally, and internally. That's the bottom line.

Only you can decide how much money you'll need, and where it will come from. In essence, developing an employer brand is a business investment like any other, and as such will show a return on the original sum invested. But that still leaves the question of who will stump up the initial cash to pay for the research. Maybe you have adequate funding and sufficient budgetary control to allow you to do this unaided. It's more likely that, like most of your colleagues in any business function, you'll need to make a robust business case if the cash is to be forthcoming. In many organisations, likely sources of supplementary funding can include marketing, PR or internal communications.

But irrespective of financial considerations, it's essential to forge alliances with these and other business functions if your project is to succeed. It's not a question of going to them cap in hand; money aside, you can do as much for them and help them meet their business goals as they can for you, and you need to make them understand that. Here are some of the arguments you could use:

To corporate finance

'I can save you serious money on recruitment, reduce the hidden but considerable costs of premature departures and demonstrate an attractive and measurable ROI.'

Of course, if you make that kind of claim, you'd better make sure that ROI really is measurable in ways that would impress the most sceptical accountant. Any promised improvement begs the question, 'improvement against what?' – which is why the baseline metrics of your current performance in recruitment and retention is so important. We cover this issue later in this guide.

King's College NHS Trust: clear demonstration of a return on investment

What prompted you to develop an employer brand?

The trust's recruitment advertising was bitty and fragmented, and there was no consistency between advertising and the material that applicants subsequently received. Bringing together all of this material and relating it to cultural and communication changes was key to improving both recruitment and retention.

How did you measure your organisation's status before taking action?

We took measurements on a wide range of factors including our vacancy/turnover/applications for post rates together with staff surveys/exit questionnaires and focus groups at the point of induction.

What did you hope that employer brand development would deliver for your organisation?

The aim was to improve the quality and quantity of applications, to be recognised immediately whenever we placed advertisements but also to retain staff on the basis that we delivered the expectations they had of working for the trust.

Was the employer brand developed as part of an overall HR or leadership strategy? Please describe.

The employer brand was not just applied to recruitment, but was also applied by formalising the standards of behaviour, creating our vision and mission and, through our training and development strategy, bringing about organisational cultural change.

What risks were involved in embarking on the project?

There were clearly financial risks, as developing a brand with our partners was expensive. The aim was for this to play an important part in reducing staff vacancies and aiding retention, thus lowering those associated costs.

How did you develop your employer brand? Were any formal models or processes used?

There were a couple of things we did. We had to work within some national guidelines as an NHS trust using the NHS brand. We built this into our brand in a partnership approach with our recruitment advertising agency and our corporate communications department. While we did not follow a specific model, we had a strategy to evolve our brand over time so it also looked fresh but was clearly still 'us'. We continue this today.

Who had ownership over the project?

The ownership was within HR through my lead as staff resourcing manager. However, as with all of our projects, we greatly involve staff groups to gain broader input and buy-in.

What other functions (if any) were involved from your organisation? HR? Marketing? Other functions/disciplines?

We had focus groups covering most staff groups in addition to working closely with our corporate communications department and our recruitment advertising partner.

Outline the basic stages of the project.

The basic stages of the project were to look at where we currently were, take professional advice upon some possible styles, consider the restraints, accept feedback from a wide range of staff, have management information as a baseline and then, as the brand developed, have a strategy and plan for future development.

King's College NHS Trust (continued)

Does your solution encompass changes to management behaviours, competency frameworks, assessment and development processes?

Yes. The cultural change stage was part of a wider trust project (called First Choice) but built behaviour standards into every job and assessed through our competency framework tools. Staff appraisals and personal development plans were also used.

What do you regard as the most successful aspects of the project?

Our success has been evident from the dramatic improvements we have seen in our vacancy and turnover rates. Also, our staff surveys give positive feedback that our brand works well. We were also highly commended at an awards ceremony. The most successful aspect, though, is the bottom line. The brand has played its part in reducing our expenditure and improving our staff performance, both of which are reflected in our front-line delivery.

And the least successful? What problems did you encounter?

One of the problems we faced while evolving our brand was that some of our staff preferred our previous style. However, as each new style emerged they always said the one before was best. This kept the project team one step ahead, albeit we learned that within a short time people would value the change. You have to have faith in what you're doing to keep moving forward.

What were the key learning points from the project?

Leadership, partnership working, consultation and using management information to measure success.

What budget did you have?

In one sense there was no budget, although a five-figure sum was used in developing material and leading the work – this had to be reflected in reductions to recruitment advertising spend, lower vacancy rates and reduced turnover. We estimate that we are saving some £2.5 million per annum as a result of these changes.

What were the project timescales?

While there was a lot of concentrated work within the first 12 months, this has been an ongoing project for the past six years and it continues to develop.

In what ways did the project differ from your original expectations?

As recruitment advertising was a key part of this project, the significant and quick changes to online recruitment were not in our original expectation. Today we're more overwhelmed than 'underwhelmed' with people who wish to join us, and that brings a whole new set of problems.

How are you measuring the effectiveness of the brand – the return it yields on its original investment?

We can clearly see from our key measurements that developing our brand has been a significant factor in returning a far greater yield than the original investment.

Looking back on the project, what would you have done differently?

We're quite satisfied with what we have achieved so far. Perhaps anticipating and developing our website quicker would have helped.

Information supplied by Peter Absolom

Case study learning points

'We estimate that we are saving some £2.5 million per annum as a result of these changes' – says it all, really.

To the top management team

'An employer brand will enhance our overall reputation. It will show the world that we manage our human capital as efficiently and to as much good effect as we manage any other class of asset or any other part of our business. It will also have a positive, measurable impact on employee engagement and customer-facing performance. It will impact the bottom line.'

Your top management cadre – right up to board level – are unlikely to be neutral about your desire to develop an employer brand. They'll either welcome the idea or oppose it, probably on cost grounds or, to be blunt, on the assumption that disciplines other than HR are best equipped to handle the task.

No matter which way you suspect they'll jump, you need to involve them as deeply as possible and as early as possible. Later in this guide we outline a very specific and effective way to secure that involvement and its natural end-product – powerful advocacy throughout the organisation for what you're trying to achieve. But just remember that the view from the top is one of three layers of perception you need to capture and measure, along with the view from less exalted tiers of the organisation, and the view from the external talent market. In my experience, very senior managers and directors absolutely love being involved in developing the employer brand for an organisation over which they not only exercise strategic control, but emotional as well as literal ownership. It helps them see the organisation – their organisation – with greater clarity and deeper insight. And it ensures that any closed doors you may encounter as the project progresses won't stay closed for long.

Your HR colleagues

'This project will establish our team as the driving force behind a project of strategic business value. It will prove that we're making a big contribution to overall HR strategy, and enhance our reputation in the eyes of colleagues in other disciplines.'

A few years ago, there seemed to be a debate or even an unseemly struggle over the ownership of true, deep HR strategy – and even, at times, over the status and future of the HR profession itself. Some people, probably management consultants, seemed to suggest that dealing with the big, sexy, strategic HR issues was a task best left to management consultancy. HR practitioners themselves would, by implication, be reduced to administrative functionaries.

The profession seems to have been pretty successful in fending off this attack. But one still encounters a great many organisations where HR is simply not represented at the same level as, say, marketing or finance. I'm not suggesting that developing an employer brand will win you a seat on the board. But it is a great way to prove that big, complex issues are safe in your hands, and to demonstrate the value of what you and your colleagues bring to the party.

Line managers and front-line recruiters

'The new brand will make your lives easier and deliver better candidates for less.'

For a line manager, it can be a hard, lonely business recruiting for your own team. You wish you didn't have to spend so much time rewriting that recruitment agency's copy. If only those consultants didn't keep sending you candidates who look great on paper but who you know, from the first two minutes of the interview, just aren't going to be right for the organisation. And that last ad you had to repeat cost *how* much?

One of the earliest and most valuable outputs of the brand development process will be a brand toolkit. Available online or in physical form, it introduces the brand attributes and associate messages; gives the rationale behind the new brand; provides hard-pressed managers with templates, headlines, style guides and even a library of images – all the tools needed to ensure that every ad, in whatever medium, will generate response from the right kind of candidate (it's that 'affinity' thing again) and build the profile of the brand among key target audiences.

Even simpler but equally effective is a brand briefing document that can be sent to all the recruitment

consultants on the organisation's supplier list. It will help them decide which candidates with seemingly identical CVs will be right – will have that elusive but essential cultural 'fit' with the organisation – and which won't.

Your marketing or PR team

'I can create thousands of additional OTS (opportunities to see – a measure of the number of chances an average member of key target audiences have of being exposed to your story) and help build the organisation's profile and reputation among many different audiences. Remember, potential employees are also potential customers.'

Classic PR is arguably the most underused weapon in the employer brand armoury. Good messages about an

organisation as an employer send out good messages about the organisation *per se*: wouldn't you feel better buying an airline ticket, a skinny latte or even a burger from an organisation that has a reputation for looking after its people?

And an organisation that gets its employer brand and its PR people working together is one smart organisation, for whom both activities support each other, and add up to a communications and brand positioning whole that's greater than the sum of its parts.

I don't believe in using jargon for its own sake, but that OTS acronym is something you might like to casually drop into any conversation with your PR colleagues. 'Talking the talk' can be an important way to enhance your credibility with a different business 'tribe'.

Recruiting for the company, not the local chieftain

Research that fed into employer brand development for a major UK and European retailer included telephone interviews with a lengthy list of suppliers, particularly recruitment consultants. As the interviews progressed, it became clear that many consultants were frustrated by presenting candidates who looked great on paper, but were ultimately rejected on the grounds that 'they just wouldn't fit in'. As one consultant ruefully put it: 'I always feel I'm recruiting to the culture of a particular manager's own team, not the business as a whole.'

The research revealed the dangerously fragmented, tribal nature of the organisation – and therefore one of the biggest problems the brand would have to fix. But a simple briefing document for consultants outlined the core qualities, values and even personality traits that the new brand had established, and prompted consultants to look for those same qualities – that brand affinity – in future candidates.

Part 7: Overcoming objections

‘The employment brand is much, much bigger than the physical manifestation of what your recruitment looks like. It’s an end-to-end way of thinking about why people choose to work for you.’ Glyn House, Operations Director, wagamama

That title presupposes you’ll actually receive some: with careful preparation, a robust business case and investing the time and effort to make your case and forge alliances with interested parties, launching and running your brand development project should be plain sailing, and any objections are minor irritations rather than serious roadblocks.

Nevertheless, as you confront the real challenges that are present in any brand development project, irritations are things you can well do without. The objections you’re likely to encounter – and the arguments with which you can effectively demolish them – look like this:

‘Never mind about your precious brand – I’ve got vacancies to fill.’

There’s no denying that developing, implementing and communicating an employer brand takes time. In my experience, the shortest time from switching on the tape recorder for the first focus group to rolling out the new creative work was six weeks, and that was pushing it. You could argue that, while the start of the project is obvious, there’s really no end-point, since a brand will go on evolving, adapting to change, and delivering its value for years.

