Employer Branding Management As A Strategic and Organizational Control Tool

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The issue of employer branding has always had an intrinsic interdisciplinary content, since it builds a bridge for cross-fertilization between different disciplines (strategic marketing, strategic management, and human resources management). This paper presents employer branding as an approach based on effective strategic organizational resources and a precise employer branding management process. In this paper, the target is to define a possible frame in order to interpret employer branding techniques as control and regulation mechanisms. Control in organizations has long been a topic of interest for researchers and practitioners, alike who generally recognize that control mechanisms are needed to ensure that organizations may achieve their goals. It has been carried out a field work on the Italian Aeronautical Meta district, that generates annual revenues equal to EUR 8.7 billion and employees 36,300 people, of whom approximately 10% are employed in the space sector. Through this field work, the intention aim is to understand if and how employer branding may create, enforce, and set up internal and shared meaning and values. In particular, stemming from the empirical research's evidences, this paper tries to conceptualize employer branding as a factor to persuade and influence the way that organizational actors enact in a socially constructed context. In this effort, the aim is to understand how managers may affect meanings, values, goals, and opinions through an effective action on employer branding that can play a crucial role in affecting sense-making processes, meanings, interpretations of the symbolic environment. The paper therefore opens up to new horizons, since it embraces a new application for employer branding, considering it as a modern control system and proposing an innovative approach in managerial control, founded on organizational identity as a key concept in an organizational citizenship's perspective.

Keywords: employer branding, organizational control, strategic control

Introduction

This paper tries to analyze employer branding management as a tool of control, both in strategic and organizational terms. The theme of employer branding has always had an intrinsic interdisciplinary content,

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since it builds a bridge between the studies of strategic marketing and management and that of human resources management and organizational behaviour. In an era, when brand per se seems to have lost its power and meaning, serious and concrete branding strategies that are just the top of an iceberg of firm's investments on high quality services/products and talented human resources, on the contrary, show to be even possible source of strategic competitive advantage (Della Corte, Mangia, 2010; Della Corte, Mangia, Micera, & Zamparelli, 2011).

Employer branding is therefore an approach that based on effective strategic organizational resources and a precise employer branding management process, that seems to be double faced: towards the external environment (both on products/services and on job markets) as well as inside the organization (in order to improve human resources involvement, efficiency, creativity, motivation, and retention). For the first aspect, marketing strategies and external reputation can be important resources; for the second aspect, organizational behaviour theories are able to analyze and show how employer branding management can push the whole personnel of the organization, at all levels, to be part of the firm's identity and building control on intangible factors according to which a sort of self-control process can come out. This issue, of extreme interest, shows evident gaps in the literature and this is the reason why this paper tries to investigate this topic in the paper. This has led to choose, as the following research hypotheses:

Hp1: There is a clear positioning of employer brand management between internal marketing and organizational behaviour.

Hp 2: Employer branding management can therefore be considered as a tool of control, both strategic and organizational.

The answer to the first research hypothesis has been given through the literature analysis and the theoretical proposal. For the second, a survey on leader firms in the aerospace sector in Italy has been done. The structure of the paper includes a literature review, which is indirectly referred to the issue, a theoretical model is therefore proposed and tested on a sample of firms in the aerospace industry, which seems to be very employer-branding oriented.

Literature Review

Considering the aims of the current research, literature review seeks to explore a different employer branding approach: a soft form of control. In this direction, the analysis points on externally spread and internally perceived identity. In turn, employees become guardians of their behaviour in line with the company's culture because they are totally integrated in employer branding identity in their hearts and minds. Through employer branding, employees turn into "true believers" and advocates of the brand. Thus, identity becomes a pivotal issue that bridges both marketing and organizational behaviour components of employer branding. In fact, as stated in other past works (Della Corte & Mangia, 2010; Della Corte et al., 2011), employer branding was found in two research fields: marketing and organizational science. Employer branding can be viewed as a holistic process in which the organization develops its employees' positive attitude and commitment with the organization (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). In spite of this holistic perspective, literature has defined employer branding from different perspectives (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy, & Berthon, 2002), considering its functional and theoretical foundations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and examining attributes and positioning (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). In this direction, the employer branding studies derive directly

from brand reflecting the same notions. More specifically, with "employer branding", the literature indicates the firm's capability of differentiation as an employer from competitors. Hence, the employer brand highlights the unique aspects of the firm's employment placement or environment (Backahous, Tikoo, 2004). In this direction, scholars identify the employment experience as the "employment offering", implying that this experience is offered to current and potential employees. This offering consists of a promise, advertised during recruitment and kept in order to retain best people. This promise has specific connotations in the identity. In fact, employer branding, according to G. Martin, R. Martin, Kneafsey, and Sloman (2009), could be defined as the application of marketing, communications and branding concepts to promises of an employment experience that make an organization distinctive and appealing to new and existing employees, and ensuring that all employees identify and engage with the organization, its corporate brand, mission, values, and beliefs and thrive with it.

