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Employer branding practices amongst the most attractive employers of the IT and engineering sector in Portugal

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Master's thesis

Master in Management and Human Resource Development

Final version (this version contains the critics and suggestions of the committee)

Porto – July 2017

INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DE CONTABILIDADE E ADMINISTRAÇÃO DO PORTO
INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DO PORTO

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Presented to Instituto de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto to obtain the Master's degree in Human Resources Management and Development, under the supervision of Professor Susana Silva (PhD)

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Abstract

Employer branding is a marketing strategy that helps employers to keep competitive in their markets. Although it is a concept used for over 30 years, its process and consequences have not yet been fully scrutinized. This study characterizes the employer branding implementation process and the employers' perspective on it. We detailed not only how employer branding practices are applied, but also the role of Human Resources Management in the process and the used practices for employee attraction and retention.

We conducted ten semi-structured, in-depth interviews amongst the Human Resources departments of the most attractive employers in the IT and Engineering sector in Portugal to gather insights about their current employer branding processes. The collected data was analyzed with the the qualitative method of thematic analysis.

The research indicates that although the employer branding process is not a clearly structured process, some stages can be identified as common. For that reason, we propose a stage divided framework for the employer branding process and we also highlight each one of the identified stages. However, we concluded that there is no universal employer branding formula since different practices of employer branding are used according to several employer branding's objectives and desired perception by the market.

The results suggest that in order to achieve these outcomes employers adapt their employee value proposition. These offers have a common base, but unique additional factors, which confirm the employer's differentiation and, as the previous literature had concluded, a stronger employer brand. On the other hand, Human Resources departments have a leading role in employer branding, however a collaboration between all the departments involved is crucial.

Finally, future investigation for particular stages of the employer branding process were suggested, as well as doing separate studies for the IT and the engineering areas.

Key words: Attraction practices; Employer Branding; Human Resource Management; Retention practices

Resumo

Employer branding é uma estratégia de marketing que ajuda os empregadores a manterem-se competitivos no mercado. Embora seja um conceito usado há mais de 30 anos, o seu processo de implementação e consequências não foram ainda completamente investigados. Assim, este estudo explora precisamente o processo de implementação do *employer branding* e a perspetiva que os empregadores têm dele. Detalhamos não só o modo como as práticas de *employer branding* são aplicadas, mas também o papel da Gestão de Recursos Humanos nesse processo e as práticas usadas para atração e retenção de colaboradores.

Realizamos dez entrevistas semi-estruturadas e aprofundadas aos depertamentos de Recursos Humanos dos empregadores mais atrativos do setor de TI e de Engenharia em Portugal para reunir informações sobre os seus atuais processos de *employer branding*. Os dados recolhidos foram analisados com o método qualitativo de análise temática.

Esta investigação revela que, embora o processo de *employer branding* não seja claramente estruturado, podem ser identificadas algumas etapas comuns. Por essa razão, propomos uma estrutura dividida em fases representativas do processo de *employer branding*, realçando cada uma dessas fases identificadas. No entanto, concluímos que não existe uma fórmula de *employer branding* universal, uma vez que são usadas diferentes práticas de acordo com vários objetivos e com a desejada perceção do empregador.

Os resultados sugerem que, para alcançar esses objetivos, os empregadores adaptam a sua *employee value proposition*. Essas ofertas têm uma base comum, mas os fatores adicionais únicos confirmam a diferenciação do empregador e permitem-lhe alcançar uma *employer brand* mais forte, tal como a literatura já existente conclui. Por outro lado, os departamentos de RH têm um papel de liderança em *employer branding*; porém, a colaboração entre todos os departamentos envolvidos é crucial.

Finalmente são sugeridas pesquisas futuras para certas fases do processo de *employer branding* assim como a elaboração de estudos separados paras as áreas de engenharia e TI.

Palavras chave: Employer Branding; Gestão de Recursos Humanos; Práticas de Atração; Práticas de Retenção

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Abbreviations

EB – employer branding

EVP – employee value proposition

HR – human resources

HRM – human resources management

SME – small and medium-sized enterprises

e.i. – that is

e.g. - for example

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Introduction

First reason for choosing the theme of employer branding (EB), besides my curiosity for the area, is its actuality - it represents a current challenge for companies. Nowadays people's feedback about their work experience and employer is extremely valued because it serves as an orientation for the potential collaboration with this company in the future by new employees. For example, it is much more likely that people apply for the job at a company with a positive employer image than to a negative one. Therefore, the company's strategy of defining and communicating an image that attracts or retains the candidates – through EB is determinant of its future and reputation. This particular study examines how the EB is being developed and transmitted amongst Portuguese companies that do best at attracting talent.

Moreover, with captivating talented candidates, the companies can accomplish their goals more easily, ensuring constant improvement and innovation. The "war for talent" is now more important than ever and the strategies to conquer the best individuals are making the difference between successful and unsuccessful companies (Cheese, Thomas, & Craig., 2007; Crous, 2007; Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001; Minchington, 2006). For this reason, considering the development of an effective EB process is crucial and this study shows which processes work great at the time of writing this thesis, since they are used in the most attractive companies.

Another reason for investigating is the knowledge gap in the area of EB in Portugal. Little empirically-based evidence exists about EB in general or about the role of human resources management (HRM) in EB. However, Berlenga (2010) examined the most desirable attributes of a company from employee perspective and Tavares (2014) has deepened the same study with relating attributes to the level of employee commitment to the organization.

Last but not least, the reason for investigation on this theme is to create awareness about the role of HRM in the process of the EB. HRM is often ignored even though it is utterly relevant in the process, for instance, it contributes to the design of EB with knowledge about employee conditions, expectations and consequently reassuring greater level of efficiency in processes like recruitment and selection (Sokro, 2012). The study specifies the role of HRM in EB process and examines how each company incorporates HRM and what responsibilities it delegates.

This thesis is organized into five different chapters; the Theoretical Framework, Empirical Study, Results, Discussion and Conclusions.

The thesis starts with the chapter of Theoretical framework where the current studies on the themes of EB, its correlation to HRM, IT and the Engineering area and finally also Employee and Retention practices are highlighted.

The second chapter, Empirical Study, gives an overview of the methodological process, describing the used ways of gathering and analyzing data, as well as the study's objectives and the research question.

In the third chapter the results that derived from the analysis and codification of the collected data are presented. These results are also illustrated with various examples of codes that were identified in the interviews.

The thesis continues with the chapter of Discussion that connects results with the theoretical framework. In the final, fifth chapter, the conclusions are presented and possible future work and limitation are addressed.

Chapter I – Theoretical Framework

1. Employer Branding

1.1 Conceptualization

EB is a concept that was firstly introduced by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) as a set of functional, economic or psychological benefits that an organization provides and defines for their employees with the aim to develop a greater employee loyalty and output. EB emerged upon the attempt of applying traditional marketing techniques of branding to the area of human resources (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Cable & Turban, 2003). What differentiates EB from classic branding is the target group: branding captures the customer's and the EB the employee´s attention and loyalty toward a certain brand (American Marketing Association, 2016).

Various authors (Edwards, 2009; Ewing, Pitt, Bussy, & Berthon, 2002; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Thorne, 2004) related to the original definition of Ambler and Barrow (1996) and described EB as a sum of corporate identity and reputation that influences individual's perception about a particular organization. Hatch and Schultz (2001) went even further and defined a strong branding as a connection between vision, culture and image of an organization.

With time the original concept of EB has been redefined. For instance, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) labelled the term of EB as a sequence of distinctive attributes that separate the organization form other rivals. This means that EB evolved from being just a simple definition of factors that an organization has, to finding what makes the organization unique. Similarly, other authors (Ewing *et al.*, 2002; Lloyd, 2002; Minchington, 2005) described EB as a process of creating a notion of a "great place to work" in the labour market. In short, this means that EB should be about satisfying the needs of employees and simultaneously creating a pleasant, encouraging environment in the organization, making the organization a desirable place to work.

Since EB helps define the organization's unique attributes, it can be seen as a long-term oriented process with the aim of assuring that the best people within organizations fulfil their aspirations. (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010)

Martin (2007) compares EB to a storyline where the first investment is on the development of a brand image and only after this created image/story is communicated through different

channels. In this process of communication, all the stakeholders are influenced and concurrently they also shape the employer brand with their behavior, identification and attitudes (Einwiller & Will, 2002; Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010).

Nowadays EB is concisely described as a strategy for winning the "war for talent" (Amelia & Nasution, 2016) that strives to appeal for the ideal current and future employees. Considering that EB serves as a communication tool through which an organization presents its attributes and offer (Love & Singh, 2011), it consequentially triggers desire on the target individuals to join it (Cooper, 2008).

The core component of EB, employer brand, is a valuable asset for an organization and therefore its management is one of the organization's priorities (Cable & Turban, 2003; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Elving, Westhoff, Meusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2012). Ambler and Barrow (1996) believe that an employer brand resembles the traditional brand, hence it has a personality and positioning. Brand personality and positioning, together with brand differentiation, form what is called the brand essence. The personality of the brand is reflected in communication style, tone and authenticity, whereas positioning and differentiation are seen as compelling attitudes among competitors (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). A strong employer brand has all of these characteristic clearly defined.

The traditional brand is a set of identifying attributes such as name, slogan, design, symbols that distinguishes the brand from others. More specifically a brand consists of brand identity and image. The brand identity is built and designed by an organization and projected to target an audience through different channels. In comparison the brand image is the consequence of this projected identity, that is, how it's actually perceived by every individual (American Marketing Association, 2016; Miles & Magnold, 2005).

Aside from its attributes, employer brand also consists of various benefits. The functional ones are physical and tangible elements such as safe working environment, salary, allowances and equipment (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Lievens, Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005). In contrast to functional benefits we have the experimental benefits, which include cognitive elements like job diversity, travel opportunities, team achievement and social activities. The third group is symbolic benefits that represent the subjective and abstract elements that influence employee emotions, like for instance, brand's purpose, beliefs or values. (Ambler & Barrow 1996; Lievens *et al.,* 2005; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, 2007; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Lievens and Slaughter (2016) explain the employer brand as a framework consisting of external and internal employer brand. The external employer brand is the employer image of an organization, that is how outsiders perceive it as employer. In contrast the internal employer brand represents the organization's identity or, in other words, the insider perceptions of employer attributes.

Employer brand coexists with other types of brand such as a consumer or corporate one. All these different branding processes need to be coherent in their messages because they affect one another (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng 2010; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). For example, when employer brand messages are incoherent with corporate ones, the audience easily detects the variance, which brings negative consequences such as decrease of employer attractiveness or turnover. On contrary, a positive corporate brand can enhance the employer brand and contribute to the quality and quantity of applicants (Cable & Turban, 2003).