But that doesn’t mean you have to put all the activities the brand will affect – particularly day-to-day recruitment – on hold. The initial research may yield some insights that can be fed directly into at least the messaging of your ongoing recruitment activity, if not its style and tone. It may modify it, improve it slightly – but it won’t stop it happening. And it won’t stop hard-pressed recruiters or line managers recruiting.

‘I’ve been handling my own recruitment for years. I know what works for me.’

That’s a reaction anyone trying to launch a new brand internally is likely to hear. It needs paraphrasing: what the objector really means is, ‘No one’s consulted me about the new brand. It’s been presented as a *fait accompli*, with a load of rules and regulations that I’m quite sure I’ll unwittingly break.’

The objector would actually love someone to come along and give them a brand-based toolkit that makes good sense, that’s easy to use and that will work in the talent market. It’s all a question of managing expectations – if you consult extensively during the brand development process, and if any new recruitment toolkit is presented with a robust, common-sense rationale, that objection (which is largely a knee-jerk, defensive response) will melt away.

‘That looks like an awful lot of money for a recruitment advertising campaign.’

Largely because so much of the debate surrounding employer brands and its actual practice has focused exclusively on talent attraction, there’s an assumption in some slightly sceptical quarters that it’s just a new way of approaching recruitment advertising. When sceptics become cynics, there may well be the assumption that employer brands are also a new way of enabling ad agencies to charge more and to compensate for the long-term downward trend in traditional advertising revenue.

You need to defuse this situation by making it clear that a brand is a long-term investment, that it applies to much, much more than just recruitment advertising, and that its value can be – and, if you have anything to do with it, will be – substantial and measurable.

'We're not Mars or Nestlé – we're an NHS trust.'

The techniques and methodologies by which employer brands are developed are the same as those that create and sustain great consumer and corporate brands. The terminology is much the same (although anyone involved in developing employer brands should strive to keep that discipline a jargon-free zone). The only real difference is the number of noughts on the price tag.

Mars or Nestlé work hard to develop, nurture and protect their brands (in the case of Nestlé, to wrestle with some serious and deep-seated image problems, particularly in the eyes of the student audience) and to give themselves competitive advantage. It's no different for a typical NHS trust, particularly when the advent of patient choice makes marketing an increasingly important corporate function. Big organisations recognise that there's a relationship, a congruence, between their brands as suppliers of goods or services and as employers: the more forward-looking NHS trusts (and indeed a great many public sector and third-sector organisations) are waking up to the same connection, and are determined to make it work for them.

'Shouldn't we be giving this to some strategic HR consultancy?'

From well-known management consultancies to strategically focused actuarial practices, there's no shortage of them waiting for the plum projects to fall into their laps. And they do have plenty to offer, particularly in fixing, defining or managing the employment product itself – the issues such as compensation, benefits, the whole basis of assessment, reward and recognition. To use an automotive analogy, they're the engineers making sure that the suspension, the braking system, the sequential gearbox all work perfectly and meet the market's expectations. But the product isn't the brand, and those talented engineers wouldn't for one second claim their ability to articulate and communicate a brand proposition like 'Vorsprung durch Technik', let alone use it as the basis for some amazing marketing communications and the creation of a powerful brand identity and personality.

The whole issue of the relationship between employer brand and employment product, and the impact the brand can have on broader, more strategic HR issues is something we cover in greater detail later in this guide.

'We're simply too small.'

When we were putting together the online survey that provided such valuable insight into this guide, one of the questions asked respondents to select from a lengthy list the most appropriate descriptor for their type of organisation. One of the categories we seriously thought of including was 'domestic households'.

It's not as crazy or fanciful as it seems: if you're a Russian oligarch seeking to employ a full-time butler on a salary in excess of £100,000 (and, apparently, this is yet another employment category where demand far outstrips supply), you'd need a good reputation as an employer to attract and retain the services of your latter-day Jeeves.

On a slightly more realistic level, reputation will be all-important if you're a new, ambitious small or medium-sized enterprise or start-up operation that's grown out of some cutting-edge scientific research. You need to attract good people – disproportionately good people bearing in mind the modest scale of your enterprise – on the basis of what working with your team and its distinctive, passionately held vision for the enterprise will actually feel like.

Defining that experience – fixing and communicating that vision so it becomes one of the reasons your people come to work and that will help them over the inevitable choppy waters that all small enterprises experience – couldn't be easier. A simple senior management workshop (one of the classic brand research techniques we describe more fully in a later section) will help you resolve your distinctive vision in colour and depth, and ensure that everyone in your top team shares it totally. Simple, brand-based communications will ensure that everyone joining you will share that vision from day one, and know just what it demands of them and offers them in return.

British Library: step by step, gets results

The British Library is the national library of the UK and 16,000 people use its services every day from a stunning marble and brick building in St Pancras, London, with a second site at Boston Spa in Yorkshire and over the web. It employs over 2,000 people and receives a copy of every item of printed material published in the UK as well as much digital material. If you viewed five items a day it would take you 80,000 years to see the whole collection.

Recruitment Strategy Consultant Anne Spearman joined in an interim role and admits she would not have considered this as an intuitive career choice, since she was not aware of the library as an employer. While in some academic roles, recruitment and retention are trouble-free, attracting other staff in customer-facing and commercial operational infrastructure roles is a real difficulty. The library traditionally attracted potential employees at the point of need to specific advertised roles in the press or professional journals; this reactive approach did not always achieve results and there was a heavy reliance on using agencies to fill vacancies.

Last year the library restructured its HR team and moved its recruitment online with an integrated candidate management system to streamline the recruitment process. A website was developed as part of the front-end access.

Anne says, 'In reviewing the recruitment strategy we decided it was important to undertake some internal and external research. This commenced in early 2007 to help us better understand how the potential employment market in our "difficult to fill" areas perceived us.'

Early in 2007 participants were invited to comment on media adverts and the website and share their thoughts about the library as an employer. The feedback confirmed both positive and negative perceptions, which were either a challenge to or advantageous to attraction.

'Our aim,' says Anne, 'was to build on the positive and address negative perceptions of a bureaucratic, boring and static organisation which only employed librarians, so having little to offer by the way of wider careers. This was a real wake-up call.'

'The library is at the cutting edge, leading the way in providing information in the digital era, ensuring more and more people have access to the 3,000 years' worth of knowledge we hold,' says Anne. 'Clearly we have a journey to make to challenge these perceptions as an employer.'

'We needed to understand that some people are aware of the library and others are not and their first impressions of the library as an employer are informed by what they see in the media adverts and on our website.'

'It was recognised that a key "window on the library" for potential employees was the recruitment website and our adverts. From the feedback it was clear that this was letting the library down and reinforcing a negative image of what it would be like to work there.'

'This was not a case of sitting back contemplating what to do and getting all the boxes ticked: it was about taking the necessary steps for immediate action,' said Anne.

'Therefore attraction was where we started and the new site will be launched in September 2007 together with refreshed advertising templates.'

British Library (continued)

The HR team is engaged in a long-term strategy to challenge and change those perceptions through improved understanding, effective marketing and advocacy among existing staff and stakeholders. For a long time, the library's employer brand has evolved organically, with individual managers advertising roles and communicating to their teams in their own ways – and with their own budgets.

Achieving change is a gradual process that depends on building trust and understanding, showing how things can be done without upsetting long-held beliefs and preferences.

HR are starting to have conversations and discussions with their marketing colleagues to understand and build a common understanding of the employer value proposition, to develop a realistic perspective of what it is like to work in the library and further develop the attraction strategy.

Engaging with the marketing function to make the business case is seen as an essential step in reviewing the employer brand to create reach and understanding among a broader candidate community.

Internally, the HR team has created a world-class well-being offer that helps to retain staff at all levels and provides a new dimension for advocacy and satisfaction from existing employees. Organisation development is increasingly seen as part of the 'great place to work' message and all staff have wide access to training and development opportunities and personal development planning. These activities reinforce this message in building and maintaining employer reputation.

Some positions in the British Library are so specialist that there may be 'only a dozen people in the world who could be right', so while headhunting is important, the library also has to grow its own people in developing specialisms and retain them in the face of strong international competition for scarce skills and knowledge. Here the team are working on a talent management and succession planning framework to address skill gaps and retain key talent.

Working with public money, the team have to recognise the realities in achieving change. While gradual progress across the key dimensions of employer branding is being made – and recognised at top team level, with limited resources and complex talent pools to deal with – working with the public purse, the team have to recognise the reality that the pace of change cannot be forced.

Information supplied by Anne Spearman, Recruitment Strategy Consultant

Case study learning points

What strikes me is the way one employer's image has been tarnished by the image of an entire employment category: the prison service has suffered the same fate, and only exceptional creative advertising backed by big budgets has started to address this.

Equally significant is the work that's clearly been done on the product itself, with the material aspects of the 'deal' now looking anything but staid and stuffy.

As for timing, the HR team clearly understands the need for sensitivity in persuading exceptionally bright, articulate academic people to see the value of developing the brand and to adopt an approach of *festina lente* – 'make haste slowly'.

Part 8: Choosing your partner

‘We did some focus groups among our competitors’ staff. The results came back and scared us to death. We thought we were quite cool, but what people told us was very different.’

Senior HR practitioner at first discovery day

Starting to develop an employer brand is like setting out on a journey. You’ll encounter triumphs and disappointment, periods where the going is easy and those where it feels like the gradient’s against you. The journey can also be long. For all these reasons and more, you need to think carefully about who you’d like as your partner or guide – assuming, of course, you select any partner at all.

One approach is to act as your own project manager, driving the project yourself and selecting just those external suppliers to handle functions that are beyond your normal experience or competence – like recruiting the right kind of participants to external focus groups – using the services of research fieldwork companies to do so.

For internal research, there’s nothing to stop you conducting your own focus groups, using the classic combination of a managed discussion and some of the projective techniques commonly used in many forms of marketing research and which yield profound insights at the same time as injecting an element of unabashed fun into the proceedings. Having said that, there’s a definite skill to moderating a group – the delicate balancing act of keeping the discussion on track while allowing it to veer off down sidetracks that can yield some unexpected insights. There’s also the question of adherence to the Market Research Society’s rules and protocols, including the absolute confidentiality of any comments participants make and any data that the group delivers.

The DIY approach to developing your own brand is a bit like the equivalent approach to building your own house – something only those blessed with limitless energy, unflagging enthusiasm and nerves of steel should contemplate.

So if appointing yourself as your own project manager or at least ‘clerk of works’ seems a little daunting, you can always choose an independent brand consultant to lead the project, do the donkey work like arranging external research, to deliver clear recommendations for the key elements of the brand, and to help you derive the maximum value from your investment. But a word of warning needs to be injected here. There are many excellent brand consultants with impeccable credentials in brand development for fast-moving consumer goods. But they won’t necessarily understand, or even be sufficiently interested in, the very specific issues, the challenges and opportunities, of employer brands.

You can entrust the project to your current employment marketing agency. They know your business, they’ve impressed you (presumably) with their brave and innovative creative work and their depth of thinking. If they’ve been doing their job properly, they’ll probably have been pestering you for ages to get serious about developing your employer brand. This time, you really should listen.

