

Learning organization- a strong employer brand?

Saniya Chawla, and Usha Lenka

Abstract—This paper aims to study the relationship between learning organization and employer branding in a way that if educational institutes operate as learning organizations can they be percolated as strong employer brands? Sample for this study consisted of 220 faculty members from 18 Indian higher educational institutes in National Capital Region, India. It has been reported that if an educational institute is a learning organization then it can emerge as a strong employer brand, which will be highly beneficial for existing as well as potential employees. This not only relates to faculty members but also to students who want to apply in the institute that offers quality education along with continuous learning opportunities. Discussions and implications are carried out. The main contribution of this work is for the academicians, researchers, and society.

Keywords—Employer branding, learning organizations, Indian higher educational institutes

I. INTRODUCTION

Change is all-powerful and surrounds the organization from all the sides. It is occurring very frequently in the organizations because every organization plans for a long-term survival for which change is an essential activity. It is seen as a golden opportunity that facilitates learning and help organizations survive through tough competition [1]. Thus, all the organizations whether it is a public or private organization take the initiative of embracing the change in order to transform themselves into learning organizations to ensure a better working environment that fosters continuous and life long learning. A learning organization promotes sharing of knowledge between the organizational members thereby creating a knowledgeable workforce. This results into a flexible organization where people interact freely with each other and create and adapt to new ideas and practices through shared vision [2]. The main aim of learning organization is to focus on continuous learning by providing a supportive learning environment.

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To become a learning organization, the organizations need to be skilled at seven activities (1) continuous learning (2) inquiry and dialogue (3) empower people (4) collaboration and team learning (5) systems to capture learning (6) connect to the organization (7) strategic leadership [3]. The same holds good for the educational sector as well. Recently education sector have started to use the concept of learning organization not only in theory but practically. To sustain the momentum, it is of paramount importance that India should overcome challenges it faces in its higher educational institutes.

However, developing of an educational institute into a learning organization is an achievement that every institute aims for, that result in establishing the institute as a strong employer brand as well [4]. Employer branding is the image of the organization to be considered as a great place to work. It is the combination of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by an organization [4]. Functional benefits include career advancement. Economic benefits include competitive salary whereas psychological benefits include convenient work location. But the question here arises is what makes the employer attractive? What makes an educational institute to emerge as a strong employer brand? Is it the career growth that the organization offers, learning culture, values, training and development, compensation or job security to name a few. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to study if the Indian higher educational institutes developing as learning organizations can be percolated as strong employer brands.

II. LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

Learning organization provides its members the environment of knowledge management practices, intrapreneurship, and total quality management that requires the support of a resonant leader at the top management level [5]. Thus, a learning organization is a place where top management trusts the other members of an organization and delegates the responsibilities of carrying out the task on their own. Learning organization facilitates the learning of one and all in the organization. Top management makes sure that everybody is involved in laying out shared vision and mission so that they collaboratively work on achieving the goals. Resonant leaders are emotionally intelligent leaders who remove fears from the mind of individuals if anything is bothering them. They imbibe them with the feelings of hope, mindfulness, and compassion [6]. They encourage their employees to indulge themselves entirely in the task of learning without being uncomfortable.

They raise the motivation and stimulation level of the members for member's personal and professional advantage. Thus, a leader who is emotionally intelligent can revive the spirit of the members when they are feeling low and heavily burdened upon. Such leaders also take initiative of imbibing the feeling of working together into each other.

Working together involves interaction between the members to influence their thinking process that leads to sharing of knowledge with each other [7]. This knowledge is then stored in the organizational memory so that members can utilize it whenever needed. In this way, learning takes place from and with each other. As all the decisions are made on shared basis, the members learn to question the old insights and develop new ways of working together by involving in inquiry and dialogue.

In a learning organization, employees are also given a freedom to initiate and practice their own new businesses within the existing organization so as to result in new process development. They take risk, experiment with new ideas, and indulge themselves into creativity and innovation. These employees develop newer ways of working and devote themselves entirely to creativity and innovation [8].