Employer brand can either be growing or dying, there is no in-between (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Organizations have the power to control the process by changing the brand reality to its vision i.e. wanted state of brand. When an organization plans where and how its employer brand should be in the future, it defines how it will be seen in order to attract, recruit and improve its engagement and retention.

1.2 Employee Value Proposition

Employee Value Preposition (EVP) is a unique proposal designed and regulated by the organization to attract and retain employees. It is communicated through the process of EB and answers the employee's question "what's in it for me" (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Minchington (2005) defines the EVP as a package of attractive benefits that employers offer to employees, like for example, salary, bonuses, career development, working environment, possibility of promotion, working hour flexibility etc. In addition, EVP shouldn't be focused on monetary factors such as compensation, but rather on psychological factors, because they have greater weight amongst candidates applying for the job (Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013).

When developing a proposition, an organization needs to take into consideration its credibility, relevance and differentiation to deliver a compelling and provocative finished product to the potential candidates. If the organization markets itself as a great place to work

with a great EVP package, it provokes its attractiveness amongst candidates (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Backhaus, 2004). Furthermore, EVP can be subdivided into more peculiar propositions to please specific target groups. For example, an organization can develop a technical EVP to please the technological recruits or a marketing EVP to please the marketing recruits (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

How an organization delivers the promised EVP shapes the long-term development of employment (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Mosley, 2007) because the overall set of brand promises themselves influence only the short-term employee engagement, but assuring the long-term engagement is only possible if these promises are actually kept.

1.3 Psychological Contract

Moroko and Uncles (2008) state that employer brand can be considered as the psychological contract between the employee and employer. This term was used already in 1995 by Rousseau (1995) for describing the relationship between the employer and the employees, their perceptions and their mutual obligations towards each other (Foster *et al.*, 2010; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). It's a non-written contract in which the employer vows to fulfil the promised offer of functional, economic and psychological benefits to employees. Simultaneously the psychological contract includes the employee's responsibility of working at his best and delivering results.

Miles and Mangold (2005) related the psychological contract to employees trust on their employers. The employee's trust is gained and built on the employer promises and its degree lowers or increases according to the fulfilment of the employer's promises. At the same time, the employee also reflects his dissatisfaction in his interactions with others. When the employer fails to deliver the promises he breaks the employee's trust, so the employee not only feels betrayed, but also less motivated. This means that the psychological contract represents a factor that influences the employee motivation and also the organizational culture.

The psychological contract evolves throughout the development of the employment relationship, so during recruitment, training, discussions and any kind of work involvement (Rousseau, 1995). If the employer fulfils the promised benefits, employees' engagement (De Vos & Meganck, 2008), commitment (McInnis, 2012) and as well as the general retention

(De Vos & Meganck, 2008; McInnis, 2012) and satisfaction increase (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

However, the employee behavior depends of the treatment received from the employer. This means that if the employer doesn't deliver the promised benefits, the recent or current employees will act out in negative way which will lead to consequences such as turnover or lower productivity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Nonetheless, the employer can avoid this from happening by conveying realistic EB messages about EVP, values and work environment (Foster *et al.*, 2010). When the employer transmits its employer brand messages accurately, it lowers the chances of employee dissatisfaction since the transmitted messages already illustrate the real conditions. Therefore, the employer brand not only creates, but also influences the psychological contract (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

1.4 Employer of Choice

When an organization reaches a stage in which the potential candidates are keen to work for it, it means that it is perceived as an 'employer of choice' (Lenaghan & Eisner, 2006; Mackes, 2005). Herman and Giola (2001) defined the concept of employer of choice as the employee's conscious decision to work for a particular employer instead of any other in the market. They associated the employer of choice with an employer that is recognized in the market for its leadership, culture and attraction and retention of talent, regardless of its sector, size or age.

Being an employer of choice brings several advantages to employers (Herman & Giola, 2001). Firstly, it lowers marketing costs, because the employer becomes more attractive to customers and investors as well. Secondly, the performance of the employees increases, since both the employers and employees feel happier and less stressed. Thirdly, the process of planning is facilitated because there is a continuity of employees with know-how that are already familiar with the company and its processes.

An organization can be the employer of choice for a specific reason like technology orientation, culture or benefit. The important part is that the organization is recognized for that specific reason which is only possible through constant disclosure of these unique

reasons. Once an organization is associated with a certain characteristic, it becomes a powerful weapon of employee attraction and retention. (Barrow & Mosley, 2005)

The employer of choice is the desired, positive result of a strong EB where people not only deliberately choose the organization, but also dedicate themselves completely to guarantee its success. At the same time, the label of "employer of choice" can also be used as an organization's strategy to attract successful skilled employees. In this case the employer of choice contributes towards a stronger employer brand and simultaneously reduces the costs of recruitment and lowers turnover (Herman & Giola, 2001).

2. Process of Employer Branding

Various authors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, 2007) present the process of EB in three phases:

    1. Creating the employer brand by defining the EVP and unique requisites i.e organization's offer.
    2. Defining the external marketing of EB by deciding how the communication of EVP will be done outside of the organization (for potential candidates, for broader public, for recruitment agencies).
    3. Defining the internal marketing of EB by deciding how the communication of EVP will be done inside of the organization and how the promises of the offer will be implemented.

According to the authors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, 2007) the process of EB is concluded if the promises that are made in EVP are fulfilled.

On the other hand, Deb (2006) claims that the process of EB starts before the development of an employer brand. First of all, a diagnostic on the present perception of an organization is needed in order to check how an organization is perceived in reality, through all different stakeholder's perspectives. Analysing the employer brand at a particular moment, means discovering what are the current employee profiles, EVPs, values, personalities and differentiators (Miles & Mangold, 2005). When examining the organization's positioning of employer brand in the marketplace, gathering insights form target groups about the following aspects can lead to clearer conclusions (Barrow & Mosley, 2005): name recognition (are

people likely to know the organization), awareness (do people know what the organization does, what are their success and practices), saliency (would people consider the organization as a new employer and what are their perceptions about a it as an employer), trial (what are the reasons for applying for a job, what impression is passed through recruitment materials and activities), brand experience (what are the first impressions in joining an organization and the future expectations), retention and advocacy (how does a employee perceive the image of an organization, would he recommended it), alumni (what is the organization's impression amongst ex-employees).

Only after this analysis can an organization define the brand strategy and development with the intention of exceeding the current brand reality and attain the wanted brand vision (Miles & Mangold, 2005). When defining a strategy, an organization needs: a team of individuals from various areas (HR, marketing, quality and production), expertise on the target market with understanding of the requirements of employees and deliverability with confirmation about what image the organization is passing.

Many authors (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Mosley, 2009) draw special attention to the organization's target markets and target groups definition and segmentation. They suggest dividing the market by distinctive attributes that the organization wishes to recruit (level of experience, skills and competences) and also clarifying the values, attitudes and diversity that it seeks in employees. These design the ideal employee profile for the position and consequentially simplify the search for a specific subgroup of talent (for example graduates from Engineering). Likewise, an organization can define general and specific aspirations that drive decisions of this specific profile by conducting researches. For example, an organization can seek feedback from the public (labour market mapping and external image research), current employees (employee engagement surveys and engagement drivers), candidates or individuals who turned down the job (attraction analysis, best practice benchmarking and segmentation) (Mosley, 2009).

After shaping the strategy, the EB process continues with the communication of the message by leveraging the right channels and developing EB metrics to measure its effectiveness. (Born & Kil Kang, 2015)

2.1 Communication of Employer Branding

Since EB is a promotion of a desirable employer image, the execution of an organization's inside and outside communication needs to be clearly defined and carefully planned (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sullivan, 2004).

Here the premises of Duncan and Moriarty (1998) communication model for the marketing process and Lasswell's traditional communication model (1948) are used to illustrate the communication process of the employer brand. According to the authors the model includes: the source that encodes the message (organizations), the message to transmit (organization's offer, employer brand), the channels where the information is transmitted (distribution channels that the organization uses such as job adds, presentation videos), a certain level of noise that influences the messages transmitted (competition – other organizations), a receiver who decodes the message (public, applicants, current employees, partners) and feedback from the receivers (all responses gathered in researches from receiver such as employee perspective, public opinion, market positioning).

First of all, it is critical that an organization reassures clear and focused communication, therefore the transmitted messages need to be simple and direct (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The messages should communicate the brand's promise (Mosley, 2007), that is, the organization's EVP, brand values, reasons why it is a desirable place of work (Lloyd, 2002) with a language that will reassure the relevance of the communication. For example, using slang in order to reach young people or using or using jargon to reach specific group of professionals. Besides that, the delivered messages need to be consisting, continuous and credible, because it makes current employees more likely to trust an employer and future employees more prone to join it (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

The channels that an organization uses for communicating the messages are equally, if not even more, important as the content of them (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The use of a proper channel, whether being a formal or an informal one, reaches the target audience and provokes maximum impact among them (Miles & Mangold, 2005). Balmer and Greyser (2003) divided the communication channels on 3 different origins - primary, secondary or tertiary ones.

Primary channels include the closest and most authentic means of communication like employee feedback, employee behaviour, organizations intranet and communication in recruitment processes (Balmer & Greyser, 2003). According to Dawson (2009), the most

effective and beneficial ways of spreading information across everybody inside an organization are internet technology tools such as email, group chat or project management applications. An organization can also transmit messages with their culture (Miles & Mangold, 2005) and share brand messages internally by commenting and reacting upon employee attitudes, for example, rewarding and appraising employees with new disruptive ideas that contribute to the organizations values. Similarly, the most genuine form of external communication is the employer brand messages received in direct interaction between an outsider and an organization's employee or recruiter, hence the verbal (for example organizations conditions, opportunities) and non-verbal data that is transmitted (for examples employee behaviour, mind-set, values).

Secondary channels provide formal information developed by the organization, which is then transmitted through the organization's website, advertising, social networks and university programs (Balmer and Greyser, 2003, Miles & Mangold, 2005). A quite common and powerful tool for the organization's communication is their website (Searle, 2006). It is the place where people make their judgement about the employer and its business, based upon its content and visual presentation. With technological development, social media also started serving as a potent tool for building relationships with the public. If an organization provides more interactivity and engagement, its audience relationships get stronger and therefore its picture more appealing. (Kent, 2010; Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013; Sivertzen *et al*., 2013).

The tertiary channel represents the third-party communication, which is transmitted through the word of mouth or media interpretation (Balmer & Greyser, 2003). Both means can either advocate and be the voice of the organization that is seeking to spread their positive image, or do the opposite, create a negative media coverage about them. Either way, the media and word of mouth communication have a powerful influence on the individual's behaviour and decisions (Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007).

Creativity is another aspect that contributes to the success of the employer brand communication. For example, an event or a video can deliver the brand message more efficiently than just a website with information (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007). Likewise, the employee involvement in the communication also improves the communication of the employer brand, not only because it stimulates employee emotional reactions but also because it encourages them to identify themselves with the message ideas.