If you have any reservations about your current agency, you can always hold a beauty parade to see who and what is out there. But make sure you select on the right criteria and ask the most searching questions as you make up your short-list. How big is their research department? Will you have a dedicated brand consultant to drive the project? If so, what is their experience? What’s the agency’s definition of employer brands and employer brand development? They’ll presumably show you case studies: ask for the detailed metrics that demonstrate the real, authentic ROI.

At this point, a rather ungenerous but inescapable thought enters my mind. In the CIPD’s 2007 guide to

Every employer brand project needs its projectives

People's relationships with the organisations they work for or might consider working for are highly complex. Asking people to agree or disagree on a scale of 1–10 that organisation X 'would look good on my CV' only tells part of the story. For real insights, particularly those that can drive the most original, yet relevant, creative expression of a brand, we need to look deeper – and that's where projective techniques come in.

They get respondents to speak about something indirectly by 'projecting' their thoughts and emotional responses onto something else.

Some are the typical techniques that many people are at least aware of – if the organisation in question was a car, what would it be? If it were a person, would they be male or female? What would they wear? What would their taste in music be?

Some are more specific to employer brands. For example, I've always found it very revealing to give participants a sheet of paper with the image of two people at a party talking to each other. One happens to mention (the way one does), 'Me? Oh, I work for (the name of the organisation in question).'

The participants fill in the other person's 'thinks' bubble – giving a real insight into that organisation's reputation as an employer, or even revealing issues ('Why can't my mum get her hip replaced sooner?') that can militate against brand advocacy.

Another technique that yields some telling and memorable results is *image association*. From an eclectic collection of several hundred images, participants are asked to select one that, in their minds, seems to symbolise the organisation in question. For a London local authority, the image of a drop-dead-gorgeous fashion shoe suggested an unexpected element of creativity in the authority's culture. For Land Rover, the frequently chosen image of a little rowing boat bobbing haplessly in the wake of a giant supertanker suggested to an external audience of graduates (inaccurately as it happens), 'That's poor little Land Rover, struggling to keep up with the Japanese competition.'

Every picture tells a story

The images people choose to express their perception of an organisation as an employer can be very revealing – as these real-life examples show:



Staff and management seen as locked in confrontation



The service is seen as avoiding issues – people expect support from management but feel they don't get it



Dictatorial/hierarchical management approach

Building internal partnerships and alliances is at least as important as their external counterparts, arguably even more so.

the employment marketing industry, just about every agency lists employer branding as one of the many services it offers. I wonder... can they all be doing it?

Building internal partnerships and alliances is at least as important as their external counterparts, arguably even more so. If you have a marketing function, talk to them, involve them, engage with them, flatter them with your acknowledgement of their importance to the success of your project (but let them know the value of your contribution to their objectives). Emphasise the mutual benefit of developing an employer brand, and the potentially synergistic relationship between employer and consumer or corporate brands.

The other people you need to involve as early as possible (assuming they play a different role to mainstream HR) are your internal communications team. They'll be the people who help you get the brand firmly established, not just as a set of messages, a new look and feel to your external employment marketing communications, but as something that defines 'the way we do things around here' – a readily accepted, fully understood and instinctively practised set of behaviours that define the experience of working for your organisation. Their actual remit will depend on the

nature, scale and structure of your organisation, but is likely to include such brand-critical tasks as induction and day-to-day employee communication. Those functions are key to the success of your brand; so are the people who handle them.

If you have a dedicated PR function, involve them at an early stage. Tell them you need their support to achieve optimum exposure for the new brand, and emphasise the all-round value of being seen as a great place to work.

How you open and conduct these various dialogues is up to you, your management style and the political dynamics of your organisation. But to succeed, you will need to develop a coherent, robust business plan that clearly shows how and where the new brand is expected to create value, and that persuades your colleagues that there's going to be plenty in it for them, as well as for you and your team.

But...

...before you set out, check your position...

The whole point of developing and communicating an employer brand is not because it's just a nice thing to do, it will win you awards or make your recruitment advertising (and you yourself) look great (it might be or do all these things). You do it because it improves your organisation's performance in the key business areas of recruitment, retention, engagement and ultimately the bottom line. It's an investment.

Hewlett-Packard: growing an employer brand out of a new corporate brand

A few years ago, Hewlett-Packard (HP) decided to get back inside its founder's legendary garage to rediscover its roots as an innovative, truly creative organisation.

Developing its new corporate brand, HP identified seven brand attributes that it felt expressed the core concept of 'invent'. HP then asked its global employment marketing agency if they felt the new corporate brand could have any relevance or resonance in the talent market.

The answer was an unequivocal 'yes', with one exception: the agency selected the attributes or values of the new corporate brand as the basis for a new employer brand. The attributes of 'invent' defined the experience HP was promising its customers; translating and using them as the basis of specific messages defined the employment experience HP was offering, and the set of behaviours it expected of its people to deliver the promise of its corporate brand.

But the whole notion of improvement begs the question: 'improvement against what?'

I can't overemphasise the need to establish a robust set of baseline metrics for your brand as it is now (remember, every organisation has one, just not the one they need, want or deserve) compared with how it will be after you and your team have done their stuff.

I'm always amazed by just how sparse the data is that many organisations hold to give a true picture of their performance – and that includes financial performance – in recruitment and retention. The required data is almost certainly there somewhere; it just needs a little digging to bring it to light. And any gaps that your quest reveals can be quickly and relatively easily plugged. Getting the measure of your current performance may not be as exciting as running your first internal focus group or delivering the new, brand-based creative brief to your agency, but it needs to be done and done well. Without it, the whole brand development project will be seriously compromised.

The areas of performance you need to fix some robust numbers on include:

- recruitment advertising spend – is it increasing or decreasing? What proportion has migrated online, and what is still based on print media? Do you have results for specific titles/recruitment sites?
- the prevalence and full cost of premature resignations (typically 150% of first-year salary), and taking 'premature' to mean any departure before the individual concerned has delivered the kind of performance that repays your investment in their training and development
- your expenditure on recruitment consultants – do they feature on your preferred suppliers list? Or are they chosen on an ad hoc basis by hiring managers? Do you even know?
- the volume of spontaneous applications and employment enquiries you receive – how many are there? What happens to them?
- the ratio of acceptances to offers – I always regard this as one of the absolutely critical metrics, since it shows the degree to which candidates have started to experience the alignment – or lack of it – between promise and reality, expectation and early experience.

You also need to measure softer issues like employees' own perceptions of working for the organisation. What's the mood like among current employees? Do you discern any trends in current perceptions – either downwards or upwards?

Getting the measure of your current performance may not be as exciting as running your first internal focus group... but it needs to be done and done well.

If you're unsure that you have enough information to really give you a handle on these and similar issues, some research will provide the reassurance you seek. You can quickly commission some internal focus groups (but remember that, if you want to know how people *really* feel about their organisation, they'll be more likely to open up to a third party than to a member of your own team). You can run an online survey. You can delve more deeply into your most recent staff surveys or, if you're due to run one in the near future, you can include some brand-related questions. But remember that staff surveys create the expectation (or at least a forlorn hope) that something will actually be done about the issues they raise. Manage respondents' expectations; tell them that they're making a real contribution to the development of a new brand, and that their concerns, comments and observations will be a key part of its development.

...then set your course

In the opening paragraph of this guide, we used the metaphor of a cookery book. We'd now like to extend that metaphor: the plates are warming in the oven, that modest little Beaujolais is gradually reaching room temperature, your guests arrive in an hour.

Time to get moving

In this section we show the basic shape and structure of a brand development project – the sequence of events that starts with research and discovery; leads to analysis and interpretation; then to the initial creative expression; to internal and external launch and ongoing communication; and finally to maintenance and measurement.

The list of actions and activities is full and all-embracing; in reality, you'll be able to look at it and say (particularly of the research and discovery elements), 'Yep, we've already done that.' On the assumption that no organisation in the real world will either need or be able to afford every single activity we list, it will hopefully help you set your own priorities.

But to begin at the beginning...

Senior management workshop

What is it? A half-day event that's really like an extended focus group, and that combines managed discussion with a range of exercises that make extensive use of projective techniques – word association, image association, personification, and so on.

What does it achieve? A lot in a short time. It gives you one of three layers of perception you need to fix where your brand is at present and how far that is from where and what you want it to be. It gives a very important and influential group of people a real sense of involvement and ownership and recognition that what you're doing is important and valuable. It will also give them, maybe for the first time, a crystal-clear sense of what their organisation is and adds up to, what its unique character and personality is, what it offers in terms of a distinctive employment experience. It will give you loads of valuable, deep insights – and some very valuable allies.

Points to watch. Limit participants to 8–10. Try to record the discussion (you'll hear and want to capture some brilliant, telling sound bites), or at least have a colleague take copious notes while you manage and moderate the proceedings.

Make sure you're really confident to act as moderator. Expectations will be high; any doubts, and you might be better handing the activity to an external consultant.

Communications audit

What is it? A detailed examination of all the materials that come into play during the journey an applicant makes from initial interest to induction and beyond. It will typically cover:

- all forms of external employment marketing, from press ads to website
- applicant information material
- your recruitment website (or the recruitment pages of your corporate website)
- the application process, whether online or paper-based
- the physical surroundings applicants encounter on their first actual visit to the organisation
- the timing of the whole applicant journey, identifying any gaps or bottlenecks
- the tone of the offer letter – and, equally or even more importantly, the rejection letter.

Creating 'committed visionaries'

In the CIPD's research report *Working Life: Employee attitudes and engagement 2006*, many employees claimed that their senior managers lacked vision, with only 38% being accorded the title 'committed visionaries'. The report then goes on to say: 'This suggests there may be problems of strategy in many organisations and in the communication of strategic vision. It may be more difficult for employees to feel engaged with their work when they do not have a clear understanding of what it is their organisation is trying to achieve.'

One of the most valuable outputs of senior management workshops is that they help the organisation's movers and shakers acquire that vision, because they will have worked through it themselves – sometimes reaching a kind of epiphany, a moment when, as the saying goes, 'it all becomes clear'.

When that happens, they'll be more likely to become sponsors of formal initiatives to articulate and communicate the brand internally. But their spontaneous, informal influence as exemplars of the brand will be just as valuable.

Ideally, the audit will include some telephone conversations with recent starters and some applicants who, for whatever reason, didn't complete the process. The audit will discover those reasons.

What does it achieve? A graphic, comprehensive picture of how it actually feels to make the journey towards becoming an employee of your organisation – the formative stages of an individual's relationship with your employer brand.

Points to watch. You need an objective view of your application process and materials, and of the applicant journey; you and your own people might be too close. If you're giving the task to an outside consultant, make sure that all the necessary material really is forthcoming.

Internal focus groups

What are they? Carefully managed discussions among employees representing different roles and locations. The groups can also include some of the exercises and projective techniques we described in the senior management workshop.

What do they achieve? A spontaneous, graphic picture of how your people feel about working for your organisation. The numbers won't be high, but the insights can be very deep.

Points to watch. Limit numbers to around eight and remember that most people's attention runs into the buffers after about an hour. Emphasise absolute confidentiality, and encourage participants to say what they *really* feel.