Identity has two fold reflexes and targets: identity of the brand towards external targets and organizational identity with strong internal implication.

The logic connection between "brand" as distinctive of consumer goods and service and "brand" applied to HRM is in the concept of identity. Brand identity is the unique set of brand associations that establishes a relationship with the target (Aaker, 2001). These associations generate value via functional, emotional or self-expression benefits. It is the unique set of brand associations, which represents what the brand stands for and promises to customers. Brand identity concept serves to highlight the fact that, with time, brands do ultimately gain their independence and their own meaning, even despite the fact that they may start out as mere product names. Brands characterize their own area of competence, potential, and authentic, but they are just a communication tool. One cannot expect a brand to be anything other than itself.

Aaker (1996) argued that the brand identity structure comprises a core identity and an extended identity that surrounds the first. The core identity is almost certainly remaining constant as the brand enters new markets and products. The extended brand identity consists of brand identity elements, structured into consistent and meaningful categories, which provide texture and wholeness. Brand core identity defines what must remain and what may be changed. Brand identity influences and is influenced by corporate reputation as employer, in employer branding field. So that reputation represents the conjunction between the external and internal features of identity.

In previous works (Martin, 2009a), employer branding is considered as a key role concerned with corporate reputations. Cable and Turban (2003) have further highlighted the importance of company reputation in increasing the likelihood of potential applicants for a job at the organization. This study helps to understand why, in the employer branding programs, carefully planning an extensive campaign in order to increase the chances of potential recruits wanting to apply results necessary. Moreover, the two scholars have identified two key factors that predict positive job seeker reputation perceptions: the degree of familiarity with the organization and external ratings of the corporate reputation. Cable and Turban have also investigated whether the degree to which organizations advertised aspects of its reputation and HR philosophies on job postings can predict employee reputation perceptions, perhaps surprisingly they have found no significant link. The more talented employees find positive aspects in corporate reputation, the more they are likely to identify with the organization, and the more they will seek membership with it in order to share the image that membership promises (Backhaus & Tiko, 2004).

Moreover, Martin (2009a) defined corporate reputation in terms of reconciling organizational needs through corporate branding and socially legitimacy through the exercise of more effective leadership, good governance, and corporate social responsibility (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Martin & Hetrick, 2006, 2009; Martin, 2009b; Martin & McGoldrick, 2008). Thus, following Sparrow and Balain (2009), for those who are already employed, employer branding aims at helping existing talent to identify and engage with it (CIPD, 2009; Martin & Beaumont, 2003; Martin & Hetrick, 2006; Martin, 2009b). In this direction, identity represents a tool of self-control in employer branding perspective, thus confirming the first hypothesis, for two main reasons: first, external reputation is necessary to attract talents on the job market; and secondly the human resources' retention requires the above explained efforts in terms of internal image, culture, and shared values.

The identity is confirmed as a fundamental asset also by Dell and Ainspan (2001), that asses "the employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses the firm's value system, policies, and behaviours toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and retaining the firm's current and potential employees". This definition indicates that employer branding involves promotion activities, both within and outside the firm, in order to make a firm different from competitors and desirable as an employer. Moreover, Baumann (2007) argued that employees' identity and identification were potential sources of strategic value creation and support for business model transformation. Employer branding aims at creating positive but authentic statements of an organization able to shape the behaviour of groups of employees, leaders, and line managers around a specific message or value propositions (Hodge & Martin, 2009; Martin, 2009b; Sparrow & Balain, 2009). Thus, identity management at all levels of an organization represents the core of employer branding.

Further, the identity contributes to workers identification with the firm (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994) and organizational commitment (Crewson, 1997). In this direction, organizational identity provides the context within which members interpret and assign profound meaning to surface-level behaviour (Brunninge & Northqvist, 2004). Thus, Hatch and Schultz (2004) posited that organizational identity acts as a sense—making guide in an organization. Organizational identification could be defined as individuals' cognitive perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Gioia, Shultz, and Corley (2000) emphasized the organizational identity as "collective understandings of the features presumed to be central and relatively permanent, and that distinguish the organization from other configurations". In their views, the focal point is in the shared interpretation of identity that may or may not correspond to official narrative (Ashforth & Mael, 1996).

According to Fiol (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998), the accent is on the social dimension of the organization identity, in fact, "meanings and meaning structures are negotiated among organizational members". This becomes a self-categorization that is the core of organizational identification. An employee indentified in an organization will be more self controlled and in line with the values and the objectives of the firm. These concepts are strongly tied with organizational citizenship behaviours (Sartain & Schumann, 2006).