Furthermore, the brand messages will have a higher impact and more credibility if individuals see these messages also being implemented at the top of company (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Biswas & Suar, 2016). For example, a CEO showing respect for the organization's values by accepting employee's rights, needs and differences or by listening and accepting their feedback.

2.2 Effects of Employer Branding

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) developed a model of EB's effects to show how EB influences the company structure (see Figure 1). According to them, EB changes the organizational identity and culture which reflects in loyalty towards the company's brand (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The final result of loyalty levels results in employee productivity and engagement. Additionally, EB creates associations towards the employer brand amongst the stakeholders which affects the employer's image. As a result of a different employer perception, the attraction of the same gets higher or lower (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Moroko & Uncles, 2008).
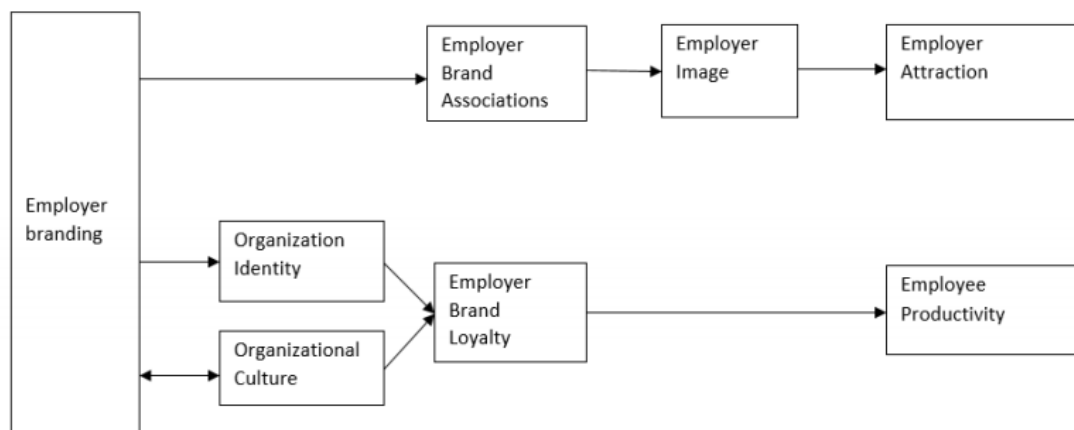
Figure 1 - Employer brand framework. Source: Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004.

EB has other more specific benefits as well, since it improves recruitment, retention and engagement of employees (Dell & Ainspan, 2001; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Sullivan, 2004). In the recruitment process a successful EB leads to a higher quantity and quality of job applicants (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Collins & Han, 2004; Heilmann, Saarenketo, & Liikkanen 2013; Lievens *et al.*, 2005; Wilden *et al.,* 2010) and to lower recruitment costs (Towers Perrin, 2003). Positive results of EB in employee engagement are seen in higher employee satisfaction (Heilmann *et al.*, 2013), identification with organization (Schlager,

Bodderas, Maas, & Cachelin, 2011), performance and commitment (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Edwards 2009). All these factors, altogether, increase the level of retention in general (Fulmer, Gerhart, & Scott 2003; Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012) which consequentially leads to a lower turnover cost. (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Lenaghan & Eisner, 2006). Similarly, the EB also improves the public awareness (Sullivan, 2004) and customer satisfaction (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Lenaghan & Eisner, 2006).

2.3 Measuring the impact of Employer Branding

The impact of implemented EB needs to be measured not only to show if and how this strategy was successful (Becker & Huselid, 2006), but also to steer the future EB according to the results of key performance indicators.

The impact can be measured throughout various HR measurements (Moroko & Uncles, 2008), which can have an internal focus (average staff turnover, engagement, length of tenure) or external focus (number and quality of applicant, percentage of job offerings accepted, average time of recruitment and selection). Another HR metric used for measuring impact of EB is employee opinion, which is most commonly gathered through surveys focused on employee satisfaction. Nonetheless, the use of other survey indicators such as commitment, loyalty and engagement is also increasing (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

Another measurement technique is the return on investment (ROI) on the EB that shows how the investment in the EB paid off businesswise (Cairns, 2012). ROI is a ratio between organization benefits and costs (more specifically ROI = (benefits-costs)/costs) expressed in percentage (Cairns, 2012). What an organization considers a benefit and or a cost depends of their interpretation. The most commonly use metrics to measure ROI on EB (Kelly Services, 2016) are costs per hire, engagement levels, time to fill, retention rates, turnover rates, absenteeism, headcount, time to productivity, total costs of labor to revenue, candidate satisfaction rates.

Apart from HR metrics, the techniques that are used for market research in the development of the employer branding process can be applied to measure the awareness and differentiation impact of EB also. For example, comparing the before and after results of external image research (public opinion about the organization as an employer) or appreciative inquiry (what is the organization unique and appealing offer) (Mosley, 2009).

3. The role of Human Resources Management

The marketing origin of the EB has been the reason for the more resistant posture of the HRM. This kind of standpoint can impede the development of excellent EB, seeing that the involvement and collaboration of both, HRM and marketing is required. (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Edwards, 2009; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Furthermore, if organizations continue to segregate branding, communication and EB, and continue to apply old recruitment techniques to the newer generation without considering different context or needs of potential employees, the organization will eventually face failure. (Elving *et al.*, 2012).

In order to compete effectively and achieve sustained competitive advantage the employers need to strengthen their brands and engage the productive and competent employees (Wright, McMahan, & McWilliams, 1994; Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013; Mosley, 2015). Since the talented employees are the ones that lead the way to achieving business growth and competitive advantage (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Erickson & Gratton, 2007; Lahti & Beyerlein, 2000; Minchington, 2005; Wheelen & Hunger, 2013), discovering and developing the strategies to attract and retain the best ones became a core task of HRM. This phenomenon of increased competitiveness for skilled individuals was named "War for talent" (Cheese *et al.*, 2007; Crous, 2007; Michaels *et al.*, 2001; Minchington, 2006) and EB can serve as a HRM strategy to successfully win it (Amelia & Nasution, 2016; Ulrich, 2015).

The role of HRM evolved due to economic, sociodemographic conditions, development and competitiveness that changed labour markets and created complex realities where employees are valued. In the last decade HR gained a more strategic posture, hence it passed from having administrative and operational functions focused on individual performances to being strategically important and aligned with the organizations goals, focused on the organization's performance. (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Gomes, Yasin, & Lisboa, 2008; Deb, 2006; Wright *et al.*, 1994). By adopting a strategic approach in the practice, HRM partnered with the business and the employee's side. This double insight in understanding the organizations compatibilities and business context, helps HRM balance between past and future more efficiently, and promote change or stability when needed.

The HR system is oriented by HR polices that correspond to the organizational goals (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012a). The system and policies consequentially

influence the choice of HR practices, which are the strategies used in practice to realize and apply the wanted guidelines into the system. De Chernatony (2006) points out that HR should be the leader in the process of EB, because it manages employees with practices like recruitment programs or training that affect directly the branding process.

Various authors (Gabriel, Cheshin, Moran, & van Kleef, 2016; Jiang *et al.*, 2012a; Jiang *et al.*, 2012b) suggested the division of HR practices into 3 dimensions: skill, motivation and opportunity - enhancing practices. All of them play a significant role in attracting and retaining employees, because they shape the conditions that satisfy the employee's desires. For example, the skill-enhancing practices focus on the skills and abilities of employees and include practices like planning recruitment, selection and training. The motivation-enhancing ones focus on amplifying the employee's motivation so practices like compensation, incentives, rewards or performance management are used (Subramony, 2009). The third dimension, opportunity/empowerment-enhancing HR practices empowers the employees to use the skills and better their general performance. It consists of practices like employee decision-making involvement, autonomy and flexible job designs. (Jiang *et al.*, 2012a; Rauch & Hatak, 2016). Based on the following division Rauch and Hatak (2016) carried out a study (SME companies) that has listed practical examples of these 3 HR practices (Table 1). The results, listed by the frequency, were the following:

HR PRACTICES		
EMPOWERMENT-ENHANCING	**MOTIVATION-ENHANCING**	**SKILL-ENHANCING**
Involvement in decision making	Rewards	Training
Meetings	Compensation	Selection
Empowerment	Performance appraisal	Job description
Flexibility	Stock options	Staffing plan
Job rotation	Health plan	Formal orientation
Grievance procedure	Performance-based pay	Written handbook
Commitment	Skill-based pay	Job preview
Treated like owners	Internal staffing	Formal procedures
Opportunity to perform (autonomy, participation)	Pension plan	Skilled HR management
Voice		Development
Use of employee ideas		Screening test
Communication		Specialist assignment
Employee feedback		Selection ration
		Selection criteria

Table 1. - Practical examples of skill, motivation and opportunity-enhancing practices.
Source: Rauch & Hatak, 2016.

Their study showed that all HR-enhancing practices are related to employee performance. However, they discovered that empowerment-enhancing HR practices have higher impact on performance than motivation-enhancing HR practices. This means that HR practices that influence the employee autonomy, decision making, involvement and responsibility levels were found to be more important than incentives and rewards (Rauch & Hatak, 2016).

Their study also reveals that the only differences that exists between the SME and large firms depend of factors such as firm age, industry, and labour market regulations. They identified that younger firms and high-tech firms appreciate more the HR-enhancing practices than any other.

Similarly Love and Singh (2011) identified 8 common criteria for human resources success amongst Best Employers from all over the world. The following table (Table 2) enumerates these criteria and presents each one of them with a complementary description.

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Inspired leadership	Leadership that is transparent to their employees, provides reciprocal communication, fosters unique culture and lives the core values.
Strategic plan	Strategic plan that is based on "Best Employer HR practices", which are developed according to employee survey data and to the understanding of employee's needs.
Employee communication	Opened, consisting communication that provides information about organizations results and is opened to employee feedback or recommendations about the HR processes.
Performance management	Includes performance programs where employees know their responsibilities, as well as the organization's expectation and are regularly assessed, rewarded (tangible/intangible) and recognized.
Training and development	Encouraging employees to participate in training/development programs, promoting people from within and informing employees about the possibilities of their career path.
Benefits	Based on 'best practices' that are personalized, flexible and innovative and promote a safe and a healthy workplace.
Physical workspace	Nice-looking, well-structured and cozy workstations with natural light and possibilities of having bar or fitness areas.
Corporate citizenship	Promoting organization's affiliation that employees value, like organizing charity activities, supporting the community and being environment-aware.

Table 2. - Common criteria for human resources success amongst Best Employers. Source: Love & Singh, 2011.

Love and Singh (2011) found that a unique culture and environment were common traits to all best employers and represented the basis for the development of eight criteria. The company's culture is shared through its values that are promoted and implemented by the company's leadership. With these actions, employers not only strengthen the employees'

integration, but also create a sense of unity among all of them. Simultaneously, safe and trustworthy environments provide an open space for any kind of communication allowing the employers to understand better the necessities of the employees.