External focus groups

What are they? (Should be obvious!)

What do they achieve? External focus groups can yield deep insights into how your organisation is perceived as an employer among key target audiences – anyone from graduates to people in specific professions or business or technical disciplines. Focus groups are classic qualitative research tools and it's the quality of insight they yield that makes them so valuable. Focus groups, both internal and external, can also come into their own to test the initial creative expression of the brand.

Points to watch. Recruitment costs can be high, and you need to find a good fieldwork company to source relevant people. External groups only work if the participants have some familiarity with your organisation. Incentives can range from around £40 per person to £80 or more. Very senior people will have neither the time nor the inclination to attend.

In their own words

It's a fascinating and invaluable experience, listening to focus group participants give their honest, off-the-cuff responses to questions. An extensive series of groups for one of the UK's most prominent public organisations put its finger bang on the huge cultural divide that was bedevilling the organisation. The issue was the conflict between the motivated, *engaged* newcomers ready to put in their own fair share of *discretionary effort*, and those who had joined the organisation just as another job ('My wife stuck an ad under my nose,' was how one participant described his initial contact).

'My face doesn't fit any more' complained one long-serving employee ruefully, while a more recent arrival had this to say of the old guard: 'The dinosaurs are still around – they've been here for 20 or 30 years. They're set in their ways, not willing to change and they have a negative attitude.'

Another recent arrival ('I'm proud of what I do and I don't mind admitting it') complained: 'If you look like you want to help, or do too much, it's like you're the class swot – a "care bear".'

Those two opposing descriptors – 'care bears' and 'dinosaurs' came to summarise the whole battle for the soul of the organisation. They made a huge contribution to the development of the brand and, as with most aspects of the brand development process, yielded insights and value in their own right.

Telephone depth interviews

What are they? Structured, one-to-one interviews with carefully identified individuals who will have a detailed, intelligent view of the organisation in question, and who will be important in determining its reputation. These individuals can be senior representatives from key employment markets; they can equally – and equally valuably – come from an *indirect* audience of suppliers, partners or influencers. Interviews typically last 30–40 minutes.

What do they achieve? A detailed, *considered* response to a range of brand-related issues and an objective assessment of the organisation's reputation as an employer.

Points to watch. Identifying the right kind of respondents and booking time slots with them can be time-consuming.

Online surveys

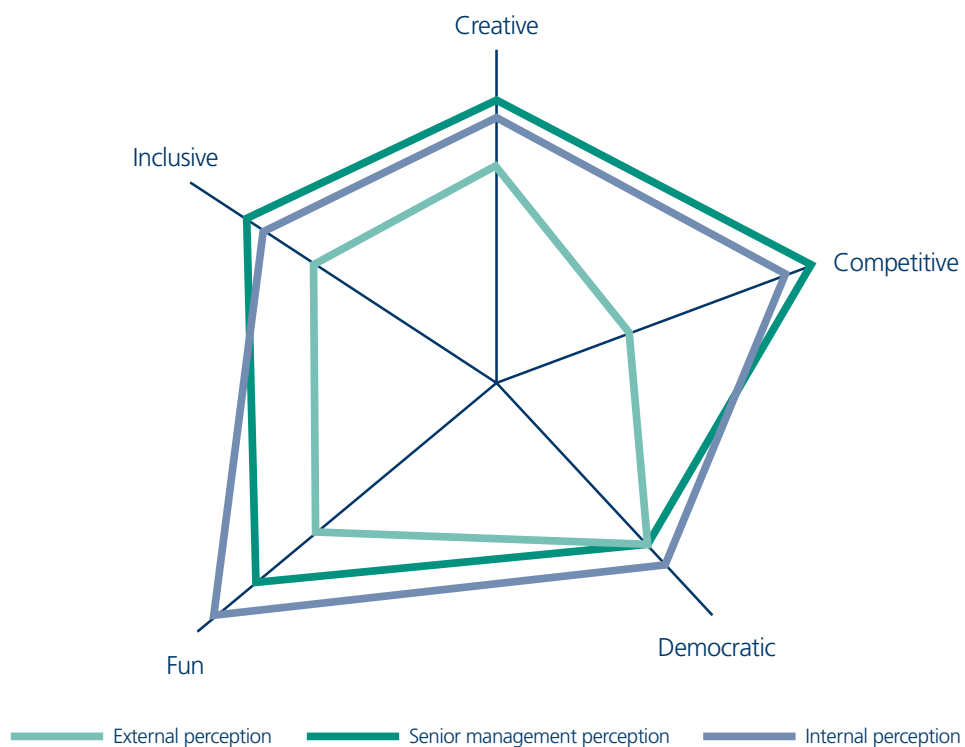
What are they? Surveys conducted among relatively large numbers of people (typically 100+), using sophisticated but user-friendly, proprietary online research tools.

What do they achieve? They're quick, they usually achieve a good response, and their ability to combine both qualitative and quantitative elements makes the data they provide particularly valuable. Off-the-shelf tools include Zoomerang (which gives you the option of using preset templates to customise your own survey) and the wonderfully named Brainjuicer are typical of the latest generation of research tools that have a particular relevance to employer brand development.

You're now in a good position to map the brand in its current state, to measure the gaps in perception between the three key audiences, and to establish how far and in what direction you need to move the brand to meet your objectives for it. You'll know just how big the gap is between the brand you currently have, and the one you want. Closing that gap may mean a long, hard slog or a quick fix, but at least you'll know.

There are a number of graphic devices you can use to express the current brand positioning; one of the clearest is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Expressing the current brand positioning – an example



The classic spider diagram is a great way to map how your organisation is perceived as an employer by three key audiences – potential employees in the big wide world outside; current employees; and the people at the top who run the show.

The example shown here is an investment bank that wanted to develop its brand and significantly raise its profile, particularly among a global graduate audience. You'll notice that on virtually all points, external perception lagged way behind internal reality. Most significant of all is the issue of competitiveness; clearly, potential employees didn't really rate the bank's chances against the giants of the sector such as Goldman Sachs and Merrill Lynch.

But notice something else: there's a high degree of alignment between how senior management perceive their organisation, and the perception of those analysts, traders and associates down on the trading floor or dashing off to a client meeting. That's a strong position to be in, because it means you can present a united front to the talent market, and any promises you make for the brand externally won't be sabotaged by internal sentiment and perception.

Around how many nodes should you conduct this extremely valuable exercise? And how should you label them? The simple answer is: it's up to you. Only you can choose the issues, the identity features around which you want to construct your brand on the basis of those that are relevant to your particular activity or industry sector. For example, a retailer would be crazy not to include competitiveness or commercial focus. A small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) will surely want entrepreneurial spirit to be very much to the fore, while an NHS trust may well want the extent to which it's perceived as having a learning culture to be part of the equation.

As for how many... well, any more than six nodes could start to get a bit unwieldy.

This is not a quantitative exercise, and the results are not scientific in the traditional sense. But they certainly give you a clear, very graphic expression of where your brand is now, the direction you have to take it in, and the likely scale of that task.

How do you choose and label the nodes around which you build your diagram of the brand? There's no absolute logic to this – it's a process that's partly intuitive. But you will know the issues that are particularly important to your brand, bearing in mind the nature of your organisation and its business. For example, when I developed the Land Rover employer brand, diversity was a really big issue for an organisation that was seen as being (and probably was) as chauvinistic and 'blokey' as Jeremy Clarkson. For a major retailer, commercial awareness is clearly important – the sense of ownership over the organisation's sales and profit performance. (In this context, we'll take the oft-quoted 'customer focus' as read.)

For a newly merged NHS trust, the issue of teamwork may be particularly important; for a call centre operation, the social dimension of its jobs may need to be mapped and measured.

Only you can decide the issues on which you want to be measured, the strengths for which you want your organisation to be known.

Across the great divide

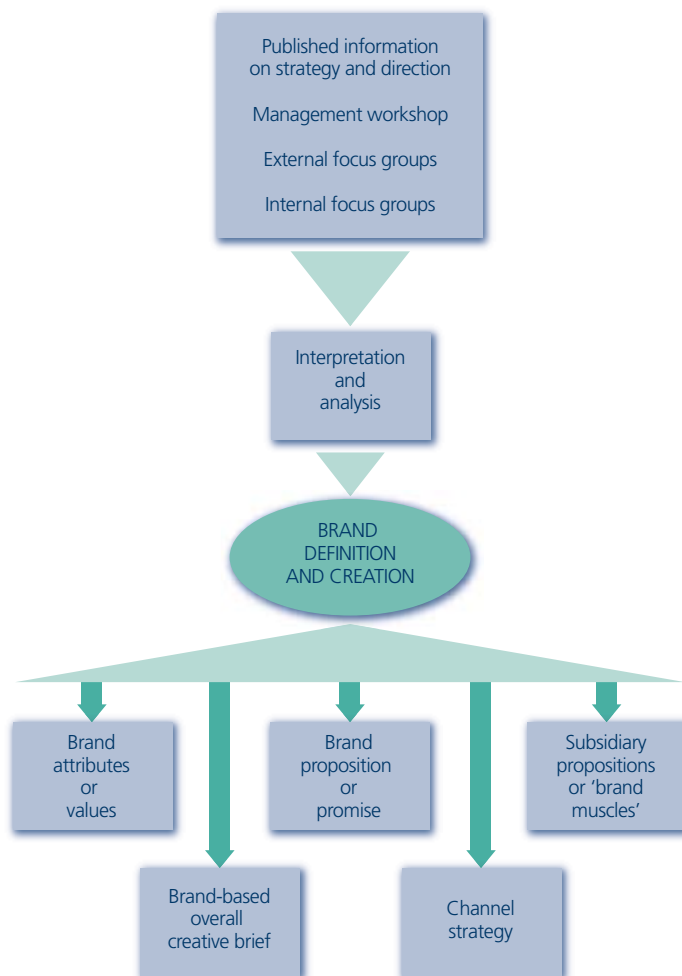
It's helpful to see the whole brand development/communication chain as two opposing funnels – input and output. It's that bit in the middle that's the real challenge. You need to make sure the research insights really do drive the expression of the brand – but not in a boring, literal, 'plonky' way. You need to ensure that all creative expression through every channel is fresh and sparky – but still anchored firmly in what the research is saying.

Getting biological: creating your brand's stem cells

We're now at the most critical point in the whole brand development process – the gap (which may appear seductively small) between the two funnels, between input and output.

It's at this stage I find myself unavoidably using the language of genetics, with acronyms like DNA and phrases like 'stem cells' entering the discourse. But the analogy's a sound one, and it may help to explain and rationalise a process that's both right- and left-brain, creative as much as analytical.

Figure 7: Brand development process



The task you now face (or your brand consultant or employment marketing agency faces) is to identify and name the distinctive features that characterise your organisation as a place to work – the basic attributes of your employer brand. I prefer to use the term ‘attributes’ rather than ‘brand values’: values are something you see objectively, and choose to espouse and adhere to.

Attributes are more fundamental – they’re what you are, your individuality, the key to your uniqueness, the colour of your corporate eyes, your corporate ‘soul’, if you’ll forgive a brief excursion into metaphysics. Every other aspect of the brand – every piece of talent attraction material, every induction programme, every employee referral scheme, every campus presentation – will grow from and depend on these attributes or stem cells.