The conization of the terms is due to Organ and his colleagues (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983), who start from Barnard's concept (Barnard, 1938) of the "willingness to cooperate", and Katz's (Katz, 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1966, 1978) distinction between dependable role performance and "innovative and spontaneous behaviours". The definition makes a clear connection with other related management domains, such as human resources management, labour relations, and strategic management. About the theme of the current research, the cross-field of interest is in the organizational behaviour in order to define the fundamental

traits applicable in the employer branding strategy. Particularly, group cohesiveness is found to be significantly and positively related to employees—employer and employees—employees relationship through the main features of organizational citizenship (Podsakoff et al., 2000, Podsakoff et al., 1996b; Podsakoff et al., 1990), that are:

- Helping behavior: the concept refers to voluntarily helping others with, or preventing the occurrence of work—related problems (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993, 1997; George & Brief, 1992; George & Jones, 1997; Graham, 1989; Organ, 1988, 1990a, 1990b; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Williams & Anderson, 1991);

- Sportsmanship: the concept refers to a positive attitude developed even when things do not go their way. It is an attitude that allows employees to sacrifice their personal interest for the good of the work group (Podsakoff et al., 1997; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994; Walz & Niehoff, 1996);

- Organizational loyalty: this behaviour makes the employees as organizational "groupies" who promote, protect, and defending the organization against external threats, remaining committed to it even under adverse conditions (Graham, 1989, 1991; George & Brief, 1992; George & Jones, 1997);

- Organizational compliance: the concept refers to a person's internalization and acceptance of the organization's rules and procedures, scrupulously adhering to them. In extreme situations this means complete and religious obedience to all rules and regulations, even when no one is watching (Smith et al., 1983; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Borman & Motowidlo, 1993);

- Individual initiative: this behaviour smoothes over the previous one. It involves engaging in task-related behaviours that goes "above and beyond" the call of duty, leveraging on personal creativity (Podsakoff et al., 1997; Organ, 1988; Graham, 1989; Moorman & Blakely, 1995; George & Brief, 1992; George & Jones, 1997);

- Civic virtue: it represents a macro-level commitment to the whole organization. This refers to an active behaviour of employees, even at great personal cost. These is the maximum expression of organizational membership (Graham, 1991; Organ, 1988, 1990b);

- Self development: it could be identified as oneself development in an environment of membership (Katz, 1964; George & Brief, 1992).

In summary, despite a lack in literature of correlation between employer branding and organizational citizenship behaviour, job attitudes, task variables, and various types of leadership appear to be more strongly related to the former than the other streams of research.

Moreover, all the above mentioned organizational citizenship behaviour factors aim at creating and developing the basis for psychological contracting and high self-management approach. The theme of psychological contract can link to the understanding of employer branding, following the arguments presented by Rousseau in explaining variations in the psychological contract content. Rousseau (1990) made a distinction between relational and transactional psychological contracts. Transactional content involves more directly quid pro quo exchange features. These exchange aspects are more based on economic exchanges, and they differ from socio-emotional oriented relational psychological contract content, where the provision of subjective perceptions of trust and fairness are central. Some authors explicitly refer to Rousseau's distinction which separates explicit tangible exchange based aspect of the psychological contract from more trust or socio-emotional based aspects of the psychological contract and apply this framework to the notion of employer branding.

The complexities of an employment offering or employment experience associated with a particular employment brand can be considered as the transaction key. Quid pro quo exchange is based on features such as pay for performance as well as important socio-emotional/cultural features that help make up a particular distinctive employment brand. Martin and Hetrick (2006) also discussed a third type of psychological contract that can be applied to the idea of employer branding, which involves ideological currency. Martin and Hetrick (2006) argued that aside from the economic and socio-emotional aspects of the psychological contract, its content can involve expectations that the organization was acting for some ideological purpose in accordance with a particular set of values and principles. Their arguments are also linked to Blau's (1964) work, who suggests that the fulfillment employees may get from working toward a particular ideological goal can act as a reward.

This is particularly useful in the context of employer branding as people may wish to work for a distinctive company that has particular values or principles if they share these principles. In this direction, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argued that employer branding contributes to the formation of a psychological contract and the accuracy of the information portrayed in employer branding will therefore influence perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Martin et al. (2008), Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Martin and Hetrick (2006), and Miles and Mangold (2005) have identified a strong connection between corporate reputation, psychological contract, and employer branding. In fact, their merit in the employer branding literature progress is that they founded theoretically a proactive organizational management of corporate reputations whose perceptions by employee's impact upon the formation and development of their psychological contract. Among the others, Cravens and Goad Oliver (2006) target an important issue claiming that this theoretical bridging could be a channel for competitive advantage[1].

These aspects could be defined as factors of organizational control in terms of employees' self-regulation. But they also impact on the strategic control. The latter is designed to test the effectiveness of implementation of corporate strategies adopted at various levels and to provide information to strengthen them or their changes. It is accomplished through the comparison between the objectives and strategies established in the plans and trends of internal and external variables relevant to their achievement. The audit strategy is not limited to assess the results achieved in the short term, but tend to monitor the overall performance of the internal and external factors that determine the company's profitability. In this direction, considering firm's efforts in human capital investment, it is possible to indicate some parameters of strategic control. First of all, think about the ROI of human capital as a developing science that could be declined as return on individuals (Gary, 2003).