As the study suggests, the best employers provide positive environments that encourage the employees to deliver their best performance. Furthermore, they even offer tangible and intangible rewards to the ones that exceed the expectations. Regardless of the employee's success the best employers aspire to keep the employees satisfied so they design strategic plans with HR practices to fulfil their needs. This means they propose possibilities of development through trainings and career opportunities, or, personalized benefits. (Love & Singh, 2011)

4. Employee attraction and retention practices

EB is a strategic tool that aims to attract talent and improve employee retention (Amelia & Nasutionb, 2016). Various studies proved that the EB has a positive impact on the two (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Berthon *et al*., 2005; Crous, 2007; Dell & Ainspan, 2001; Minchington, 2006) but, the reasons that attract or retain the employees can be completely different (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

Nowadays, the employees are more valuable than ever in history (Gomes, Cunha, Rego, Cunha, Cabral-Cardoso, & Marques, 2010) and employers recognize the urgency, not only to have a qualified employee work force, but also to keep it satisfied. Although the processes of attraction and retention are related to the relationship between an organization and their current or future employees, what separates them is their target group, goal and timing. The employee attraction covers all the activities appointed to the broader public until the point where an individual enters the organization, whereas the employee retention covers the activities after that, so when that individual becomes an employee.

4.1 Attraction practices
External public receives information about the organization from different sources like media (newspapers, internet, radio), people (friends and family) or from personal experience (internships, job fairs) (Peterson & Merino, 2003). If the organization does not provide

sufficient information about itself as an employer it lowers its chances to attract the best fits (Kissel & Buttgen, 2015; Elving *et al.*, 2012).

In order to attract the right people, organizations need to promote an offer of work conditions that distinguish them from competition through the EB strategies (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Wilden *et al.,* 2010). However, the individual's selection of the employer is of course prior to his experiences, motivation, necessities, priorities and personality (Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001). Consequentially, a candidate feels more attracted to the organizations that share the same traits and values as he does (Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004).

According to Deb (2006), candidates' and employees' attraction towards the value proposition of the employer depends of three main aspects:

a) Reputation, which is the national or global popularity of an organization;
b) Career offer, which is the content of the job with its opportunities and compensation;
c) Corporate culture, which is the organization's environment, employees and talent leadership.

Similarly, the Randstad Award 2015, world's largest survey of EB (Randstad, 2015), stated the most common characteristics that potential employees seek for in employers

• long-term job security,	• training,
• competitive salary,	• strong image/strong values,
• financially healthy organization,	• strong management,
• pleasant working atmosphere,	• quality products/services,
• interesting job content,	• international career,
• good work-life balance,	• diversity management,
• career opportunities,	• use of latest technologies,
• flexible working hours, location	• environmental awareness

These desired characteristics are used in a set of marketing practices that an organization uses to attract potential employees, especially in the recruitment (Brown, Cober, Cober, Keepin, & Levy, 2003). Since the aim of recruitment is to increase the individual's knowledge and attraction towards an employer, the organization uses activities such as printed recruitment advertisements (Collins & Stevens, 2002) or recruitment websites (Allen

et al., 2007) to reach the audience. However, one dimensional recruitment strategies, such as, posting positions online and waiting for candidates to find it are not enough to attract the top talent. Instead the organization needs to reach for the talented individuals, regardless of their employment status, by using dynamic messages and tracking their effect on them (Stanton, 2015).

Since nowadays digital technology shapes the world and human interactions, i.e. people share, learn and communicate through social networks (Stanton, 2015), the organizations should adapt and leverage digital technology tools in the attraction strategies (Parry & Tyson, 2008). Knowing that the public feels more attracted to content that involves slogans, photos, positive associations (Collins, 2007), storytelling and video presentations (Stanton, 2015), an organization can develop a more efficient (time, money) strategy. It also needs to consider the power of social networks such as, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and provoke attraction through online campaigns.

Besides the desired characteristics, an organization should also transmit the current employee experience to captivate the interest of the public (Foster *et al.,* 2010). The employee experience at the organization can serve as a product and if the organization wishes to highlight it even more, it can communicate the experience trough the involvement of employees themselves in retention materials (e.g. speaking in videos, posing in pictures) (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

An overall organization attraction strategy can consist of various different practices. For example the EDP Group's strategy consists of five practices (Secară, 2016): promotion (public announcement of the initiatives and opportunities inside the company), networking (bringing a company closer to the academic community and students), competitions (creating challenge to identify the individuals with skills), partnerships (establishing partnerships with other entities such as universities) and development (offering internships and trainee programs to bring the candidates to the labor market).

4.1 Retention practices

EB is not only important because it attracts new talent, but also because it increases the level of commitment and retention amongst workers (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Edwards 2009; Fulmer *et al.,* 2003; Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012). Retention is the set of initiatives that the

organization uses to prevent employees from leaving and to maximize their time of working for the organization (Cascio, 2003; Kossivi, Xu, & Kalgora, 2016). Organizations can retain the employees with creating work conditions that reflect a positive experience (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Boxall & Macky, 2009).

Some of the attraction practices that have been also marked as beneficial to retention are employment conditions such as flexibility (in working hours, place and organization of work), communication, family-friendly policies, orientation toward well-being and social benefits (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Zatzick & Iverson, 2006). The studies of Dockel (2003) and Dockel, Basson and Coetzee (2006) identified some similar retention factors as well: compensation, job characteristics (variety and autonomy), training and development opportunities, supervisor support (recognition and feedback), career opportunities, work–life balance and organizational commitment. Offering these characteristics contributes to making a company a desirable place to work and consequentially increase employee commitment and satisfaction.

HR practices that foster the conditions stated above, and consequentially affect retention are (Longmore & Ronnie, 2014):

- on time and accurately payment,
- documentation management,
- communication practices
- relationship that respects and values
- the employees,
- reimbursement for attended courses/conferences and special leave requests

5. Employer Branding in Information Technology

Information technologies (IT) are a set of equipment, tools and methodologies (like programming, data conversion, storage) to retrieve and process information (Business Dictionary, 2017a). The IT industry has already constructed more efficient solutions for a variety of fields and tasks, which consequentially lead to greater demands for work force in the area too. The future trends will be similar, but most probably with even faster and bigger needs. The European commission report (E-skills in Europe Portugal, 2014) revealed that 3.900 job vacancies weren't occupied in 2012 in IT and communication field in Portugal. It

also estimated that this number of unfilled vacancies will rise to more than 8.100 in 2015, and to 15.000 in 2020. With this data we can conclude that the Portuguese IT market already is a highly competitive one, hence the demand for IT talent is bigger than the offer available on the market. The organizations are facing a shortage, therefore attracting the workforce presents a difficult challenge to face.

Since EB serves as the tool for attracting the qualified candidates (Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012) a few authors already tried to examine what in particular attracts the IT employees in the EB process. For example, the studies among IT employees in Russia and India discovered that the professionals feel attracted to opportunities of professional growth, development, training (Kucherov & Zamulin, 2016; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016), along with a safe work environment, equilibrated work-life balance (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016), frequent feedback, personal acknowledgment and challenging assignments (Kucherov & Zamulin, 2016). Tanwar and Prasad (2016) also found that the fulfilment of employee's expectations, good compensation structure, job security and fair management positively contribute to EB consequences such as productivity, commitment and satisfaction. Westlund and Hannon (2008) came to some similar conclusions almost a decade before - job satisfaction variables such as rewards, promotions, supervision, pay, condition, co-workers, benefits, communication and nature of work influenced the turnover among American software developers (Westlund & Hannon, 2008).

The selection of HR practices that is used to fulfil employees needs depend of the organization's objectives - whether an employer seeks for long or short-term committed employees (Agarwal & Ferratt, 2001). The most often used HR strategy, long-term investment strategy, focuses on career development, security and retention of IT people. Here the HR practices used provide interesting work opportunities (job rotation), training and development (conquering new skills) and performance measurement (identify need and goals). The consequences of these actions are lower turnover and recruitment needs (Agarwal & Ferratt, 2001). On contrary, the short-term HR strategy focuses more on maximizing compensation (benefits and pay) and recruitment to deliver productivity immediately and less on individual concerns (Agarwal & Ferratt, 2001).

6. Employer Branding in Engineering

Engineering is a process of designing, building and analyzing objects with the aim to discover the best approaches to solve problems by using knowledge and principles (Business Dictionary, 2017b). It combines multiple disciplines (physics, chemistry, mathematics, design and innovation) and operates in different industries such as Civil, Mechanical, Production, Electrical, Environmental, Medical, Agriculture and Chemical ones.

The striking development in the last decades with arise of environment, food, biomedical issues lead to the emergence of new forms of engineering such as bioengineering (Unesco, 2010). Simultaneously, the demands of the engineering market have changed also and engineering nowadays focuses more towards finding new socially and environmentally beneficial solutions (Unesco, 2010). For example, the MIT Portugal Program, a Portuguese Government initiative that connects the Portuguese Universities, Research Centers, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and partners from industry and government, focuses only on 4 future areas of engineering development: Bioengineering, Design and Advanced Manufacturing, Sustainable Energy and Transportation.

According to European vacancy and recruitment report (European Union, 2014), engineering was one of the fields with the largest employee growth between 2011 and 2012 in the European Union. Portugal's employment in engineering has grown between the year 2008-2010 however it suffered a decline in the years of 2011-2012. In spite of the decrease among these years, the number of scientists and engineers (25-64 years) among active population in Portugal has risen form 3,2% in 2005 to 6,4% to 2014. (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2016). Portugal was also one of the countries with above EU average of young employees (aged 15-29) in engineering (European Union, 2014). This means the engineering organizations are investing in attracting the newer and younger workforce.

Only a few studies examined what drives the engineering workforce to join a particular organization and how EB is used to captivate them. The study of Newton and Keenan (1990) amongst the young professional engineers in United Kingdom discovered that job change is connected to limitations in the current work environment such as lack of growth or development opportunities rather than the amount of the salary.

Similar drivers were also discovered in a Norwegian study about EB amongst the engineering students two decades later (Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013). The non-materialistic

attributes such as innovation, psychological and application value positively affected the student's attraction towards organizations, and compensation once again wasn't the main driver of choice. In addition, the study revealed that social media helps build a greater organization's reputation and attractiveness in the EB process.

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7. Methodology

Following the literature review, we will, in this chapter, revise the methodological practices used in this investigation. For this investigation we divided the empirical study in the following points: Research question and objectives; Methodological approach; Instrument; Procedure; Data analysis and Participants.

7.1 Research question and objectives

The starting point of the research was only defined after the review of the previous studies to ensure that formulating the problem in made in a unique and specific way, but still connected to the questions raised by them (Vaz Freixo, 2010).