What we’re really talking about is *deciding what you want to be famous for*. Obviously, a degree of realism

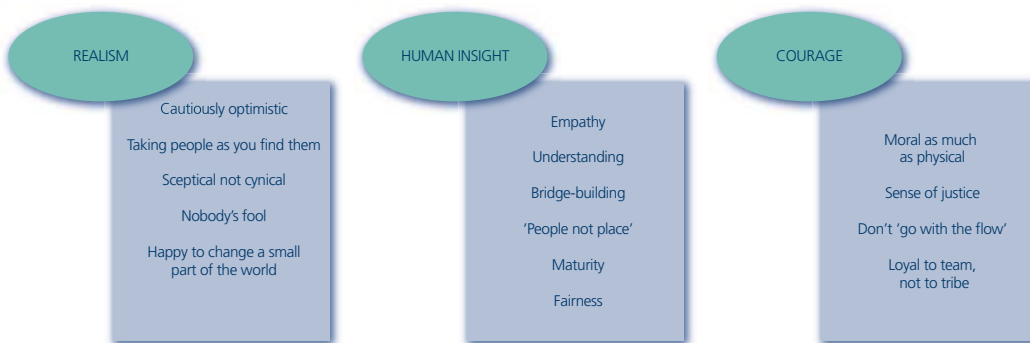
needs to come into play. You can’t just pluck attributes out of thin air; they have to be based on what your organisation actually is and stands for (Figure 8). There may not be too many surprises in the attributes you choose – apart from the fact that probably no one has chosen and articulated them before.

The research will give a clear indication of what these are (that’s its main purpose). But only you or your advisers can choose the actual form of words in which they’re expressed. From my experience, there are two golden rules that come into play at this stage of the brand development. The first is to keep the actual number of attributes to a minimum: remember, these are the words you’ll want all your employees to respect, remember and act on. And, whatever you do, please avoid the stilted, restricted vocabulary, the totally debased linguistic currency that so many organisations

Figure 8: The key attributes of the Prison Service employer brand



You have to be clear what each attribute actually means. And you need to build the inference that each attribute leads to a specific behaviour – like this:



deal in when they express their values. You'll know the words I mean – and, in any case, the depth and detail of the picture of your brand that the research yields will open many more verbal choices to you.

At the heart of it all: the value proposition

You're now ready to write the few words that are right at the core of the new brand – its overall value proposition. A brand proposition isn't the same as a campaign strapline, although some people seem to confuse the two. A proposition doesn't have to be clever or snappy (but it should never be turgid or predictable); it probably will never appear in recruitment or other brand-based communications. But it's a form of words that describes, in essence, what makes working for your organisation different and special. It therefore needs to be around and to work for a long time, so it's worth taking the time to get it exactly right, and to check that everyone who's close to the development of the brand is happy with its final form.

Looking at that Prison Service example... that set of brand attributes led us to the initial proposition we proposed:

'If you're fascinated by people and can relate to them effectively, you'll find long-term interest and satisfaction in a career with the Prison Service.'

For a major retail chain, we developed a quartet of brand attributes:

- champions
- commercial
- committed
- credible.

Why just four? Because we wanted them to be easily remembered and acted on in an organisation where most employees are hard at it in busy stores, trying to respond to customers and react to the latest machinations of the competition.

A proposition that grows naturally out of these attributes is:

‘Be the best, beat your best as you earn the trust of customers and the respect of colleagues.’

It defines how it would feel to work for this organisation. It’s aimed at attracting people who get a buzz from the cut and thrust of modern retailing. But it indicates some of what the organisation expects of you, and in this aspect, it relates closely to some of the behaviours associated with the specific attributes, for example:

Champions

We love to beat our best, including our personal best.
We’re passionate advocates of new ideas.
The competition’s out there, not in here.
Today’s successes are tomorrow’s challenges.

From attributes to arguments

Once you’ve established the brand attributes, you can then build specific examples of ‘what this means in practice’ for each one. You can identify and articulate the behaviours that you want everyone to associate with each attribute; you can even use them as the basis for specific arguments you can deploy in future employment marketing initiatives. Because, together with the proposition, you now have a complete, distinctive, accurate, compelling description of what it means and feels like to work for your organisation.

Flexing the brand muscles

One of the questions people often ask about employer brands is: ‘How can I make sure the brand works for different categories of staff – for senior managers as much as call centre workers?’

The answer’s simple: you emphasise those brand attributes that will have most resonance and significance for the particular audience you’re talking to at any one time. A former colleague, now a highly successful employer brand manager, describes this as ‘flexing different brand muscles’ (see Figure 9). Another analogy is a mixer desk. Your attributes are the different tracks; you can fade them up or fade them down depending on the audience you’re playing for. You’re not sacrificing consistency or compromising the brand. The music remains the same; it’s just that different audiences will hear it slightly differently.

You have the inputs. You’ve established your baseline metrics against which you will confidently demonstrate future improvement. You’ve identified the attributes that define your brand’s individuality. You’ve developed an overall value proposition, the one overarching answer to the ever-present ‘what’s in it for me?’ questions lurking in the minds of current and prospective employees. It’s time for some action.

Ready?

Figure 9: Different audiences, different emphasis – flexing the brand muscles



Part 9: From plan to practice

'We thought we were quite clever developing an employee value proposition and then segmenting it across different talent pools. We sat back and thought: "Nice one!"

'But the reality is that it should be 1% of the effort. And what we really focus on is shouting less about the strategy and more about aligning our processes to the employer brand. It's nuts and bolts that make this work.' David Roberts, Employer Brand Manager, Orange

The brand launch: hold back on those whistles and bells

You now have everything you need to brief whoever is responsible for developing the initial creative expression of the new brand. Whoever they are, they'll have the one thing that all creatives crave – a *proposition!* And you'll have some objective criteria for reviewing their efforts. It's no longer a question of, 'Do I like what they're showing me?' but, 'Is what they're showing me an accurate expression of the brand?'

For additional reassurance, you can use focus groups (internal, external or both) as a means of testing the initial creative work to see if everyone else 'gets it' and that they can discern clear brand-based messages within it.

So you're now ready to launch the new brand with some spectacular, potentially award-winning, employment marketing. Whoa! Not so fast! As we've seen, alignment between expectation and reality is one of the key features of a successful, effective employer brand, and you're in danger of setting external expectations without first making sure that the internal reality will actually live up to them.

So the golden rule is: launch the brand internally, make sure everyone understands it, agrees with it, and it's starting to impact the way they think and work. Then, and only then, can you think about launching it externally.

The means of launching and embedding the brand within your organisation are quite specific, but the

quality of the end result will depend on the quality of the relationship you establish with whoever handles your internal communications.

Activities you need to consider, and which give you ample opportunity for demonstrating and expressing the new brand internally, include:

A formal announcement. 'Formal' doesn't mean stiff and starchy – it just means an internal communications initiative that's fully thought through and that people will really notice and respond to. You can present the new brand to the senior management team (hopefully they'll have been involved and supportive right from the start) – and give them the means to cascade the presentation down through the organisation. You can hijack a slot at the next management conference. You can send everyone an email introducing the new brand. You can use any or all of the communications channels and techniques open to you.

But you must make sure that everyone understands the thinking behind the new brand, where it's come from, what its purpose and value are. Simply presenting them with a *fait accompli* is to make them switch off or even to invite resistance.

The candidate journey. This is really a mix of external and internal communications. The communications audit (assuming you've done one) will have revealed gaps or weaknesses in the process – points along the way where the potential employee may experience misgivings or even decide to go no further. The brand

gives you the means to plug them. It also gives you a unique opportunity to create a completely seamless experience where every touchpoint is a further demonstration of the brand, its attributes, messages and personality – everything from the letter inviting the candidate to interview (how about telling them how the brand has helped shape the questions?) to what they see and hear as they wait in reception, to the tone and style of the post-interview follow-up. Imagine applying for a new job and discovering that every letter, every brochure you receive, every email, every telephone conversation, every personal contact confirms your biggest hopes and confounds any lingering suspicions. How impressive would that be!

Factoring the brand into the induction process. This is a sure way to introduce newcomers to ‘the way we do things around here’ – in other words, to a clearly defined set of on-brand behaviours. The brand is at the centre of the oft-quoted ‘psychological contract’ between employer and employee: the induction programme is a great way to give employees an idea of what their side of the bargain involves.

After the brand has been launched internally, you can check the effectiveness of that launch, the extent to which it has been embedded. A quick online survey will test people’s recall of the brand attributes, and the overall proposition. A few internal focus groups among recent starters will help you check alignment – the degree to which they feel the brand has fulfilled its promises and met their expectations.

Time to go public: ‘It’s the web, stupid’

If any one phenomenon marks the watershed between the old and the new, provides the catalyst that has transformed recruitment advertising into joined-up, grown-up employment marketing and moved employer branding from a concept waiting in the wings to its current position very much centre stage, it’s the World Wide Web.

A recruitment website, or the recruitment pages on a corporate site, gives a potential employee the chance to encounter and experience an employer brand in ways that no other medium can. A brochure can show and tell; a website can demonstrate an organisation’s brand attributes and values in action. It can introduce candidates to current employees, and create the basis for an ongoing relationship. It can offer a ‘test drive’ of the roles in question and what they will feel like in the context of that organisation. It can offer the means to apply there and then, while the initial surge of interest and excitement is still flowing.

In one of the discovery days that formed part of the development programme for this guide, we looked at recruitment websites for a range of employers. The overall reaction was disappointment. Most were perfectly practical and functional (some weren’t); few, if any, showed any individuality or personality, two key features of an employer brand. Everyone felt that real opportunities for expressing the brand had been missed. A pity, especially when, just as with print-based advertising, it costs no more to create something great than something average.

Take your new career for a test drive

Websites create the perfect opportunity for candidates to experience a particular role or field of employment – and for organisations to express their employer brands in experiential ways.

The Army website was a classic case – a place where you learned what it feels like to make instant, life-or-death decisions and, from a brand perspective, how tough it is to ‘be the best’. An HSBC graduate website subjected potential applicants to real tests in real time – asking them, for example, to decide between holding and selling a banana plantation as a hurricane threatened to head towards their precious investment. GCHQ sought potential code-breakers (in reality, exceptionally talented maths graduates) by hiding lines of different code in its website, expressing not just the cerebral aspects of the brand, but its playful, fun aspects as well.

The medium is the message

Technology has resulted in an explosion of channels through which you can establish your brand and communicate its message. Digital radio gives you affordable access to almost any minority community you can think of. Podcasts put you and your brand in touch with people on the move. Web banners can drive people to your own website. Cinema advertising, targeting specific films in specific locations, is no longer the stuff of dreams. And owners of traditional media have responded to the digital challenge with their own innovations, their own deals.

Clearly, there are some amazing opportunities out there. But how do you know which ones to take? And can the brand help you choose?

The first question to ask as you survey the multifarious channels available to you is: 'Which of these will give me affordable, effective access to the audiences I

seek?' The second is slightly more complex, but equally important: 'Which channels will not just give me access to the communities I seek but will also provide, in themselves, expressions of the brand?'