Focus is also been given to improving and maintaining the quality standards. Learning organization makes sure that every employee is engaged towards raising the quality excellence in various processes and systems [4]. The employees in a learning organization are motivated to continuously engage in improvement and learning [9]. Their focus is to achieve the award of quality that will help them in achieving the sustainable competitive edge.

III. EMPLOYER BRANDING

The theoretical perspective of employer branding relates to human capital theory and resource-based view of the firm. It states that attracting talented individuals is as important as acquiring any other resource that builds a competitive advantage [10]. Signalling theory states that potential individuals see the information put up by the organization and organizational features signals them about the company. Positive signals attract the potential employees. Therefore, greater is the positive signal; greater is the quality of applicants [11]. Thus, employer branding makes company attractive for existing and potential employees by offering certain benefits such as supportive learning culture to join the organization.

Factors that make an employer attractive are relationship among workers, support of top management, total quality management, knowledge sharing practices, fostering risk-taking and experimentation, location, learning and development, friendly organizational culture, helpful and flexible HR department, corporate social responsibility, global opportunities, and economic value [10], [12], [13]. Organizations fulfilling these factors make the existing and prospective employees stay attached to the organization. Loyal employees

development, individuals themselves become committed for that organization. Such individuals develop a sense of belongingness with the organization. Once the employee is motivated, his interest and acceptance towards individual learning and development increases thereby resulting in continuous learning process.

A study conducted across India found that strong employer branding has a positive influence on application intentions of students, as students want to be associated with the strong employer brand. Students are more interested in applying for institutes that offers learning opportunities [15]. Another study conducted at two Russian universities found that employees are ready to work for the companies with strong employer brand at lower pay structure [16]. Thus, strong employer branding calls for more applications thereby improving the recruitment efficacy, retention rate, and increases employee engagement. Therefore, we propose,

H₁: Employer branding is a probable consequence of Learning organization.

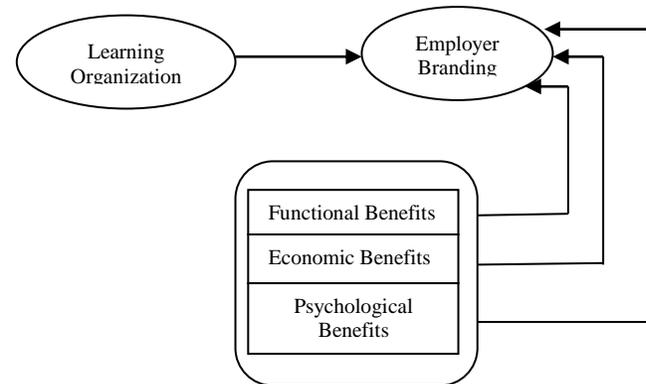


Fig. 1 Employer branding is a probable consequence of learning organization

III. METHOD

The Sample

Sample for this study consisted of 220 faculty members from 18 Indian higher educational institutes in National Capital Region, India. The criterion that was kept during the survey was that the institute must have a minimum strength of 7 faculty members and must have an establishment of minimum 10 years.

The measure

Survey for data collection was done using a self-designed instrument called as "learning organization survey for developing higher educational institutes as employer brands". Data is collected during the period of February 2014 to March 2014. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions on learning organization and 30 questions on employer branding. The questionnaire takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Reliability of the instrument

The instrument established the reliability criteria. Learning organization is measured using 5 constructs. education. Such programmes help in the personal and professional

continue to develop good relationship with their organizations if they see their organizations emerging as learning organizations. Strong employer brands are the first choice of current or prospective candidate applying for a job as it gives a strong reputation and image to an employee [14]. When an organization focuses entirely on the individual's

These five constructs were resonant leadership, intrapreneurship, knowledge management, total quality management, and supportive learning culture. The Cronbach's alpha reported was between 0.66 to 0.85. Similarly, employer branding is measured using 3 constructs, namely, functional, economic, and psychological. The Cronbach's alpha reported was between 0.69 to 0.82.