With the literature revision, having considered the field of EB and HRM, the following research question has been formulated:

- How EB practices are used amongst the most attractive IT/Engineering companies in Portugal?

The formulated question is unique and specific, focusing on what has not yet been explored in Portugal, that is, the investigation of EB practices that are implemented by the most attractive employers in IT and engineering area.

Arising from the research question, the main objective of the study was to explore the practices of EB used in Portugal's most attractive employers. Besides this general objective the study also, more specifically, contributed to:

- understand the role of HRM in the EB process of the studied companies;
- characterize the most used attraction practices in EB in Portugal, on the IT and engineering area;
- characterize the most used retention practices in EB in Portugal, on the IT and engineering area.

7.2 Methodological approach

Since the usage of the methodological approach depends entirely on the research question, how the practices of EB are used amongst Portugal's IT and engineering most attractive employers, a qualitative approach was used to answer the question of this particular study.

This approach represents and categorizes the collected data that consists of non-numeric information (text, transcripts of interviews) without the use of numerical operations (Punch, 2011).

The qualitative approach belongs to the interpretative or constructivist paradigm, basing upon several realities that are unique, unpredictable, modified and based on individual perception. Glaser and Strauss (1967) gave credibility to the qualitative research as a methodological approach by classifying qualitative methods as systematic and by proving that the qualitative approach is independent from the quantitative. The main objective of the qualitative research is to discover and understand the essence of a real-life situation and not to test hypothesis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Since the research will examine an actual ongoing condition, i.e. the EB process implementation and its variables, the qualitative methodology fits.

Another reason for using the qualitative approach is the fact that little compiled knowledge exists about the EB process in the IT and engineering sector in Portugal. This approach not only provides complexity and richness to the collected data, but also gives a more detailed and deep insight of the problem. The qualitative approach's base premise is that we perceive the world throughout actions and interactions meaning that our understanding of it is limited to them (Punch, 2009). Therefore, the focus of the qualitative approach is not on generalizing or proving hypothesis but rather in discovering a particular perspective in its fullness and diversity. This means we do not control the variables, but rather discover them (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The method used in the study was a thematic analysis, which imposes the extraction of codes and categories from the texts. The thematic analysis is a method that identifies, analyses and reports patterns within the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). It reports the experiences and reality of the participants as well as examines the circumstances in which these experiences and realities appear (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is often not considered as an independent method but preferably as a process of grounded theory (Ryan & Bernand, 2000). However, the thematic analysis is not theoretically bound to any pre-existing theoretical framework and can be therefore used in various different theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The thematic analysis was first mentioned by Merton (1975) as a procedure developed to identify implicit and explicit themes, which are deduced from the communicators'

information and these information's interpretations. Decades after, Braun and Clarke (2006) labelled the thematic analysis as a recursive process and divided it into 6 steps. The first step is the familiarization with the data, where the researcher listens and reads the gathered data more than one time. The second step is coding, which is an analytic process where the relevant data is labelled with semantic and conceptual codes. The third step is the search for themes, where the codes are organized in coherent patterns i.e. themes. Here, the researcher identifies similar codes in the data and constructs them by relevance into themes. In the fourth step the themes are reviewed. This means that they are examined according to their relation to codes and overall data. In this step some of the themes may also need to be restructured or redefined. The fifth step consists of defining and naming the themes, so each theme is given a concise and informative name. The last step is the writing up, where the data extracts are put into an analytic narrative, which tells the reader a coherent story.

Braun and Clarke (2006) concluded that the recognition of the themes in the thematic analysis can be done either through inductive or deductive processes. In the inductive thematic analysis, the themes relate to the collected data and are not influenced by the researchers' preconceptions or pre-existing code frames from the theory. On the other hand, the deductive i.e. "theoretical" thematic analysis tends to be driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area. The latter can lead to a poorer description of the data and at the same time to a more detailed analysis of a particular data aspect.

In this study we applied the inductive thematic analysis, since little studies exist about the investigated topic, i.e. EB processes among the most attractive IT and engineering companies in Portugal. We did not base our study on a pre-existing theory or framework, instead we collected the data and used it to extract the analysis's structure. This means we did not consider the themes that were identified in previous researches, but rather transcribed the collected data, read and re-read it, code it diversely and constructed themes related to it (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

7.3 Instrument

For this study the following data collection techniques were used to respond to the research question (see Annex 1):

(a) A brief questionnaire was applied to gather quantitative data.

(b) A semi structured interview was applied to gather qualitative data.

The intention of the research is to gather as much information as possible from the participants and that is why the method of semi-structured interviewing is convenient. It does not limit the participants it instead allows to incorporate the subjectivity as well as diversity of the answers. Furthermore, the use of a semi-structured interviewing allows to gather a substantial quantity of information from a small sample. (Ribeiro, 2008)

Our brief questionnaire collected data about the sociodemographic characteristics and consisted of 11 different questions in total. The first six questions were about the participant's characteristics, where we inquired about age, gender, level of study, area of study, position and years of work at the company. The second part of the questionnaire was devoted to the participant company's characteristics. This part consisted of five questions about the company's location, origin of the company's capital, activity sector, company's age and number of employees.

The semi-structured interview guide was carefully thought through in order to be clear and understandable, not suggesting answers or having two questions in one. The interview was based on 17 questions that covered the main objectives of the study. The interview guide started with an introductory question relating to the participant's understanding of employer branding, "Based on your own professional experience, how would you define employer branding?". The second question inquired about the process of employer branding in the organization, while the third one inquired about the most important goals of it. The fourth question explored what kind of employer does the organization want to be and the fifth sought the organization's differentiating factors, "How does your organization differentiate itself from other competitors?". The questions number six and seven were about the employee value proposition design and offer. From here on, each question seeks further in-depth information about the application of EB, so therefore, the eighth and ninth questions were about the communication process of the employer branding messages, inside and outside of the organization. The next one inquired about the key performance indicators of EB success "How do you measure the success of employer branding?". The eleventh question asked about the involvement of the organization's departments and the twelfth about the usage of human resources practices. The final 5 questions were more focused towards the process of attraction and retention in the organization. For that reason, the question number 13 was about the attraction practices "What does your organization do to attract the potential employees?" and the question number 14 was about the evolution of the level of attraction in previous years. The questions 15 and 16 were in their construction

similar to the previous two questions, however with a focus on the retention practices used and their evolution in previous years "How has employee turnover changed over the past years?". The last question was the only one that was not a direct reflection of the organization's reality; it inquired about the participant's opinion and suggestions that he might have had to improve the EB of his company.

7.4 Procedure

The process of data collection started with elaboration of instruments, so with the design of the questions for the interview guide and sociodemographic questionnaire. After this initial design, the questionnaire and interview guide were tested and an interview actual was scheduled and applied to an expert with a similar population characteristic to verify the clearness and appropriateness of the questions. This test interview was also analyzed in order to verify the process of coding. The interview questions that were proven as repetitive or too similar to other questions were redesigned and rephrased. With this testing we narrowed down the interview guide to 17 questions and the sociodemographic questionnaire to 11.

Even before concluding the testing phase we started contacting potential participants for the study. This was done by sending an invitation to participate through email with the study description, objectives and theme to the heads of the HR Departments of 67 companies from the selected population (Trendence Graduate Barometer study). The emails that were used were obtained either through the company's website or through the company's HR representatives LinkedIn accounts. 33 companies were not contacted due to the absence of contacts at the company's official website. Several of these companies did not have a dedicated website for the Portuguese market, others did not share contact details with the general public. For these 33 companies we also did not find any existing LinkedIn account from HR.

We started by contacting the companies that were listed higher on the Trendence Graduate Barometer study list (Trendence institute, 2016). The first contacts were made in the beginning of March 2017 and the last one was made in the beginning of June 2017. To ensure a sufficient number of participants and to stimulate feedback, a reminder in the form of an e-mail or a telephone call was implemented to those who had not replied within the first two weeks. When the reminders were not enough to obtain an answer, we tried connecting with the LinkedIn accounts of other collaborators from the same HR departments to increase the chance of the response.

In total, seven companies answered that they will not participate in the study, 50 contacted companies did not answer, and 10 companies showed interest in participating. With these 10 agreeing companies we scheduled a place and time for the interview, according to their availability and geographical location. Here, the chance of implementing the interview in person or via Skype was offered and the participants chose the option that was more convenient for them. From the 10 implemented interviews, four happened via Skype and six in person. All of the participants were representatives of the companies' HR departments.

Before the implementation of each interview the study's objectives were presented to each participant and an informed consent (see Annex 2) was also signed by the participant. This signed informed consent officially and legally declares the voluntary participation of participant, the anonymity of the information passed throughout the interview and gives authorization for audio recording of the interview.

During all the process of the interview the ethical conditions were guaranteed, assuring the confidentiality of the data collected as well as the participant's complete freedom to quit at any time if wanting so. All the interviews were audio recorded, of course only when having the authorization for recording given directly by the participant.

The interviews were implemented between the months of March and June 2017 and had the average duration of forty minutes. Then all audio recordings of interviews were put into digital format and afterwards transcribed verbatim and the participant's and company's names were encoded. Every word or reaction was written down manually in order to fully capture every detail of the interview and consequently guarantee the analysis's precision. All the interviews that were implemented in Portuguese (six) were then also translated to English.

7.5 Data analysis

The transcriptions were analyzed according to the principles of thematic analysis. This means that the gathered data was organized and ordered to develop further understanding on the theme. In this process of data analysis, we respected and used the procedures described by Stauss and Corbin (1990) that consists of the following steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

We started the process of coding by inserting the whole transcribed interview into an Excel table for further analysis. We then continued the process by identifying the analysis units,

such as phrases, words, expression, from the data gathered. In this process we used common sense and logic to define which parts have a particular meaning that is different and distinctive from the other parts. After the systematization of this information into analysis units, we open coded the information, which means that we attributed special codes to each of the analysis units. According to Straus and Corbin (1990) open coding is the process in which we break down, examine, compare and categorize data. The end results of this process was the name identification of each analysis unit, according to its meaning.

After that we applied axial coding, which is a step where each code extracted from open coding is redesigned into a higher line of code and given a new label that is once again broader in meaning than the initial code. The attribution of axial codes also verifies the adequacy of the initially developed codes in the open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The last step of codification, selective coding, consists of seeking relations and discovering different categories from the axial codes. Here, we added depth and structure to the already existing codes, this means we defined core categories and related all other codes to these categories (Straus & Corbin, 1990).

Every interview implemented followed the coding steps described above. This process of analysis was circular, which means that after we implemented the first interview, we transcribed it, analyzed it and then repeated these steps with the second interview and all of the following ones as well. This process was also recursive and a non-linear, which means we could proceed to the next step without ending the one before or move back and forth between the steps of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After this data analysis, the final result was critically evaluated and we made our conclusions about the discovered aspects, limitations and the further possible research.