Conceptually, this helps to establish a link between personnel investment and business performance in order to measure and manage individual performance against goals. This concept has its roots in the finance literature of upper and lower value bounds on cash flows (Cochrane & Saa-Requejo, 2000; Cochrane, 2001), but has been further developed by HRM. In this direction, starting from Schmit and Allscheid (1995), it is possible to state that that employees' overall climate (that constitutes the before mentioned organizational control) affects service intentions, "which was related to customer service" (Barney & Wright, 1997). So this measurement impacts both on financial returns and customer satisfaction and retention.

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[1] "Combined, these intangible assets constitute a powerful and unique tool capable of creating sustainable competitive advantage" (Cravens & Goad Oliver, 2006).

Thus, a connection with balanced score card appears clear. Employee engagement in balanced scorecards is enabled by making obvious linkages between internal (such as retention, turnover, and satisfaction) and external metrics (quality defects, cycle time, productivity, and gross margin). This visibility builds employee awareness of the role that they play in the corporation's or initiative's success. It expands morale and passion for continual improvement towards a customer-centric culture in the quest for maximum employee contribution to the organization's goals.

Research Gaps, Hypotheses and Theoretical Implications

As underlined in the previous paragraphs, employer branding is a very debated and discussed topic that however requires a serious managerial approach, both in its strategic, marketing, and organizational implications. The literature seems to confirm the first research hypothesis and opens up a way to verify the concrete applicability of employer branding management to strategic and organizational control through the view of organizational citizenship.

It is also in fact that an interdisciplinary issue does not just aim at attracting potential employees but also significantly aim at retaining the most talented ones within the organization, through intangible and innovative tools.

In order to answer the second research question, it has been considered necessary to build a theoretical framework which, on the basis of the literature analysis, has shown how and when it is possible to adopt EBM as a mean of control. The model that figures out after a long literature analysis is outlined in the following figure that tries to clarify some theoretical preliminary step which is necessary to get to the issue. Employer branding cannot just be considered per se—it has to be analyzed and adopted in terms of employer brand management (see Figure 1).
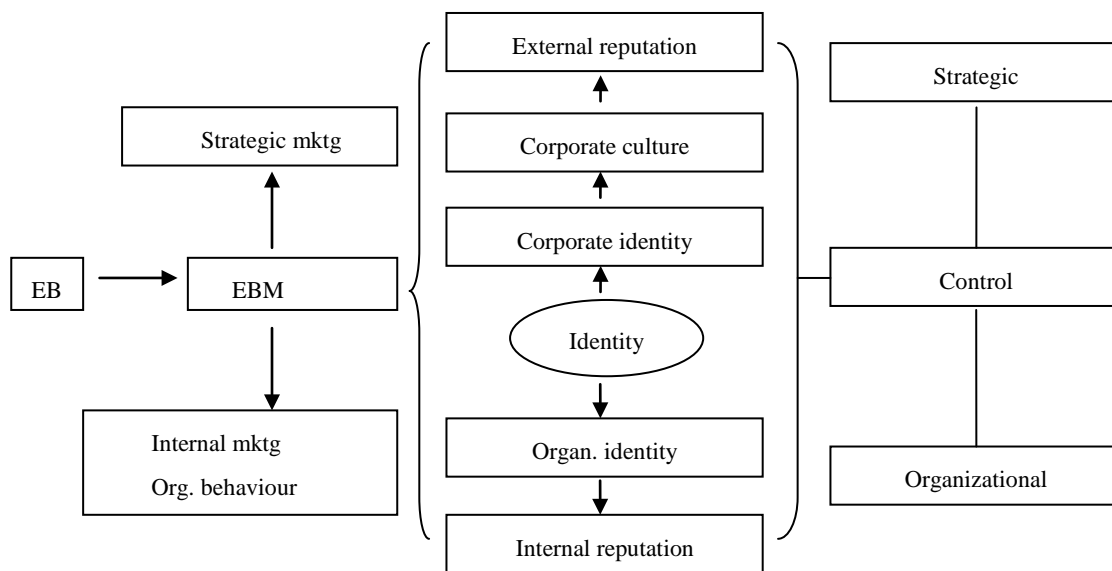

Figure 1. Employer branding management and control.

Employer Brand Management (EBM) has relevant implications in two main areas of the firm: strategy and external marketing on one side and internal marketing and organizational behaviour on the other side. The first area regards mainly firm's capacity of concerning a positive external reputation (corporate brand before

employer brand) that is based on corporate identity, that the whole of values, approaches, and culture that prevail in a certain organization. In terms of external reputation, employer branding allows to attract more talented applicants on the job market and, if correctly managed, can even reinforce corporate brand, in the overall brand management complex system of a firm (Sullivan et al., 2002).

