MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: ATTRACTING/RETAINING POLICIES AND EMPLOYER BRANDING TO REDUCE THE GAP WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Working in the public sector has traditionally been viewed as one of the best options to balance favorable economic conditions and the security of having a job for life. Therefore, public sector work has never had to worry too much about attracting new workers and keeping people within its workforce. However, the socio-economic upheavals of the post-covid era seem to undermine the public sector's image of excellent workplace. Today, in fact, first of all the new generations are less attracted by the static nature of a job that lasts a lifetime, showing greater enthusiasm towards the opportunity to have different experiences. Second, compared to the past there is greater ease of moving abroad (especially within the European Union/EU) and an immeasurable "flexible and technological availability" which brings the possibility of finding better working conditions closer. Third, the non-sudden responsiveness of public sector wage policies to adapt to the growth of inflation and the increase in the cost of living, takes it away from the traditional "fair enough" conditions moving even further away from the best performers' consideration. As a result of the conditions described, public sector is experiencing problems of attracting new young workers (with many open positions that cannot be filled) and retention of best performers (as always more comparing to the past they decide to leave also in the very first months after being hired). For these reasons, the primary objective of the current study is to assess the management of brand and image as a tactic for drawing skilled personnel in the public sphere. In pursuing this goal, the study focuses on enhancing employer branding as a viewpoint encompassing both outward-facing and inward-facing marketing approaches. These efforts aim to allure and maintain individuals with exceptional abilities capable of generating societal benefits akin to those in the corporate domain.

LITERATURE BACKGROUND, GAP AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Employer Branding (EB) is not a new concept in the literature, with various perspectives defining it. These perspectives consider its functional and theoretical underpinnings (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) and analyze its attributes and relative positioning (Berthon et al., 2005). Specifically, employer brand refers to the knowledge and perceptions about a company as an employer (Lloyd, 2002), portraying it as a desirable place to work (Rampl, 2014; Saini et al., 2014). This concept often relates to how organizations market their offerings to current and prospective staff, communicate with them, and maintain their loyalty (Biswas and Suar, 2014). Employer branding strategies encompass both external and internal approaches, promoting the company's image as an appealing employer both within and outside the organization. These strategies also emphasize recruitment messaging to attract job seekers who align with the company's needs, vision, mission, priorities, and image (Biswas and Suar, 2014).

In addition, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) suggest that employer branding is closely tied to organizational culture and influences organizational identity. In fact a strong employer brand fosters positive attitudes among employees, leading to greater satisfaction and commitment (Del Vecchio et al., 2007; Rampl, 2014). In this way, employer branding represents a strategic framework that integrates human resource management and marketing practices (Biswas and Suar, 2014; Maxwell and Knox, 2009) and for this reason Job seekers often differentiate companies based on their employer brands, making a well-developed brand a competitive advantage that significantly influences their career intentions (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Rampl, 2014; Turban and Greening, 1997). So, basically, what we're saying here is that if job seekers aspire to work for companies that embody particular values (Edwards, 2005) and in today's business environment, attracting and retaining loyal and competitive employees is challenging, then a robust employer brand enables organizations to firmly position themselves in the competitive labor market (Collins and Stevens, 2002). While widely prevalent in private companies, research in public organizations is scarce (Whelan et al., 2010). Nonetheless, as seen employer branding is pivotal in talent management, with the primary goal of drawing in top-notch candidates and keeping current employees engaged within the organization. Therefore in the public sector should embodies an innovative perspective by applying traditional marketing principles to the processes of recruiting, selecting, and retaining human resources. For all the reasons shared above, our research questions for the present study will be:

- *Do private sector employer branding strategies work in the public sector? and if yes, under what circumstances?*

- *Is it possible for employer branding to aid the public sector in attracting and preserving top-notch staff?*

- *What are the principal tactical elements in employer branding for the recruitment and retention of skilled individuals in the public sector?*

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts a qualitative approach collecting data through observations and interviews as previously done in similar works (Drake and Chen, 2023). In particular, the interviews will consist in a semi-structured format in which participants will have the opportunity to add extra-content, increasing the exploratory nature of the study (Palmucci, 2023). At a subsequent phase, the gathered data will undergo examination utilizing the content analysis technique (Crouse et al., 2011) wherein the participants' replies will be scrutinized. Subsequently, 'thematic components' identified by the authors will be employed as a foundation for addressing the guiding inquiries and facilitating comparison with the outcomes of other researches.

EXPECTED RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

From the result of our analysis we expect to empirically verify that the practice of public employer branding not only can be applied but it can help public Italian sector in the challenge to strive to become better places to work as well as recruiting and retaining talent within the public sector, and prevent them from leaving, as has recently been happening, often moving towards private employment that seeks them out and offers more adequate compensation or faster career growth opportunities. Employees can serve as vital advocates in crafting an employer branding approach; nevertheless, they can equally emerge as formidable adversaries if their encounters within the organization have been unfavorable, therefore we expect to highlights that the practice of employer branding helps constructing and upholding an actor network, such as the ability/process of involving actors and keep them aligned. Our study will contribute to two different streams of research. First, it will contribute to enrich the current knowledge about public employer branding; second, it will bring new empirical evidence to the employer branding literature in the public sector. As for H.R. management implications, our result may be a useful strategic tool for Italian public sector top management and professionals within human resources, marketing and communication who are tasked with implementing an employer branding strategy (Christiaans, 2012). This work is not without limitations: first in fact they refer to the poor generalizability of the results outside the Italian borders resulting slightly valid in other national contexts. Regarding this, the sample could be expanded to other countries that have similar socio-economic characteristics such as other southern European states. Second, the study only takes into consideration clerical jobs in some public sector institutions. To arrive at a better understanding of the phenomenon, future studies could take into consideration more institutions and the differences with other professions in addition to employees.

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