7.6 Participants

The population of this study is composed of all the companies listed in Trendence Graduate Barometer 2016 study - Portuguese Engineering/IT Edition (Trendence institute, 2016). Trendence Graduate Barometer is a study that defines the 100 most attractive companies from a student point of view, in this particular case from the students of IT and the engineering sector. The result of this study, a list of the 100 most attractive companies, served as a base for this research, as the focus is to examine the EB practices among these most attractive employers. The reason for choosing exactly this population is because they

are the most successful in attracting new employees which consequently means they are doing their EB right.

The sampling process is the selection of a certain, representative part of the population from which the research gains data and if applied correctly the concluded research is more accurate, efficient, flexible, faster and cheaper (Frey, Carl, & Gary, 2000). In this research a theoretical sampling was used – this means the best informants were chosen to prevent repetition of information. The sample also depended on the fulfilment of the theoretical saturation, this is the point where a certain level of stabilization amongst the categories is reached and new cases do not bring any new information to the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The theoretical saturation is the judgment criteria for the continuation of the data collection process, so it consequently determines the size of the sample (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The sample of this study was therefore adjusted according to the fulfilment of the theoretical saturation, so when the same kind of examples started to repeatedly emerge from the data, we stopped gathering more.

Since the study focuses on the EB process and HRM impact among most attractive IT and engineering employers, the sample consists of individuals that are responsible for the human resources departments in these companies and have either an education background in human resources, or, know profoundly the process of EB in their companies.

As a result, this study's sample consists of 10 participants from the most attractive companies, of which eight (80%) of them were female and two of them were males (20%). The youngest participant was 29 years and the oldest one 54 years old, but the overall average age of the sample is 37,6 years. The participant's average duration of work for the current companies is 6,95 years.

All of participants' sociodemographic characteristics, also their positions in the company and level of education, are gathered in the Table 3.

INTERVIEW	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION DEGREE	EDUCATION AREA	YEARS AT COMPANY	POSITION
1	Female	33	Bachelor	Psychology of Work and Companies	10	Manager of Talent and Organizational culture
2	Female	26	Master	Management	3	HR Technician and Coordination
3	Female	46	Master	Biochemistry	13	HR Director
4	Male	34	Bachelor	Psychology	1	HR Technician
5	Female	37	Bachelor	Psychology	12	HR Technician
6	Female	39	Master	International relations	2	Talent and Resourcing Specialist
7	Female	38	Bachelor	Architecture	2,5	Ecosystem Explorer
8	Male	54	Bachelor	Human Resources	16	HRBP Responsible
9	Female	40	Bachelor	Public relations	9	Talent Acquisition Manager
10	Female	29	Master	Psychology	1	Retention and motivation

Table 3. - Participants sociodemographic characteristics

The companies that participated in the investigation have in average 5608,4 employees and 43,45 years of existence. Five of the companies have their headquarters in Porto, two of them in Lisbon, one in Coimbra and one in Braga. However, four of the companies are funded by foreign capital. Besides that, three of the interviewed companies act in the IT sector and the rest act in other engineering sectors.

All of companies' sociodemographic characteristics so from localization to number of employees, are gathered in the Table 4.

INTERVIEW	LOCALIZATION	AREA	CAPITAL	AGE	EMPLOYEES
1	Porto	Engineering	National	21	1500
2	Lisbon	Engineering	Foreign	130	4495
3	Coimbra	Engineering	National	14	75
4	Braga	Engineering	Foreign	26	2000
5	Porto	Engineering	National	70	28000
6	Lisbon	IT	Foreign	25	7400
7	Porto	IT	National	2,5	150
8	Porto	Engineering	Foreign	69	2300
9	Porto	Engineering	National	58	9000
10	Porto	IT	National	19	1200

Table 4. - Organization characteristics

Chapter III – Results

In this chapter the results of the thematic analysis of the interviews are presented. The main categories and subcategories that emerged from the process of qualitative analysis that better enclose the tagged text are: Employer branding process, Company's framework, Employee attraction and Employee retention. Each of these 4 categories is presented in a separate table and the results are further explained.

EB process

The category, **EB process,** as can be seen in Table 5, covers all of the main points of the employer branding implementation and it's therefore the most extensive one. It emerged from 11 subcategories which are: EB Interpretation, EB Guidelines, EB Usage, EB Objectives, Departments involved in EB, Department's contributions to EB, EB Communication channels, EB Communication content, Tracking EB KPIs, HR practices used in EB and Suggestions for improvement of EB.

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING
EB PROCESS	EB Interpretation
	EB Guidelines
	EB Usage
	EB Objectives
	Departments involved in EB
	Departments contributions to EB
	EB Communication channels
	EB Communication content
	Tracking EB KPIs
	HR practices used in EB
	Suggestions for improvement of EB

Table 5. - Category of EB Process

The subcategory of ***EB interpretation*** gathers all participants' perspectives of the term EB. The vast majority of participants interpret EB as a set of **activities**, so all the actions that a company actively implements to impact their employees and the public with the objective to share a particular EB information. We can see these activities being further detailed as an example in the Interview 2.

> "Amm, and so all of these activities from the definition of the EVP to the participation in events and job fairs and online personal marketing and communication all of these, is the basis of our employer branding." (Interview 2)

The interpretation of EB is widely associated with the company's **recognition** as well. This means being recognized and identified in the market as a company with a particular characteristic. One of these specific recognitions is, for example, referred in Interview 1.

> "with the intention to be recognized as a quality employer" (Interview 1)

Similarly, as described in the excerpt of Interview 8 below, the participants interpret EB as the company's **image**, so of the general impression that the company represents to the employees or to the public.

> "Well, now, um, as we define, we basically define it as our brand image ..." (Interview 8)

Yet, another employer branding's interpretation is the company's **offer** so the monetary and non-monetary benefits proposed to the employees. As illustrated by the participant in Interview 5, this offer can include benefits such as incentive, training or work-life balance.

> "and also involves incentives, ammmm, of helping construct this well-being, in particularly employee's connection with the family, the life-work balance. Am, the initiatives of training for its employees..." (interview 5)

Furthermore, many participants label employer branding as the **ability to attract,** or in other words, the capacity to allure the new candidates into the company. This particular interpretation can be seen in the statement of the Interview 2.

> "So I would define employer branding as the company's ability to attract…" (Interview 2)

The EB was interpreted as the **ability to retain** the current employees, so keeping the workforce that the company already has, as described in this excerpt.

> "And to retain, ok, the employees that are in Company 4 already." (Interview 4)

In a more general and methodological perspective, EB is perceived as a **concept** that joins the HR and the marketing practices. This conception illustration can be found in Interview 4.

> "It's a marketing concept ok but applied to HR, to human resources ..." (Interview 4)

The next subcategory is *EB guidelines*, or in other words the general rules that companies follow during the whole process of EB. They are a set of best practices generally accepted and used by most companies. Each participant mentioned different types of guidelines that his company uses, but the that was the most repeated throughout the interviews was that fact that EB is a **partially-structured process.** This means that EB is not precisely defined and does not have detailed procedures, as described by the participant from Interview 1 in the following excerpt.

> "Ok, Company1 therefore my interest in participating in this study, because the concept of employer branding itself has been worked on by us, but not in a very structured way" (Interview 1)

Besides that, the **EB adaptation** was frequently mentioned as a guideline too, like for example in interview 6. This means that the companies segment the target groups they wish to influence with the EB and then also adjust the whole process according to age or area.

> "In this plan we divide employer branding, we divide it into segments, we have 3 segments, youth segment, young segment, then the segment turn around and professional segment. For each of these segments, the channels that will be used within the next 3 years are identified," (Interview 6)

In addition, one company in particular stated that it receives guidelines from abroad, so it has a **multinational orientation** for the EB process. It also receives orientation for its EVP design, which means it needs to also follow guidelines passed through corporate. The participant in his statement explains how corporate in Germany provides these basic guidelines.

> "OK so (coughing) Sorry, sorry. So as you know, we are a multinational company and we have some guidelines that are provided to us by our corporate, in Germany, amm, and the definition of the EVP is done centrally by corporate with support from external companies. (Interview 2)

In contrast, one company also stated that it faces various **obstacles** due to its multinational dimension, so, many times instead of orientation and alignment, there is no coherency in the process. As illustrated in the excerpt from interview 5, due to their size it is difficult to be aware of all initiatives the company has.

> "But the group is very large so it is difficult, in a smaller company it is easier to make it visible to all employees. In a large company that is very dispersed in terms of geography, information is more difficult to circulate and it often happens that only in certain documents we realize the existence of some of these initiatives that are in some way developed in each market." (Interview 5)

Another very important guideline is the alignment of the EB **strategy with the business one,** so the two go hand in hand, supporting each other. This means that the EB corresponds to the company's mission and current business needs, like it is mentioned in the excerpt from Interview 3.

> "For example, having a strategy connected to our company." (Interview 3)

EB objectives is another subcategory of the *EB process* that describe the main goals that a company wishes to achieve with the process. We discovered that all the interviewed companies' EB objective is to use the EB to **fulfill** their de**mands**. This means satisfying the recruitment, retention, business strategy or other kind of needs that arise in the company. The example of Interview 3 states the fulfilment of recruitment demands.

> "This is what we want, we do not want people who only come to gain money at the end of the month, but the ones that will be a part of a family, of people working for the same purpose." (Interview 3)

Besides that, all the companies wish to **influence its recognition** regarding the public eye, so they strive to be recognized as the best company with the best conditions in the market. The example of such recognition is indicated in the statement of Interview 6.

> "The main objective is to be one of the 10 most attractive companies in Portugal." (Interview 6)

Another objective of EB is the **promotion** of the company, so the majority of participants use it to pass the real image of a company as an employer and its unique offer. In particular, the Interview 2 enhanced this objective.

> "so we really need to show them, am, why they should come and work with us at Company 2. So that is our, our main strategy is to, to pass on that message." (Interview 2)

For a few of the participants the aim is also to directly **influence employees**, which means impacting them in a way that they change their behavior and habits. As expressed in interview 1, the companies try to increase the employees' identification with the company.

> "…a little to increase the employee identification with the company and with this, working on our image, from within." (Interview 1)

However, the companies do not only aim to influence employees, but also the academia. As a consequence, increasing their levels of **proximity with academia** is a goal of EB too. For example, the company number 8 is focuses on attracting the best talent from universities.

> "… the best students or the best talent that exists at the universities, this in fact is our goal." (Interview 8)

In addition, a small number of participants also see the **continuous influence** as an objective of the EB process. This means, as referred by the statement of participant number 4, that EB should be done with continuity.