From this point of view, some authors (Moroko & Uncles, 2005) underline the deep link between employer branding and corporate brand, pointing out some specific features that can be found both in corporate brand theory and practice. As reported by Della Corte et al. (2011), these aspects are:

• being known and notorious: very well known and notorious companies are much appreciated by current and prospective employees as workplaces;

• being relevant and resonant: for employers that practice employer branding, current and potential employees are to be considered as "consumers" to attract, through distinct value propositions (bundle of benefits) (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Micheals, Handfield, & Axerold, 2001). Successful employer brands are characterized by having a value proposition that is relevant to and resonant both for their potential and current employees;

• being more competitive than competitors as employer brands: a differentiated employer brand is often seen as the key in winning the "war for talents", in function of some specific aspects (functional, symbolic, and experiential) that will be further analyzed.

In fact, looking more specifically at human resources, corporate identity deeps its roots in organizational identity: only when people working in a certain firm feels and shares the same value and culture, that is firms' real identity, there is a positive internal reputation that develops and that favours human resources' working within the firm rather than changing (employees' retention). This view leads to a process that can even imply both strategic and organizational control.

This aspect is strictly bound to a vision of EB (Della Corte & Mangia, 2010) according to which firms' approach in employer branding management is characterized, with different intensity, both by functional and symbolic dimensions, that can be described as follows (Della Corte et al., 2011):

• functional aspects: the more tangible aspects of EB (i.e., incentives, compensation systems);

• symbolic aspects: the more intangible components of employer branding (i.e., relationship between employer and corporate brand, with reference to the firm's image and reputation);

• experiential aspects: the experiential issue refers to the overall atmosphere, climate and culture that prevails in the organization and mainly to how it is lived and really experienced by the organization.

Therefore, in this optic an employer that practices employer branding and employer brand management tries to express corporate identity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) through valuable propositions both to potential and actual employees (Sullivan et al., 2002), adequately and realistically expressed by the brand (Eisenberg et al., 2001). This concepts explain why EB is absolutely and interdisciplinary and transversal issue according to which employees are at the same time targets of EB Management, co-creators of firms' life, values and culture and final "users" of organization behaviour (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002).

Thus in organizational terms, the vision of employer branding managing according to internal marketing perspective is based on the assumptions that the first market for a firm is made of its personnel: the internal customers are employees and their products are the jobs. So they have to be satisfied with their products,

otherwise they may decide to change product (job). At the same time, the firm has precisely chosen its target for its internal market and tries to satisfy them as co-actors of its activities (George & Gronroos, 1991; George, 1990; Gronroos, 2004; Ballantyne, 1997).

The fist market of a company is its personnel, so that employees are internal customers and jobs are internal products. Thus, internal marketing plays a fundamental role in the employer branding strategy: it is a planned effort using a marketing-like approach directed at motivating employees, for implementing and integrating organizational strategies towards customer orientation (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003).

Moreover, the mission of internal marketing is that of managing the relationship between organization and employees, pointing to internal communication, knowledge sharing, and motivation, thus stimulating both employees' sense of belonging and pushing them to contribute in firm's identity and reputation constant improvement.

If therefore employees seem to be the most important internal stakeholders for a firm (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010), employer brand management becomes a relevant tool for employee retaining, since it makes the firm the positive workforce that had been promised in the recruiting phase (Frook, 2001) and makes employees feel themselves as part of organizational identity and therefore of organizational culture. And this is much true when firms operate in industries, like service, where the human touch is significant in delivered services to customers. This also explains why employer brand management is necessary: if the employee does not learn, share, and assimilates the main values of the firm, and if internal service is not of the expected quality level, then the service provided to the external client won't be satisfactory (Heskett, 1987), creating a sort of intellectual and emotional engagement of the personnel with the brand (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Thomson, 2000)[2]. Thus, the goal of internal marketing becomes that of developing workforces able to be committed with organizational values and goals (Zamparelli, 2012; Bakhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

From this point of view, in resource-based perspective (Barney, 1991, 2001a, 2001b) employer brand management itself can even become possible source of sustainable competitive advantage (Della Corte et al., 2011), in a scheme where employees are active partners, since they have to believe and support the vision and self-actualizing it (Blumenthal, 2011).

This approach, that can maybe more easily applied to a big seized but simply organized company, can become more complex if it is the case of multinational or transnational firms, based on a multiracial and multicultural human resource endowment (Vallaster, 2004). In such situations, however, it can become even more strategic, if it expresses corporate brand values, favours both intellectual and emotional employees' involvement (Thomson, 2000) and manages to refer to all organizational levels, even if in a different way and with different intensity (Mahner & Torres, 2007).

EB As A Control Tool: Organizational Implications

The investigation starts considering the main streams within organization studies—perspective literature on soft form of control, trying to point out the relevance of the EB as a mean of control, that it can be interpreted as the way managers can align employees capabilities with the organizations goals (Cyert & March, 1963;

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[2] According to Bergstrom et al. (2002), among the most important things there is that of successfully linking very job in the organization to delivery of the "brand essence".

Perrow, 1970; Thompson, 1967).

Control in organizations has long been a topic of interest for researchers and practitioners alike, who generally recognize that control mechanisms are needed to ensure that organizations may achieve their goals (Kirsch, 1996; Mangia et al., 2008).

This preliminary consideration helps in making a fundamental distinction between formal and informal means of control.