Being seen to be using certain channels will, *ipso facto*, say something – actually, say plenty – about your brand. Using SMS text messaging will not just get your recruitment message through to a younger audience, it will help establish your brand as something credible and cool. If creativity is one of your brand attributes, being seen to use radical, offbeat communications channels – like projecting your message on the side of a high-rise building – will convince people of your organisation's creative credentials. If you want to come across as a highly competitive, macho commercial enterprise, carry your recruitment message to your competitors by a deliberately provocative billboard right outside their offices.

Diesel: communications channels to match the brand

Diesel was founded in 1978 and has grown to become one of the world's truly global fashion brands. The tagline 'For successful living' encapsulates a single brand focus and people at Diesel are keen to spell out how, for them, there is no separation of employer branding from consumer branding: there is just one, unified Diesel brand, stemming from the vision of founder Renzo Rosso.

The brand is 'unique'. It's one of choice, rather than utility and Tim Pointer, recently appointed HR Director, feels that the staff who choose to work at Diesel do so because of their strong affinity with the company's clothes and attitude, which means that the business is often recruiting from among its passionate consumers, rather than those who are simply looking for a good job in fashion retail.

In design and merchandising disciplines, Diesel receives a lot of unsolicited interest, as the firm is a natural destination for many people with these skillsets. But when setting out to recruit people for the retail network, the HR team works closely with the trade and retail marketing team to create in-store and advertised candidate generation campaigns that are seamlessly linked to the current collection and the theme (always current and sometimes controversial) that supports it.

The opening of Diesel's flagship store in Bond Street saw promotion in the London press and in-store flyers lead to some 3,000 people expressing an interest in retail roles. Around 150 of these were invited to a branded event held in a premium London venue, where everything was themed in the season's oriental style, with cushions, screens and water gardens installed around ten separate interview areas to ensure the ultimate branded candidate experience.

(continued)

Diesel (continued)

Applicants were invited to dress in the way that they felt best expressed their relationship with design and, as a final touch, were challenged to accessorise their look with a flower or plant that described their personality. Perhaps unorthodox, the event allowed Marketing and HR to collaborate in finding people who could truly deliver the Diesel brand and generated enough successful candidates to resource the Bond Street store and to provide a pool of high-quality, validated applicants for other vacancies across the retail network in and around London.

Across the business, it remains an important priority to keep the founder's vision central to employees' understanding and behaviours. Staff are encouraged to read the books by Rosso, which are available in-store, alongside frequent formal and informal communications, including branded events and collection briefings. But while staff in-store wear clothes from the latest range, they're encouraged to customise and accessorise – to show their individual relationships with the brand in a way that their marketing colleagues acknowledge is a critical dimension of Diesel's brand identity.

Case study learning points

A stylish brand needs to come across stylishly and wow potential candidates from their first experience of the employer brand. Those flowers and cushions... a little over the top perhaps? For other brands, yes, but for Diesel it was wholly appropriate – and the results speak for themselves.

Part 10: Every picture tells a story

Although employer brands are about much, much more than just graphics and design, there's no getting away from the fact that logos and symbols are integral elements of all brands. Get them right, and they can speak volumes for you.

I've always been impressed by the way the Civil Service Fast Stream brand logo has been intelligently tweaked and developed to keep it up to date, to send out the right messages and avoid sending out the wrong ones (see Figure 10).

It started life as a pen nib (very old-style Parker 51, very Sir Humphrey) but these days it's more of an arrow – clean, simple and contemporary. And it neatly blows away any whiff of elitism, any hint of Whitehall cobwebs.

And look at the way the Unilever logo has morphed from something cold, hard and impersonal (very corporate, very 1980s) into something softer and more engaging. I know it's the logo of a corporate brand, but it arguably has more currency and greater influence in the context of employment marketing than any other.

Maintaining impact

A great many people in a great many organisations complain about information overload. Their inboxes are overflowing; their heads are reeling with every latest edict, diktat or communications initiative. In research for a recent brand development programme for a major UK and European retailer, senior managers ruefully drew the distinction between information and communication. They complained about an excess of the former, and described how so much of the latter just seemed to run into the sand.

The employer brand can address this. It can give continuity, consistency and focus to what would otherwise have been discrete initiatives. It can become the driving force behind your organisation's intranet, and provide the consistent look and feel, even the actual graphic templates, that will effectively make all your day-to-day, tactical internal communications expressions of the brand – and contributors to its stature and recognition within the organisation.

Figure 10: Logos and symbols as part of the brand



The tools for the job

In many organisations, recruitment is and will continue to be conducted through a wide range of people and locations. The role of the brand in such a context is to provide the consistency of message, of look and feel that will build awareness of the brand, but also to offer a degree of flexibility to take account of local market conditions, media habits and even cultures.

A well-thought-out brand toolkit will achieve this for you. We draw a distinction here between a toolkit and the more familiar visual identity manual. The latter will probably be full of detailed, nit-picky rules and stipulations that will enforce visual uniformity – but also engender resistance and hostility. A toolkit, on the other hand, will be light on hard-and-fast rules, stronger on examples and suggestions that ‘doing it this way might well work for you’. It will also explain the reasoning behind the new brand, and make it clear that using it will make the recruiter’s or line manager’s life easier, their recruitment efforts more effective.

Coca-Cola HBC: the tools for the job

HBC stands for Hellenic Bottling Company – the business that bottles and markets Coca-Cola brands throughout the whole of Europe, from Greece to Germany. So the new brand had to be flexible and sensitive to local market conditions if it was to have any chance of being accepted and adopted.

The toolkit (see Figure 11) provided that flexibility, with a range of images and headlines that participating local companies could choose from to suit their own local requirements, giving them a real sense of ownership. It also provided a detailed rationale for the whole campaign and even sample copy.

There was a subtle difference between saying, ‘do it like this or else’, and ‘this is the way you really should do it because it will work best for you’. Subtle, but important.

Figure 11: Coca-Cola HBC ‘toolkit’



Orange: a classic of its kind

What prompted you to develop an employer brand?

Phase 1 was to develop an external employer brand where the aim was to create a unique, desirable and consistent identity externally to ensure that we attracted great candidates. We created a consistent identity for Orange the employer and then segmented it so that it was relevant and desirable for each of our talent pools, such as retail, contact centres, finance, technical, graduates, and so on.

Phase 2, which we are still working on, is to join up our external and internal employer brand and to define and communicate our 'employment offer' internally so that it articulates what we offer and why staff should stay at Orange. The aim here is to use the employer brand to retain and engage staff and was driven by a tougher employment marketplace and a tougher business environment that we operate in.

How did you measure your organisation's status before taking action?

We conducted three pieces of research:

- Externally – we ran focus groups across our target talent pools in retail: contact centres, IT and engineering, finance, marketing, HR, and within our main geographic areas and spheres of influence (for example M4/M5 motorways). At these sessions we investigated how Orange was perceived as an employer and what potential candidates wanted from an employer and how they saw us delivering that.
- Internally – we run a twice-annual climate survey that goes to all staff to capture the reality of working at Orange.
- Vision/company strategy – we spoke to our strategy team to get an idea of where we're heading from a business strategy point of view.

These three pieces of research gave us the information (perception and reality both internally and externally) to create our employer brand.

What did you hope that employer brand development would deliver for your organisation?

- Improve recruitment – by making it easier to attract talented candidates, better fit (giving candidates a clear picture of what it is really like to work here), reducing cost to hire and driving more speculative CVs.
- Improved retention and engagement internally.

Was the employer brand developed as part of an overall HR or leadership strategy? Please describe.

Our employer brand was developed to assist one of our key UK corporate objectives and to fit with France Telecom's wider HR strategy.

How did you develop your employer brand? Were any formal models or processes used?

We took the best approaches from the marketing community around brand-building and segmentation and applied it to the HR world.

Our model involved defining our offer, segmenting it to our target audience and then implementing it in a consistent way internally and externally.

We used a mixture of in-house and agency expertise to research, design and communicate our employer brand.
(continued)

Orange (continued)

Who had ownership over the project?

The project sits within Orange HR with close co-operation with our colleagues in marketing. The key sponsor is our HR vice-president.

What other functions (if any) were involved from your organisation? HR? Marketing? Other functions/disciplines?

Reward, internal communications, HR operations, physical environment, brand, PR and employee engagement teams.

Outline the basic stages of the project

- Scope the project.
- Conduct research.
- Create the employment positioning/offer.
- Gain buy-in across the company.
- Build creative execution.
- Launch the employer brand.
- Monitor the progress of the brand.
- Adapt as necessary.

Does your solution encompass changes to management behaviours, competency frameworks, assessment and development processes?

We're using our employer brand to support the uptake of leadership development within Orange.

What do you regard as the most successful aspects of the project?

- using solid marketing techniques to develop our employer brand
- flexibility to segment our offer to different groups
- breadth of our employment offer – covering emotional and rational offers

And the least successful? What problems did you encounter?

The biggest issue is where does employer branding sit? HR, engagement, marketing, brand, internal communications, PR?

What were the key learning points from the project?

Buy-in is key as employer branding covers many directorates and functions.

What were the project timescales?

Phase 1 = six months build + two-year implementation

Phase 2 = one-year build + projected two-year implementation

Orange (continued)

In what ways did the project differ from your original expectations?

Buy-in for an employer brand can take longer than expected due to the wide range of directorates it covers.

How are you measuring the effectiveness of the brand – the return it yields on its original investment?

- perception of Orange as an employer in the marketplace and brand pull (for example candidate CVs registered on our jobs website, reduction of advertising costs)
- internal perceptions through our annual climate survey and attrition levels

Looking back on the project, what would you have done differently?

More buy-in before starting the project. You can never have too much.

Information supplied by David Roberts, Employer Brand Manager

Case study learning points

While we hope this guide makes it abundantly clear that employer brands are about much more than just recruitment, there's no denying that 'to ensure that we attracted great candidates' is a pretty strong reason for going down the brand route in the first place. The other impressive point is Orange's realism about the time it takes to do the job properly: six months to build and two years for implementation is refreshingly realistic. It was probably the acceptance of these relatively long lead times that prompted Orange to apply the new brand to the issue of talent attraction first.

Part 11: Building brand loyalty, creating brand equity

'If you take your foot off research, you'll slip behind,' David Roberts, Orange Employer Brand Manager

Most truly great brands have been with us for a long time. They may have tweaked their logo, modified their colour palette and inspired some great advertising campaigns along the way. But the overriding impression they create is one of permanence and the ability to change with changing times – but with each change only confirming their essential nature and identity.

BMW has been promising the excitement of getting behind the wheel of the 'the ultimate driving machine' since the late 1970s. Richard Branson's burgeoning empire has been claiming to fight Joe Public's corner against the vested interests of the commercial establishment since he sold his first cut-price 12-inch vinyl from a cramped, first-floor Oxford Street record store in 1970. Marks & Spencer's reputation for quality has been passed down through successive generations – as has its reputation as a good company to work for. British Airways is still attracting spontaneous enquiries and applications from young men (and, thankfully, women) who want to get behind the controls of a 757, or at least dispense in-flight catering with 'the world's favourite airline'.