> "So it already stays in the mentality of doing the best for the company and being committed. And that's a continues job. (Interview 4)

Continuing further on the category of *EB process* we have the subcategory of *EB Usage*, which represents all the digital and non-digital means that companies use in the process of EB. In short, they are basically the company's activities and conditions, that are used to accomplish the desired objectives for the EB process. Some of the companies tackle the process of EB with a structured outline, so this means they use a **plan**. In this plan, like stated in Interview 2, they define the steps and the budget.

> "Our process usually defines for each year what will be the employer branding plan, and this includes the budget side and also the planning of the events and fairs where we will be." (Interview 2)

Among the ones that do not use plan, a set of **common practices,** meaning practices that are considered successful by the company, is defined and later on used in the process. An example of this EB Usage was highlighted by the participant in Interview 5, where he described how there exists a set of companies practices.

> "a set of practices already exists within the group that are being used for employer branding. We have a set of initiatives, …" (Interview 5)

By far the most common EB Usage among interviewed companies, is the presence at specific **events.** This means attending gatherings, parties, fairs or other kind of presentation activities, like participant number 10 illustrated.

> "we take to this kind of events. Aaa, we try to smile a lot and to talk with everybody and if that's also we always bring with us a consulting, a consultant, I'm sorry." (Interview 10)

Another EB Usage is **academic activities**, so activities alongside universities such as project development, study visits, or, as participant of Interview 9 stated, academic job fairs.

> "our participation at job fairs alongside the universities is employer branding,…" (Interview 9)

Similar to the academic activities are the **internships,** which are basically offers of temporary work experience for students that wish to get to know the company's way of functioning and learn new skills. The companies, like shown in the following excerpt of Interview 4, often have special protocols with universities to help implement these internships.

> "But it's not only job fairs, we have protocols with ISEP, we have protocols with FEUP, where the students come and make internships in Company 4" (Interview 4)

Besides that, one company in particular also applies EB through the **dissertation projects.** Like stated on interview 4, the company promotes opportunities to research within the company to the students.

> "and also the dissertation. Final dissertation, the project." (Interview 4)

Among the EB Usage focused more towards the inner part of companies, so towards employees, the company's **environment** was referred. This means, as described by the participant from interview 3, that the company offers a work place in which employees feel relaxed.

> "people have a very pleasant and relaxed company environment," (Interview 3)

This same participant also stated another EB Usage that is being applied by his company, the company's **structure**. According to him, this means that the company uses its hierarchy and designed processes as a form of EB inside the organization.

> "am, we keep, we have very well stipulated processes, but we are not a square company, ..." (Interview 3)

The **office offer** was also highlighted as an EB Usage in the process, more particularly it is visible in the following excerpt of Interview 7. This offer is the overall package to employees that, more specifically, includes things such as a social room or food at the office.

> "What food do we buy, what is the product, what is the process to buy that food and what are the computers that we use ..." (Interview 7)

Two of the participants even went a step further and referred that **everything a company does** for the employees represents an EB Usage. As illustrated in the following statement of Interview 7, according to him every act of the company reflects what kind of an employer they are.

> "I suppose there is nothing we do that is not employer branding." (Interview 7)

Furthermore, another EB Usage that was mentioned by the companies is the use of **company campaigns**. These campaigns are mainly used to convey a particular message to a particular target segment. They are defined and organized with a particular area and goal, as described in the excerpt of the Interview 8.

> "We have worked our image a lot for with campaigns as other companies do, because we in fact are really focused on the area of engineering." (Interview 8)

The EB Usage turned more towards the outside of the companies, we found out that the **recruitment**, which includes all the processes of attracting candidates, is applied. The example of the recruitment, was referred by the participant of Interview 9.

> "and then we have the normal recruitment processes that covers all kinds of segments of, ammm, of potential collaborators." (Interview 9)

Similarly, the **selection**, which is the process of appointing new employees from the applying candidates, is also listed as an EB Usage. The interviews, the emails sent, the follow-ups are a part of recruitment, which was mentioned in the perspective of participant of Interview 7.

> "the way we select candidates reflects as well our culture." (Interview 7)

The **promotional material** also presents an example of usage in the EB process and is especially important for the outside public, since it often represents company's first and many times the only contact with the public. In the following excerpt of Interview 10, the participant mentions how the company uses merchandising.

> "What do we do? We have some merchandising that we, …" (Interview 10)

In addition, **competitions** represent another EB Usage that was also mentioned by a few of the companies. As described on Interview 9, this usage is based on the company's rankings, studies and event competitions in which it participates.

> "We, the, the rankings and the questionnaires at which we concur and the results that come from there are employer branding..." (Interview 9)

Nonetheless, one of the interviewed companies also use company's **foundation** in the EB process. Since the company founded this special organization to help the ones in need and to do charity, the company also uses it to implement their EB.

> "Ammm, other initiatives such as increases, promoted by the foundation area, the group has also founded the foundation of Company 5 that promotes a set of initiatives with character associated

toward not only the external social scope, but also towards initiatives for the employees, namely to help the employee's children in forms of student scholarships, especially for the employee's whose children are attending higher education." (Interview 5)

The next subcategory is the ***departments involved***. This subcategory shows which company's department are somehow involved in the EB process. By far the most referred department among participants was the **HR** one, so in other words, it is the administration of employees that is involved the most throughout the whole process.

"Well, above all human resources." (Interview 6)

However, the HR department was not mentioned in Interview number 7, because this company does not have a hierarchically organized structure, meaning that there is no department of HR. In this case, as explained below, the **operations team** takes care of the EB process.

"I mean we don't have a lot of departments we have legal teams. You know, every single person that does an interview with someone, is involved in employer branding because we had issues sometimes with people saying that they hated the interview." (Interview 7)

Another very frequently mentioned department is the **communications** one. This department is responsible of all transfer of the information from the company to the public and vice-versa. According to the participant of Interview 10 the communications department is also aligned with the HR one.

"Also we have the communication team, that's also work together with us HR in this employee branding." (Interview 10)

With a similar frequency of mentions as the communications department, is the **marketing** one. This department manages activities such as creation and delivery of offers that are directed to the public. As mentioned in Interview 3, HR department tends to create synergies between the marketing and other departments involved.

"But we are creating here some synergies with …aaa, also the marketing department, …" (Interview 3)

Besides these three leading departments in the process, the **technical departments** are involved too. In these cases, the EB process depends on the involvement of the company's engineers or technicians, as illustrated in Interview 2.

"But besides these two departments, the technical departments usually are also involved am, …" (Interview 2)

Another department involved in EB that was mentioned by the participant of Interview 7 was **management**. This means that the company's top administration is also involved on decisions and the implementation of EB.

"So the HR and management areas, ammm, are the main one." (interview 7)

This same participant also revealed yet another department involved in their EB process, that is **sales**. In comparison with management, the sales department contributes more to the implementation phase than the design one, thanks to their constant contact with the public. Interview 2.

> "but it's in the other company of the group that is Company 4.1, that's sales area from Portugal sales." (Interview 4)

Another very important participant in the process are also the **employees**. The same way as they are influenced by the EB, they are also directly involved in it. The participant of Interview 4 even states each one of the employees is like a particular channel.

> "And our employees of course. Each one is one communication." (Interview 4)

The next subcategory, the ***departments contributions to EB,*** explain what are the responsibilities that a certain company's department involved in the EB process, has. Each one of the departments referred in the subcategory of **departments involved in EB** contributes differently to it. Nonetheless, the most common task of all the departments that was highlighted by the interview process is the **overall strategy** that is implemented by HR, as affirmed on the following excerpt of Interview 8.

> "Together, we prepare, develop the events and collaborate with various entities to be exactly ready to be more robust in the presentation we make to the market." (Interview 8)

This means the departments always work in general interconnection with the HR department, but then each particular department has a **different kind of responsibility.** As expressed in the following excerpt of Interview 6, each department develops unique KPIs and activities to contribute to EB.

> "So the question is how each one will intervene. What are the steps we need to take, the manuals, what indicators need to be followed during and from the beginning, or whether the departments will need to actively participate at some point." (Interview 6)

So, for example, the communication department **organizes communication**, which means it defines the channel and content of the communication, so therefore it manages the communication tools, from social networks to marketing materials, as the participant from Interview 2 referred.

> "So we work together with the central communication department to define our core messages, our design materials, our overall image for the employer branding." (Interview 2)

Furthermore, the marketing departments contribute tremendously **towards the design of materials** that are used for all the EB purposes of the company. So as seen on the excerpt of the Interview 1 below, it also helps define the visual and the strategy of information sharing.

> "For example, marketing helps a little bit with the question of the product and brand disclosure." (Interview 1)

Among the department contributions, according to one of the interviewed companies, employees' contributions are the only one that do **not** have any particular **policy.** The employees contribute with the unique sharing of how they feel and how they perceive the the EB process. As referred in the following excerpt of Interview 7.

> "But there are no instructions for people to how to share information about Company 7. They just say whatever they feel, if you ask each of these persons that are at Company 7 what is the culture, they will give you a different answer, because people value different things in the, in the overall culture that we have." (Interview 7)

Technical departments are usually involved when needed, specially at events where companies are present. Therefore, their main contribution ends up being, the **event presentations** where they speak about the technical skills needed for the job and about the overall work experience in the company. We can see an example of this kind of contribution on Interview 2.

> "since we need those technicians to really provide us their needs in terms of recruitment and sometimes they come with us, like as I said to job fairs and events, to really capture the attention of potential candidates." (Interview 2)

Another subcategory of the EB Process is the ***EB communication channel,*** which covers all of the different forms of the company's communication that is used in the process of EB. The most commonly used channels are the **social networks,** so, as stated on Interview 6, this includes networks like Facebook, LinkedIn or Instagram.

> "Yes, I would also like to add that we have the internal social sharing too, on Facebook and on Instagram, …" (interview 6)

Other communication channels used are **video**, **company's website and company's foundation website** which usually represent the company's core business, culture, environment and some workday responsibilities to a no-employee. Likewise, the **events** tend to represent the same things, but not throughout passive content but rather with interactions with the company's employees and ambassadors at the place of the event.

Among the communication channels, participants also mentioned **campaigns and press releases**, which are specifically designed communication processes that always have a particular goal and target audience. As participant of the Interview 6 explained, they are focused on one segment only, in their case the youth segment.

> "we always do these campaigns to spread our employer branding. At the youth level we do campaigns with universities … " (Interview 6)

Among the employees', companies communicate mainly through **manuals**, which are handbooks where all the most important information about the company's organization is

gathered. As stated in Interview 3, they usually give them to the employees when they enter the company.

> "Within, within, in this time and it's still very recent, we have a collaborator guide, a collaborator manual that is delivered to new employees when they enter the company, …" (Interview 3)

If manuals represent the most frequent communication channel for new employees, the **intranet** represent the most recurring one for inside everyday communication. Besides intranet, a few of the companies also use **emails** and **newsletters**. The first are used to communicate with particular individuals or smaller groups within the company, whereas the second are basically monthly or weekly organized emails to all employees that convey all the company's news. A few of the companies also have their own **television** or **magazines** that also serve as a communication channels with employees.