Before considering informal and soft alternatives to managerial control, let's argue that the traditional formal control reminds the idea of bureaucracy and implies a sort of calculative formulation, relying upon an economic view of organizations that has been enhanced through agency theory (Fama & Jensen, 1983).

Adopting a traditional perspective, following the bureaucratic authority, those higher up in the hierarchy set up the standards to measure the effectiveness of workers. In this perspective, the main aim is to make workers accountable and minimize costs, control errors, and regulate behaviours. Jensen (1996) argues that "making the internal control systems of corporations work is the major challenge that economists and management scholars are facing" is, perhaps more than ever, crucial to understand the real evolution of management science in the 2010s.

Lindkvist, Soderlund, and Tell (1998) stated that the frequent adoption of "tests and other similar forms of formal control mechanisms can create a sense of shared responsibility for vital sub-parts of the system and encouraged interfunctional dialogue and compromise".

There is a direct relationship between the degree of formalization and of standardization and the extent of application of formal control mechanisms (Walton, 2005).

On the contrary, unlike formal control systems, which monitor the behaviour adopting explicit and formal measures, informal typologies of control use different tools and means (Falkenberg & Herremans, 1995): (1) values; (2) beliefs; and (3) unwritten traditions.

It is possible to quote B. K. Snavely and W. B. Snavely (1990) who argued "informal types of control coordinate employee behavior through interpersonal, social and/or cultural influence methods… ", emphasizing how "work group norms are based on shared values and beliefs among peers and learned through socialization".

In the same way, for Ouchi (1980), an informal control system is composed of shared beliefs, values, moral standards, and traditions that influence the behaviour of employees. In this perspective, it is possible to refer to the theoretical considerations carried out by Courpasson (2006) who analyzed the concept of "soft form of constraints" within the neo-liberal world's organizations.

The main point is the possibility to introduce "new methods of work and the perception from people to have a greater autonomy on the workplace" (Toraldo, 2011). In this way, this paper has been considered the role played by EB in achieving a sort of homogenization between the individual stakes and the organization ones. As observed by Heelas (2002), work is increasingly conceived as an activity which ought to give the opportunity to explore the inward self. In this perspective, the possibility to use a clear EB may be a useful tool to "help" the workers in exploring their inward self. The main theoretical issue raised by this interpretation of EB may be related to the theme of the "management of authenticity", investigated by some authors in the last few years (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; Fleming, 2009; Pedersen, 2011). In our opinion, the appearance of the

"real self" could be related to the expression of the main characteristics of the EB. Hence, the possibility to "be yourself" and to "change yourself" has spread across some organizational contexts, echoed the claim to free individuals and let them be more attached to their work.

In the light of the constraints against formal control conditions under bureaucracy, there has been a flourishing stream of contributions focused on the area of informal and soft controls: implying or control through culture, norms, and trust rather than through hard direction (Grey & Garsten, 2001).

In particular, this investigation focused on the relationship between EB, employees' behavior, and forms of control, it is possible to shed a light on the concept of corporate culture, that as stated by Raelin, has been proposed to be especially useful in order to influence workforce on "achieving high levels of productivity because it links workers to a common set of core values, beliefs, and assumptions" (Denison, 1984; Lim, 1995; Ouchi, 1981; Peters & Waterman, 1982).

As shown in the following sections, the use of a particular EB can be deeply impact on the corporate culture and values.

Lebas and Weigenstein (1986) stated that the role of culture has becoming more and more crucial since control through market and rules have become increasingly less viable. The most relevant aspect is related to the fact that culture and EB may create a sort of shared identity and organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1933).

The reason why in this paper the analysis is focused on EB as a mean of control is related to the fact that is strictly related to the expression of sentiments, beliefs, and attitudes, exerting a sort of homogenization of desired values and norms which makes constant surveillance unnecessary (Pfeffer, 1981; Ray, 1986; Raelin, 2011).

A further aspect that will take into analysis refers to the organizational members' receptiveness to the values, feelings, and characteristics of corporate culture. The real effectiveness of these soft control methodologies depends upon employees reactions (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Methodology and Empirical Results: The Guttman Scale and the Spearman Co-graduation Analysis[3]

In the empirical phase, following sampling criteria were adopted: (1) firms' business activity; (2) company's attractiveness (both on the final market and on the labour market); and (3) membership of the Italian aeronautical meta-district and of Federation of Italian Companies for Aerospace, Defence and Security (AIAD). In this case, the target population is composed by a large number of companies in the aerospace industry located in the Italian regions (Campania, Lombardia, Piemonte, and Puglia) in the meta-district ($N = 562$)[4]. The first step of selection enables to focus on business excellence, given the business that offer technologically advanced and highly differentiated firms. According to those criteria, the interviewed firms (Finmeccanica, Alenia Aeronautica, Thales Alenia Space Italia, Avio, Telespazio, Cira Centro Italiano Ricerche Aerospaziali,

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[3] This paragraph is by Clelia Cascella.
[4] The population, thus constituted, includes individual companies specialized in particular aspects of operations including aerospace and specialized units for the task of stamping and forming sheet metal parts, heat treatment of aluminium and steel, composite materials inspection and quality not destructive control tests, assemblies and installations, components and electronic systems and control, control the hardness and electrical conductivity, surface treatment and non-destructive testing, manufacture and installation of assemblies and subassemblies of aircraft, satellite remote sensing, satellite imagery interpretation, GIS, monitoring acceptance of raw materials and composites (Kevlar, Fiberglass, Epoxy Carbon, Aircraft Interiors, Electronics).