Your brand development project will need a specific, relatively short-term focus and you'll need to show some quick wins to confound the sceptics and win support for each successive phase of the project. But remember this: the brand you create and communicate will be around long after you've left to take up the plum job that your prowess in brand development will qualify you for. The brand to which you give birth will grow up to acquire its own, almost independent existence. So even while your initial focus is relatively short term, there are things you can be planning and doing to ensure your organisation reaps maximum long-term benefit from the brand.

Brand loyalty and the long good-bye

People will leave your organisation as surely as night follows day. If the brand is doing its job, they'll be fewer in number, fewer still will leave prematurely, and at their farewell party they'll be saying things like: 'Well, I've had a fantastic time here. But this amazing job came up and I knew I'd be crazy to turn it down.' In the back of their minds may be the ghost of a thought about returning at some point in the future; that thought should be in your mind, too.

You need to understand that one of the objectives of your brand project is to create long-term loyalty. And for that, you need to recognise that people's relationship with their employer brand (or their employer's brand, to be more precise) doesn't end when they pick up their P45 and head off to the pub.

You need to see them not as leavers (less still the traitors that some organisations, amazingly, still regard anyone who has the temerity to look for pastures new) but more as alumni – a valuable constituency of people who, with the right treatment, will act as informal but highly effective recruitment consultants and brand advocates for the organisation that still holds a place in their affections.

There are two ways you can make this happen. The first is to discover the real reasons why people leave. Traditional exit interviews don't really do this; people are too evasive or simply too polite to dish the dirt on that bullying manager or to fulminate about that missed promotion. But they'll happily open up to a third party. So get a research company or an independent consultant to conduct a series of short telephone interviews with recent leavers. They'll feel flattered, and automatically more favourably disposed to the

organisation; hard feelings will be softened, bruised egos will be mollified. And to get real value from the exercise, repeat the telephone interviews with the same cohort of leavers a few months later. You'll discover if the grass really is greener on the other side (it seldom is) and you'll discover a more objective, balanced view of your organisation as a place to work. You may even find people ready to come back.

The other thing to do is simply to maintain contact with leavers through newsletters or other classic communication tools. Depending on the nature of your organisation, you may want to be selective in who you keep in touch with – but remember that even a Saturday morning student on the checkouts may be a potential future manager or a part-time call centre operative a future team leader. Let them know what's happening with the organisation and with the brand; let them know the organisation is still around, and hasn't forgotten them.

If the brand gives you the means – or at least identifies the need – to maintain a relationship and sustain loyalty with leavers, it can also be the basis of building relationships with audiences who, though they may be indirect, can make a huge impact on your reputation as an employer. That audience includes influencers and opinion-formers, such as teachers and community leaders. 'But surely,' you may be thinking, 'building and sustaining those relationships is just good recruitment practice.' Yes, up to a point. But the employer brand helps you create the employment story you want to get across; it defines the distinctive employment experience you want those influencers to comprehend and buy into. At a very basic level, it gives you something to talk about.

Using the brand to think and plan ahead, to get your recruitment activity off the back foot and to enable you to develop a relationship with future potential employees naturally depends on you maintaining good relationships with your PR or communications team. And remember that, while the changes and initiatives that help determine the distinctive employment experience your organisation offers may not seem terribly startling or newsworthy to you, they may well be just the stuff that editors will love to devote some valuable column centimetres to.

Don't forget to take measures

The world of the HR practitioner never stands still. New challenges rush over the horizon, and suddenly yesterday can seem like ancient history. You may breathe a sigh of relief that your newly created brand seems to be finding its feet... and move swiftly on to the next item on your agenda.

One of my biggest frustrations in brand development projects has been getting clients to put some accurate, robust metrics on the impact the brand was having and the value it was adding to the enterprise. It was a struggle to get them to produce the key baseline metrics in the first place; it was harder still to persuade them to make regular measurements against those original figures.

But it's a task that must never be overlooked or underplayed. Apart from anything else, you owe it to yourself to produce the numbers that prove to anyone who may still harbour doubts that your brand project is producing the goods and that you're doing a great job.

Let's get engaged

Employee engagement is definitely the hot topic in the HR firmament right now. Books have been published on it; strategic HR consultancies are rubbing their hands at the additional income it represents; Google throws up countless references to it.

The whole issue of engagement begs the question 'engagement with what?' It's the employer brand that can help create and communicate that 'what'.

And there's overwhelming evidence that an organisation whose people are fully engaged is a successful organisation. In the retail sector alone, John Lewis has long known the bottom-line value of treating employees as partners: the more people feel it's their business, the more 'discretionary effort and time' they'll put into it. Marks & Spencer hasn't reversed its declining fortunes simply on some great advertising and high-profile models of a certain generation. It's done so by engaging staff in a new way – the right way – of thinking about the company and the whole way they

approach their work. 'Your M&S' has an obvious resonance with customers; it has an equally strong resonance with employees. It implies a combination of *ownership and responsibility*.

The issue we need to concern ourselves with is the role the employer brand can play in developing engagement – in persuading employees to 'put discretionary effort into their work, beyond the required minimum to get the job done, in the form of extra time, effort and brainpower', to quote Towers Perrin's accurate and detailed definition. More succinctly, the CIPD simply talks about 'a passion for work'.

The whole issue of engagement begs the question, 'engagement with what?' It's the employer brand that can help create and communicate that 'what' – the vision of an organisation that its people can recognise and believe in, and that makes them want to give of their best.

Of course, the brand is by no means the only driver of engagement. Gallup's useful research model for measuring engagement lists obvious issues like, 'Do you have the materials and equipment you need to do your work right?' or, 'In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?'

But their list of 12 questions also includes several that are more directly brand-related, like: 'Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?' or, 'At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?' or, 'Do you know what is expected of you at work?'

Gallup suggests that asking employees to rate their response to each question on a scale of 1 to 5 will give a detailed and accurate picture of the extent to which they feel engaged or disengaged.

But it's one thing to measure the degree of engagement your people feel with their organisation; it's something else to be able to put a figure on the tangible, financial *value* of that engagement. For some organisations, any effort to do so is largely irrelevant. An NHS trust knows that a growth of employee engagement will show up in an improvement in how patients and referring GPs perceive the trust and the services it provides. But there's no transaction, no sale – and therefore no bottom line in a conventional sense. But for a retailer, the link between employee engagement, market share and sales performance is absolutely critical.

You can bet Stuart Rose will be looking closely at the figures that show his employees are signing up to his vision for the organisation. And he'll be following in the footsteps of US retail giant Sears who, 15 years ago, proved – to its own satisfaction at least – that employee engagement was the principal factor behind turning a \$3 billion deficit in one of their key divisions into a healthy \$752 million income. More recently, Towers Perrin have claimed that, for every 1% improvement in engagement, a 0.1% improvement in sales growth will surely follow. It's a neat, memorable formula. And it won't half impress your chief financial officer.

Lakeland: a model of engagement

Over the last 40 years, Lakeland has become one of the leading kitchenware and homeware companies in the UK. Starting as a small, family-run mail-order concern based in the Lake District, the company now operates a retail network of 35 stores alongside a thriving online and catalogue-based mail-order business.

Lakeland is often nominated as a great company to work for and spontaneously mentioned by job-seekers and HR professionals alike as an organisation that has got employer branding right. Debbie Bullock, HR Manager, reveals that success has come out of a deeply rooted ethos that runs through the company, from the leadership team – the founder's three sons – to the most junior trainee and from the head office location in Windermere to retail outlets across the country.

'There's absolutely no separation. Wherever you work, you're an ambassador – it's the first thing you read in the handbook.' Lakeland has a history of involving all colleagues in product development and sampling and everyone from front-line customer service staff to the despatch team are encouraged to learn about new and established products, to suggest ideas and offer opinions in a flat structure in which everyone is on first-name terms. Monthly staff meetings, email communications, fun events, training DVDs and even proof copies of the new catalogue make sure that 'everyone knows everything' and that 'no one's ever having to play catch-up'.

Staff targets are focused on customers' enjoyment of their shopping experience rather than on sales, and employees are frequently visible in catalogues and customer communications, where they are proud to represent the business, their colleagues and the product range.

The unique ethos at the heart of the business drives recruitment and training. Although the Lakeland package is competitive, rather than spectacular, the company receives a big response to its recruitment ads, whether in its Lake District heartland or retail locations (including some traditional hotspots). Despite having a strong online presence for its customer offering, the business prefers not to use online recruitment channels and doesn't contract out any part of its recruitment and assessment processes. Traditional methods, closely managed by a team who live and breathe the brand, deliver consistent recruitment outcomes, while new retail managers spend two weeks in Windermere before even setting foot in their store location to ensure that they fully immerse themselves in the Lakeland way.

Retail and call centre employers often experience high staff attrition, but at Lakeland seven to ten years' service is not unusual in these roles and many staff have friends and relatives working within the business on their recommendation. Community is clearly an important focus and the employer brand meets corporate citizenship in the way in which Lakeland supports local schools (where the children of many staff study), charities and community initiatives.

Despite its growth, staff feel that the business remains true to its roots as a family concern, where everyone is treated fairly and with respect. The employer brand has developed without any sort of formal model, but intuitively as a shared objective across HR, leadership and staff at all levels.

The secret of Lakeland's success seems to lie in consistency. 'Don't rush it,' counsels Debbie, 'Do what's right for you. Look at what other companies are doing, but stick to your values and do what you think is right.'

Paperchase: where product creates brand

Paperchase, the contemporary stationery retailer, describe themselves as an exciting and 'must-have' brand that has doubled in size in the last three years and has grown to over 100 stores in premium high-street locations, mainline stations and concessions in partner stores. The business is rolling out a new 'model store' concept while continuing to open in new locations.

With a large number of students working at sales assistant level, staff turnover is built into the people dynamic and isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Growth has been rapid and a small HR team has worked energetically to keep up – five years ago there was no HR team at all serving a business of some 500 people. Emphasis has been on getting the core processes right – recruitment to support the expansion, and the retention and development of managers.

Personality fit is central to recruitment and retention efforts and the customer-facing brand is inextricably connected to the employer brand: 'they have to love our product if they're going to work in the stores.' There is no formal employer brand programme in place and the company is sceptical about management artefacts that are not central to the business – there are no formal values, no mission statement, no staff satisfaction survey and no formal referral scheme.

Nicola Wilton recognises that 'there's loads more we could do, but we don't have the time. We have to concentrate on the things that will bring results today and focus on what we can do to recruit and retain good people at all levels.'

While some press advertising continues to feature in the recruitment strategy, migration online is working well for entry-level positions. The business researches potential locations to find potential sources of labour, building links with local colleges and tries to create advocacy through existing staff and customers.

The big issue is to move away from agencies – especially at store manager level – and to accommodate 'next steps' for emerging managers within a flat structure.

Communicating as an employer depends on close working with Paperchase's busy marketing team – the owners of the brand. Personal contact and trust is key here: 'There's a running joke in our design team: "Just say 'no' to HR", but trust is built around commitment to the brand – we're designer-led, innovative and quirky; people just instinctively get it or they don't.'