Data analysis and results

The analysis was done using SPSS 21.0. Normal distribution was run on the data and it came out to be normal. To test the hypothesis, correlation was performed. Table 1 shows the average values of aggregated responses and the correlation results. The variable learning organization has been found to have a significant and positive relationship with employer branding. Therefore, hypothesis H₁ is partially accepted. To fully confirm the results, regression analysis was done. Learning organization ($\beta=0.67$, $t= 5.87$, $P<0.05$) indicated a significant relationship with employer branding. The results also reported 34 % variance and this resulted in partial acceptance of H₁. Therefore, it has been found that learning organization is a significant predictor of employer branding in Indian higher educational institutes.

TABLE I
MEAN, SD AND INTER-CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES UNDER STUDY

	Mean	S.D.	LO	EB
LO	3.79	1.17	1	.624*
EB	3.99	1.11	.624**	1

Notes: P<0.01, LO= Learning organization, EB= Employer branding, ** denotes highly significant values

V. DISCUSSION

Learning organization (LO) and employer brand (EB)

The present study has revealed the relationship between learning organization and employer branding. Institutes emanate as strong employer brands by offering certain functional, economic, and psychological benefits. Learning organization fortifies its employees to engage in prolonged learning process, be proactive, and adapt to changes rapidly and flexibly. Every employee looks for a friendly and learning culture to join and stay in the institute. When institutes provide challenging opportunities to its members, it inculcates the spirit of learning by making them work on such challenging tasks. In the present study it has been found that institutes are offering certain benefits in terms of learning of advanced software technologies, faculty

development of faculty members. Those Institutes who have collaborative set ups with foreign institutions are offering faculty members to voluntarily take initiatives of moving aboard. Many of the faculty members are taking keen interest in initiating research projects with other institutes through funds provided by their respective institute.

They are also encouraged to take risks while working in R&D projects. Institutes also motivate them through rewards, recognition, and appreciation, which keep them monetary satisfied as well. However, psychological benefits like good relationships, friendly environment, and physical facilities are also subjective to their learning process. This urges not only existing members to stay forever attached to the institute but also prospective faculty develops the trust on the organizational facets that leads them to apply for that institute. Such sense of attachment, loyalty, and commitment on the part of faculty members acts as a stimulant for taking up challenging tasks and delivery challenging lectures during the classroom sessions. This magnifies and augments the effect of the learning activities and an institute makes a substantial remark among the benchmarking competitors by establishing itself as a powerful employer brand.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper focused on studying if Indian higher educational institutes developing as learning organizations can be percolated as strong employer brands. From the findings and discussion, it has been found that learning organizations significantly impacted employer branding. It has been reported that if an educational institute is a learning organization then it can emerge as a strong employer brand, which will be highly beneficial for existing as well as potential employees. This not only relates to faculty members but also to students who want to apply in the institute that offers quality education along with continuous learning opportunities.

VII. IMPLICATIONS

The main contribution of this work is for the academicians, researchers, and society. Academicians can focus on developing their educational institute as a learning organization to emerge as a strong employer brand through which new applicants both faculty and students will be attracted towards that institute. This will also help an educational institute to improve its world wide ranking in terms of learning and research. Researchers can further take up this study in exploring more facts of learning organization and employer branding in depth. The study is also beneficial to the society as potential faculty and students look for the institute that offers advancement in learning opportunities and by transforming the institute as learning organization, the value of being considered as strong employer brand increases. This ensures more quality applicants being considered in the institute.

development, foreign exchange programmes, knowledge sharing practices, quality programmes, and quality

VIII. LIMITATIONS

However, the study is not free from certain limitations. The responses were taken only from faculty members, ignoring the administrative staff and students. The study was specific to only higher educational institutes. Further study can also be carried out in schools. In all, the study provided a significant contribution and has provided further scope of carrying out the similar research.

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