Galileo Avionica and Selex Sistemi Integrati) represent the universe of big organizations of aeronautical sector and each of them is representative of a network of suppliers[5].

The main objective of this study is verifying the existence of connection between the implementation of EB strategy in a long-run perspective and the firm control that can be considered, both in internal (organizational control) and external (strategic control) perspective.

The interviewed industries represent an excellence in the employer branding perspective. In fact, by analyzing the questionnaire, for the 40% of the sample, the brand is a very important strategic resource and, for the 60% of interviews, it is the focal point of business strategy (see Figure 2).

The perception of EB role (in the firms' long-run strategy) is a key concept in the empirical phase of this research. In fact, the hypothesizes of this work are:

• Can the implementation of EB perspective in the firms' long-run strategy contribute to redefine the corporate identity?

• If yes, can the EB become a tool of internal and external control?

For both, a different analysis was carried out. In particular, respect to the first one, the identity concept has been redefined according to EB perspective.

The identity concept is very complex and dynamic, it changes over time, and it is strongly influenced by a lot of different factors, such as the firm's history/tradition, the management/equity values, but also by HR management behavior towards firms' employers, the employers themselves, etc.. For investigating this aspect, a Guttman Scale has been proposed, where the items (i.e., the "steps" of the scale) are arranged according to a increasing intensity criteria. In other words, for "climbing the scale", the interviewed subjects must have a major quantity of latent dimension (in this case, HR management behavior towards firms' employers). In this term, an ideal continuum has been designed, along which it seems possible to arrange a set of indicators aimed at pointing out the "human oriented leadership". This one is aimed at valorizing firm's human capital, i.e., the latent dimension in the meaning above specified.
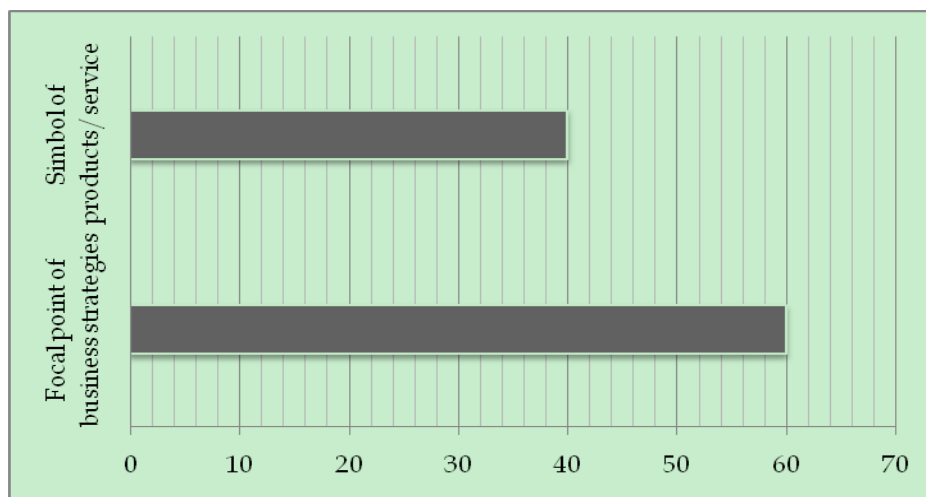

Figure 2. The perceived role of the brand in the interviewed firms' strategy.

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[5] FWC sector competitiveness studies—competitiveness of the EU aerospace industry with focus on: aeronautics industry within the framework contract of sectoral competitiveness studies in December 2009.

In order to achieve this goal, a reliability analysis was carried out through Cronbach's alpha (its value equal to +0.87 confirms the choice of indicators, underling their unidimensionality) and then three weighted indexes were constructed. Through them, those aspects were point out: (1) HR leaders' perception about the strategic value of human resources; (2) the pursued HR leaders' objective respect to EB strategy implementation; and (3) the EB implementation level in the firm strategy. Arranging the firms according to the owned quantity of property (in this case, the quantity of human oriented component in interviewed subjects' leadership style), the Guttman scale has been constructed (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Guttman Scale

	The role (such as perceived by HR leaders) of human resources in the construction of corporate identity	the EB implementation level in the firm strategy		
		Low	Medium	High
Firm 1	1	1	1	1
Firm 2	1	1	1	1
Firm 6	0	1	1	1
Firm 3	0	1	1	0
Firm 7	0	1	1	0
Firm 8	0	1	1	0
Firm 4	1	1	0	0
Firm 5	0	0	0	0

Note. Source: The authors' reworking.