Case study learning points

Apart from highlighting the day-to-day pressures that HR teams in a high-growth retail environment have to contend with, this study emphasises yet again the importance of a good relationship (albeit tinged with playfulness in this instance) with marketing. But it also demonstrates that elusive quality of affinity – the hard-to-articulate sense that a particular organisation is somehow 'for me'.

Part 12: The brand and broader HR issues

'Tomorrow's CEOs will spend more time on their organisation's reputation as an employer than with the investment community (and fund managers will worry if they don't).'

Simon Barrow, Chairman, People in Business

The HR profession increasingly sees the concept of the employer brand as important to HR strategy. However, employer brands aren't the philosopher's stone that turns everything to 24-carat gold. Any impression that they might be omni-competent and all-powerful probably comes from the fact that many of their exponents and practitioners are marketing people who are seldom lacking in enthusiasm and their ability to persuade.

Employer brands aren't the answer to every hard-pressed HR practitioner's prayers. But because so many aspects of an enterprise impinge on the brand, and vice versa, they can be a conduit through which other HR issues can be identified and addressed.

There's a close, functional relationship between brand and product. To use our automotive analogy again, product means the basics such as engine type and size, suspension layout, braking system and so on. Brand means the collection of intangible emotional responses that any encounter with the product provokes – from climbing eagerly behind the wheel to just clocking a sleek coupé on the street. The two may be in conflict: that soggy gear change or an engine that seems to be lacking in the 'va-va-voom' department will diminish the brand's stature and tarnish its reputation.

And the same applies to employer brands. The brand image you want to project may be of a thrusting, entrepreneurial enterprise where risk is actively encouraged and amply rewarded. But this may be totally at odds with a compensation structure that rewards tenure rather than tenacity, long service rather than long hours and that has little or no element of incentive to it.

Your brand may promise a collegiate, supportive culture. Someone joining your organisation, perhaps returning to work after a break or changing career, may find a frosty reception and support that's only grudgingly given.

In both these cases, the research that's part and parcel of any brand development project reveals issues that need dealing with irrespective of the way they relate to the brand. The brand can't fix those problems, but it can identify that they exist and need fixing.

Time and time again in any discussion about employer brands, the issue of alignment comes to the surface, and its importance is borne out by the recent CIPD-sponsored research project we've referred to elsewhere in the guide.

In the context of employer brands, alignment simply means: 'This is pretty much how I expected and hoped it would feel like to work here.' Achieving this all-important alignment between expectations and reality depends on another kind of alignment – between the rhetoric an organisation employs and the reality of what it delivers.

In other words, people in any organisation need to feel that their ultimate issues will deliver on their promises and, in general terms, do what they say they'll do. It doesn't always happen: only 34% feel they can trust their senior management team and, as the report makes startlingly clear, 'as employees gain more work experience, they become more cynical about their senior managers.'

The implications for brand development are twofold. First, if senior managers are involved at the outset, they'll more readily appreciate the need for alignment.

Second, they'll realise that they're the people who can deliver it.

A new brand can make you review your whole approach to appraisal and promotion. Many organisations these days talk about 'living the brand'; rather fewer make any strenuous attempts to inculcate on-brand behaviours and measure the extent to which they really do drive the way the organisation thinks and operates.

That measurement isn't difficult. And it provides a great pretext for beefing up your appraisal system and even extending the process to include full 360-degree appraisals.

Resource planning is something many HR practitioners would love to be able to do, but seldom seem able to – perhaps because reactive, day-to-day pressures intrude too deeply into their work.

Before the advent of employer brands, opportunities to put one's organisation on the radar of various audience groups from which future talent might be drawn were scarce or non-existent. One of the problems was that your recruitment advertising had relatively little to say other than 'come and apply for this great job'. (The reasons why anyone should consider applying, that is the employer brand, were seldom articulated.)

But because the brand gives you a coherent and compelling story about what working for your organisation might offer and feel like, it also gives you valid reasons for telling that story to those constituencies of people you might want to directly attract at some stage in the future.

Your strategic business plan and marketing research indicates a growing need for older employees in customer-facing roles. You don't need them right now, but you will sometime. The brand has given you specific arguments (remember those 'brand muscles'?) that will resonate with that audience. Classic PR and the use of non-traditional channels (how about an ad or article in Saga magazine?) helps you make the connection. So when you eventually do need to recruit, you'll be doing so against a background of awareness and favourability. You'll get the people you need, they'll know what your brand means to them and what it asks for in return. Recruitment will be easier, so your costs will be lower.

You won't just have caught up, you'll have got ahead of the game.

Because you're worth it

Finally, I'd just like to leave the here and now and try to take a peep into the future. Just imagine how it would be if your organisation's employer brand – the brand you developed – was seen as a measurable,

Measuring and rewarding 'living the brand'

A fast-moving consumer goods multinational whose products feature in most kitchen cupboards or bathroom cabinets wanted to develop and implement an employer brand in the wake of an aggressive takeover.

Research revealed that in the brand it wanted and, to a large extent, already had, attributes like 'competitiveness' and 'commerciality' were very much to the fore. On the axis of 'competitiveness', the results were almost literally off the scale – a result that gave the organisation consolation rather than consternation.

They quickly realised that their compensation structure was at odds with what the brand promised, and the behaviours it demanded. Equally quickly, they fixed the problem by making 'living the brand' a major factor in managers' six-monthly appraisals – and an even bigger component of their remuneration.

valuable asset – the kind that features in the balance sheet and all those densely packed pages of the annual report. Suppose, if yours is the kind of organisation that’s likely to attract hostile bids from a rival or from a private equity partnership, the book value the accountants place on the employer brand boosts the organisation’s overall value and helps it mount a spirited, successful defence.

It’s not as fanciful as it may seem. Already the world’s great brands have acquired a value as assets measured in terms other than straightforward sales performance or market share. The methods for measuring their value (Accenture \$6.78 billion, McDonalds \$27.51 billion) are many and varied, but one particularly clear and robust approach, developed by the global brand consultancy Interbrand, has certain features that could, with a little thought, be applied to

employer brands. They talk about ‘forecasted current and future revenue specifically attributable to the brand’. For revenue, substitute the measurable reduction an employer brand makes on the traditional costs of talent attraction, recruitment and retention. Remember the formal relationship (again, measurable) between employee engagement and sales revenue. It’s interesting that Interbrand’s ‘brand strength analysis’ includes the words ‘loyalty’ and ‘retention’. They’re not talking about employee retention, but we are – and we can place a value on it.

This guide is to help you get started on your employer branding journey. Puzzling over how to measure the financial value of the employer brand won’t yet be a priority for many. But in future, it could be another way for the HR community to prove the real value it adds to an enterprise.

Thirty things you need to remember about employer brands (or may never have known)

- 1 Like all brands, employer brands are essentially marketing concepts and constructs.
- 2 The tools and methodologies of employer brand development are substantially the same as those for consumer or corporate brand development.
- 3 Employer brands are at least as much about retention and engagement as they are about recruitment.
- 4 Never trust anyone who tries to wrap employer brands in a cloak of mystique or jargon.
- 5 They're not just for the big, glamorous PLCs with their own high-profile consumer brands. They're for every local authority, charity, SME, government department, academic organisation that needs to recruit, retain and engage good people.
- 6 The basic difference between talent attraction the old way and the brand-based way is the introduction of research.
- 7 Employer brands can support corporate brands, and vice versa.
- 8 Every employer brand is an investment that should and must demonstrate a return comparable to other forms of business investment.
- 9 To prove a brand's effectiveness and demonstrate its ROI, you need to accurately measure your current performance in recruitment and retention.
- 10 The highest ROI ever recorded by an employer brand was 290%.
- 11 Starting a brand development project doesn't commit you to completing it: you can walk away at any stage, and every stage will yield its own value.
- 12 Developing an employer brand proves that HR can handle big, strategic projects and issues.
- 13 The shortest realistic time to develop a brand is six to eight weeks: in reality, you should allow a lot longer. Its value will last and grow for as many years, and probably longer.
- 14 The biggest cost element of an employer brand project will be research.
- 15 You already have an employer brand, because your organisation has a reputation as an employer. It may not be the brand you want or deserve, but it's there just the same.
- 16 One of the first employer brands – and one that still enjoys a strong, well-defined reputation – is Civil Service Fast Stream.
- 17 Probably the first commercial organisation to take the issue of employer brand seriously was British Airways way back in the late 1980s.
- 18 You can't develop a brand on your own – you need to involve marketing, PR, your internal communications team.
- 19 Your recruitment website is one of the most potent expressions of your brand, enabling potential applicants (and your own people) to see your values in action and experience the reality of working for your organisation.

- 20 The public sector has done as much to embrace the concept of employer brands as the commercial sector.
- 21 One of the keys to a successful brand is to ensure that expectation is fully aligned with the reality of working for your organisation.
- 22 Before you're tempted to launch your brand externally, make sure it's fully communicated, understood and embedded internally.
- 23 Research for the *brand* may show up weaknesses in your *product* – the basic features of working for your organisation.
- 24 Brands breed engagement – the discretionary time and effort that people put into their jobs, and that customers or service users notice.
- 25 Engagement – and the financial value of engagement – can be accurately measured.
- 26 A brand toolkit will give recruiters and line managers the flexibility they need, and the brand consistency you want.
- 27 Without compromising consistency, a brand can be tailored to create the greatest resonance with a number of different audiences and talent market sectors.
- 28 Your employer brand can give new focus and consistency to your ongoing employee communications.
- 29 If employer brands are a big HR issue today, they'll be even bigger tomorrow.
- 30 Employer brand development is attracting managers from classic marketing backgrounds to move into HR.

Find out more...

Employer Branding: The latest fad or the future for HR? (2007)

www.cipd.co.uk/researchinsights

In this report eight leading commentators consider employer branding and its current and future role in people management.

The questions they consider include: What is employer branding? Where has it come from? Does it really work? How do you get started? And what is its future and the outlook for HR?

Contributions from:

- Helen Rosethorn, CEO, Bernard Hodes Group and Job Mensink, Senior Director Recruitment Marketing, Philips International
- Dr Shirley Jenner and Stephen Taylor, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School
- Glyn House, Operations Director, including HR and Marketing, wagamama
- Simon Barrow, Chairman, People in Business
- Suneal Housley, Country Manager, Universum
- Professor Graeme Martin, Glasgow University

Recruitment, Retention and Turnover (2007)

www.cipd.co.uk/surveys

Annual CIPD survey looking at trends in recruitment, retention and employee turnover. This survey of resourcing practices includes a section on employer branding.

Working Life: Employee attitudes and engagement (2006)

www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore

Available from the CIPD bookstore, this report by Kingston University and Ipsos/MORI contains survey findings from a nationwide survey of 2,000 employees in the UK. It gives you:

- a picture of the experience of work in the UK today
- an insight into the drivers of employee engagement
- recommendations for improving employee engagement levels in your own organisation.

How Engaged are British Employees? (2006)

www.cipd.co.uk/surveys

Summary of the study of employee engagement and attitudes by Kingston University and Ipsos/MORI above, available from the CIPD.

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