Arranging the firms according to the owned quantity of property (in this case, the quantity of human oriented component in interviewed subjects' leadership style), the Guttman scale becomes a perfect scale. Therefore, a leadership style typology can be individuated in the sample:

• (totally) Human oriented leadership style: The interviewed subjects work in a dynamic system aimed at valorising the human capital, where (1) inter-firms collaboration programs—aimed to improve EB strategies—have been activated; (2) evaluation system—aimed to control and verify the impact of EB strategies on employers' performance—has been carried out; and (3) in the last three years, investments—aimed to improve the implementation of EB strategies—have been done (employer value position) etc.;

• Intermediate profile: This is the most complex profile. HR leaders declare of favouring the valorisation of human capital and declare of considering it as an important element of corporate identity. Nevertheless, there are not concrete EB activities in a long-run perspective (even thought, some activities are implemented, such as the construction of EB inspired website and some other things, but long-run perspective seems be absent);

• (no) Human oriented leadership style: The interviewed HR leaders do not track down a connection between the human capital and the definition of corporate identity. They do not work in a system where EB strategies are implemented, either in a long-run or in short-run perspective.

In the total research architecture, the carried out analysis is propaedeutic to the second part of the empirical phase. In fact, there is only once defined the leadership style typology in HR perspective, the possibility of considering EB as a tool of internal and external control becomes practicable. In this direction, the internal control is the developing faithful employers and the external control is the firm's capability of attracting talents which are able to satisfy firm's needs.

In order to achieve this goal, a Spearman co-graduation analysis was carried out, taking into account the EB activities realized by the firm and:

(1) Employers' performance level—internal control;

(2) Firm's attractiveness—external control.

First at all, connection between EB implemented activities/strategies and the three leadership styles individuated through the Guttman scale was investigated.

The squared Spearman coefficient has a variation field (-1; +1). It is null in absence of co-graduation, it is negative if there is an inverse relation between variables, and it is positive otherwise (see Table 2).

Table 2

Spearman Co-graduation Analysis

	Leadership totally human oriented	Intermediate profile	No human oriented leadership
Internal control	0.95	0.54	0.40
External control	0.80	0.66	0.64

Note. Source: Our elaboration.

EB is a tool of internal control, the EB activities and HR leadership styles strongly influence the internal employers' performance. In order to investigated this aspect, it was disassembled into two parts: (1) the employers' loyalty to their firm; and (2) the employers' availability (such as perceived by HR leaders) to satisfy firm's unexpected needs. In confirmation of this finding, there are the co-graduation indexes related to the second and the third leadership profiles: in fact, they are higher than the expected ones. Therefore, it is possible to observe and hypothesis that: (1) the aeronautical sector has a consolidate tradition. This could explain a higher imperviousness of this sector to the most recent strategic approach; and (2) there is a very small "sample" (even though it represents the real target population of this work) and this could be cause bias effect (so called social desirability). And, in our opinion, this effect exists in the analysis.

The employer brandings appears an important tool of external control. By comparing all co-graduation indexes, the second and the third styles are able to attract talents, but they are not able to guarantee the same employers' performance level. So, this one is better in firms where a human oriented leadership is implemented. In the light of those considerations, the human oriented leadership becomes a strategic resource for firm, because it can guarantee a better agreement between the firms' needs and the candidate profiles. Of course, this naturally constitutes the strategic presupposition to create a "pocket" of long-run competitive advantage.

Conclusions, Managerial Implications, and Hints for Further Research

In this paper, it has been interpreted the idea of EB not exclusively as a marketing mean, but rather as a sort of control and regulation mechanism, able to impact on value and managerial framing processes. In this sense, it has been understood EB as a tool to create, enforce, and set up internal and shared meaning and values. In particular, it has been conceptualized EB as a factor to persuade and influence the way organizational actors enact in a socially constructed context. In other words, managers may affect meanings, values, and shared opinions through an effective action on EB that can play a crucial role in affecting meanings and interpretations of the symbolic environment organizational members operate in.

The paper has in fact answered to a twofold objective. Firstly, it demonstrates that employer branding is the expression of employer branding management, and that it has relevant implications outside the firm as well as inside. This adds value to literature on the theme and confirms the necessarily interdisciplinary approach. A second very important research implication is that it opens up new horizons in the field of organizational control, inserting an innovative and unusual perspective, through the "organizational citizenship view", thus building a relevant conceptual bridge between strategic and organizational control.

In this direction, there is a deep conviction which also represents a significant suggestion and possible tool for managers and practitioners in planning their firms' control systems and human resources management, on a very critical issue like that of finding and attracting talented people and, most difficultly, to retain them. Of course this is the first research step in this direction, even if the interviewed firms seem to be very willing to apply it. A limit of the paper is that the research survey has been conducted on a very specific sample of a very specific industry, which reveals to be employer branding oriented. It requires to be verified in other contexts in order to see if compare the results and to verify the possible generalizations, and this is the challenge for our research's prosecution.

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