On the other hand, companies also have the non-digital channels of internal communication, such as **posters** that are exhibited in the company's physical spaces or **meetings** with the physical presence of the people. Another communication channel involving the employees' presence is **training**. It is used by one of the participating companies that uses it as a form of integration of new employees.

> "We have training sessions too. When you enter Company 4 we have the Company 4 day. Well, nine days of training and close integration." (Company 4)

In addition, participants mentioned that certain individuals or groups of people can also represent an important communication channel for their EB. For example, the **HR** department, since it dictates the rules and sets the example for all other employees. So, in the words of participant number 2, the HR department acts as an ambassador in the process.

> "Usually we do it on a more informal way, so we try to be, especially in the HR, every year we try to be ambassadors of our employer branding proposition internally, ..." (Interview 2)

Another people related channel are the **employees and customers.** They, as customer or employee, have an experience with the organization, based on which they form an opinion and afterwards share it. Furthermore, participant of Interview 7 stated that every **interaction** ends up being a communication channel. According to him all interactions or in other words all influences communicate the company's culture or the company as an employer.

> "But then it's everything. I mean, what doesn't communicate culture, you know, it's difficult to answer that question because everything does, everything communicates employer branding. Every human interaction," (Interview 7)

Part of the communication is also done through other **entities** that work in collaboration with the company, either as a places where the company's communication is done, like technologic parks, or as entities that actually develop the company's communication.

Companies also use **academic activities** as a channel of communication, as stated below, they connect with universities, and implement projects or study visits, for example.

> "Then connected with the universities, we in fact have many contacts, we have many professors, many engineers who are from the best universities that we talked about and who have developed their careers here, and therefore, have a lot of contacts also with the universities, both with the professors who exist there and with all departments of various levels that also allow us to have a close proximity and a great exposure, either as I was referring to before, with academia or with the market in general." (Interview 8)

The processes of **recruitment** and **selection** were also referenced as one of the communication channels in companies' EB. This means communication passes from the job specifications to what a company says to the candidate during the whole process or how it delivers the final decisions.

The next subcategory, ***EB communication content,*** is about the particular information and ideas that are conveyed through the communication channels. The content that almost all participants communicate is the **information about work**, meaning what are the latest launches, products, implementations and what are the team's objectives. Some of this content is illustrated in the following statement of Interview 1.

> "in which we are sharing everything that is, our launches of new products or, ee, implementation of new machines" (Interview 1)

Another very frequent communication content is the **company's image**, which is all about passing the messages about the company's culture, mission and vision. Meaning all that contributes towards the company's identification among the potential and current employees. These exact characteristics are expressed the interview 3.

> "and describes all, the whole company, since it was created, the history of the company, mission, vision, all these parts, am, …" (Interview 3)

Additionally, the companies also communicate all the **job opportunities** available. This consists of sharing the job positions and youth talent programs over the communication channels. This is done internally, as we can see in the example below, and also externally.

> "… internal recruitment opportunities and so on." (Interview 8)

Besides that, one company also communicates the **customer experience**, so how the clients feel when using the company's services or products. As described in the statement below, the whole experience is communicated to attract the people.

> "that they used a service of the company, and how it went, and what they feel in the relation with the security of keeping the cells with us. It ends up being something that attracts people to Company 3." (Interview 3)

Another content that appeared only one time among the participants, is the **CEO's feedback**. This content, is composed by the chief executive officer point of view on the company's current situation and work being done, and it is illustrated below.

> "Once our CEO sends an email and shares the comments of last month and the next month, ..." (Interview 6)

Yet another typical content used in the communication is the **challenges** that a company is facing at this moment. This means publically exposing the problem inside so that employees can help resolving them with their feedback and solutions. The company number 7 uses it this way.

> "I mean, we, every time we have a challenge that happened, we ask everyone what should we do, how can we deal with this. And sometimes it's not that much about answering the question, is more about asking the right questions to people and then they will come forward, and they will create solutions for the challenges that we have every day." (Interview 7)

The subcategory of *tracking the EB KPIs* emerged from the need of controlling and knowing the progress of the EB process. Firstly, it is important to indicate that the majority of the companies face **obstacles** in measuring the performance of the EB, because they either do not measure it or because they do not know what to measure and what measuring tools to use. According to the example below, measuring is the most difficult part of EB.

> "OK, so that's the difficult part [laughing], as you may know employer branding is not completely measurable in all of its variance..." (Interview 2)

However, companies do track some indicators with tools like for example **surveys**, which consist of questionnaires about a particular company characteristic, such as the organization climate or individual's satisfaction. These surveys are then applied to customers and to the employees as well, as summarized in the statement below.

> "and for this I must give a note here, that we develop a group of surveys for organizational clime, so we have referred to the satisfaction of the employees, but we intend to, throughout the year or until the end of this year, to extend this survey to the collaborators within the group. In addition, there is also a survey that is done at the satisfaction level at the level of our external customers. These are indicators that allow, ...," (Interview 5)

Besides that, the companies also use **event feedback** as a form of measuring. As explained in the interview below, the companies gather this information at the events by receiving information about their presentation from the events participants or by ranking that are constructed at these events.

> "ammm... We are having a little feedback after the participation on the events, in which we are present, about the impact that the presence of Company1 had. I'm going to give you a real example: We were, this year, for the second time, in the Find-Up employment fair at the University of Porto, am, and there, clearly, a ranking of the most searched companies of the fair is done" (Interview 1)

Another measurement tool is **benchmarking**, so the comparison between the rival companies. Having this rival comparison was mentioned in Interview 1.

"and I will have some contacts with some companies that work on the matter," (Interview 1)

Apart from benchmarking, **studies** that measure all the companies' attractiveness or positioning in the market are used. This means all rankings, such as the ranking of best companies to work at or the most attractive companies in the market. An example of a company that uses this measurement is stated below.

"No, no, what we do... For example, the study that you have sent me attached on the email, aaaaa, eeee," (Interview 1)

In addition, the **reviews** that employees write about the company on online tools also serve as a measurement for one of the interviewed companies. The example of Interview 7 mentions the use of a website that gathers all the employees reviews worldwide.

"You know we have some really bad reviews on Glassdoor." (Interview 7)

This same Interview also referenced a very similar measurement tool as the reviews, the **referrals**. This tool also depends on the employee opinion about the company and their word-of-mouth.

"and if they share with their friends and if they refer us to other people as well." (Interview 7)

What is being measured with these tools stated above is **satisfaction**, so how satisfied are the employees with the company's offer and conditions. As participant number 5 describes it, they measure the satisfaction among the clients and the employees.

"Yes, we have been able to have greater influence. Maybe I answered on second one and not the first one. Am, but I think that here goes a lot thorough the satisfaction that we perceive it in the less standardized way, …" (Interview 5)

A very similar perspective measured is also the overall **employee feedback**, which is their opinion about the current conditions and processes. Even more, the company then tries to improve these weaker points, as referred in statement below.

"So how do we measure? Yes, so feedback from people or someone tells us, ok, we're not happy with this situation and ok let's do it together, the solutions for it you know." (Interview 7)

Another characteristic measured is the **exit feedback**, that happens only when employees decide to leave the company. With this feedback the company tries to understand what can be improved for the future so that the employees stay. The participant from the Interview 7 presented his company's point of view on this matter.

"But we measure feedback, so we sense what our people are doing and we, we also, I mean, when people leave, we always ask what would you improve here. I mean, I don't tend to ask why people are leaving because sometimes they want to share sometimes no. But what can we do better, I think we can learn from people that are leaving," (Interview 7)

The **company's position** is also considered as a measuring indicator by one company. This point of view was shared in the Interview 6 and it's about the company's success in terms of

their EB implementation. So whether the plans were implemented and what still needs to be done.

> "to conclude in what kind of position we are and what is being done even in terms of employer branding." (Interview 6)

Companies also try to measure the process in a more quantitative way so by comparing the **number of job vacancies** they have. This means, as was also introduced by the Interview 2, the amount of the available opportunities at companies.

> "so we have measured some aspects, for example we check how many jobs vacancies we have open …" (Interview 2)

Another quantitative metric used is the **numbers of candidates,** so how many candidates does a company receive per open vacancy. We can see a reference to this indicator in the following excerpt of the description of Interview 3.

> "But I can say that in an informal way we measure the number of candidates we received in total or in some adds." (Interview 3)

In a similar fashion, companies also measure the average **time** that they need **to fulfil the job vacancies**. As observed by participant number 2, this means how long does the company need to find a fit for the job vacancy.

> "and the time to lead, the time to fill each job vacancy through our website." (Interview 2)

Besides these measurements that are more focused towards candidates and new employees, companies also referred to a few ones that are more connected to senior employees. The indicators they use here is the **level of retention**, so how many employees leave the company.

> "At this time we essentially measure through the instrument that allows us to evaluate, amm, the degree, basically the degree of retention of the best talents in the organization. That is, since we go to the market every year to actually capture the best students, how do we measure, in fact, in a way, by retention factor. If we have great levels of retention or not of these collaborators. Amm, no, we do not seek nor intend to obviously have, as we say, 100% retention, but we have a very good retention levels in fact, and, this is the factor that allows us to say, ok, we are or not competitive in the market." (Interview 8)

Another subcategory of the *EB Process* is the ***HR practices used***. These practices are all the specialized processes that are used inside of the HR departments. By far the most used HR practices in the EB process are the recruitment and communication ones. **Communication practices** are the ones that are used all the time with the objectives of informing the employees or potential employees about the company's actual state, goals and offer.

> "Also we have the communication team, that's also work together with us HR in this employee branding." (Interview 10)

On the other hand, the **recruitment practices** are used in EB mainly when companies need to recruit new candidates, so they try to attract them and illustrate the best company's picture. These practices were mentioned almost among all the participants, but here an example of Interview 1 follows.

> "Ok, ammmm, we have the employer branding mostly linked to recruitment … (Interview 1)

A few companies also pay special attention to what follows after this recruitment phase – i.e. **selection practices**. This involves the treatment of candidates, updates about the status of the application and guaranteeing the accuracy and consistency in the whole process. These practices were for example mentioned in the Interview 9.

> "and selection process, amm, normal ones, am, we do the test applications, …" (Interview 9)

Once candidates successfully pass through the selection processes, one company also applies special **onboarding practices**. In these, candidates receive special treatments like an introduction session and a supervisor to help him understand how the company works.

> "We have in, in most cases, probably not in all cases, but in most cases we have a kind of a buddy system also for welcoming the new your employees," (Interview 2)

After the person passes from candidate to full-time employee, the company's practices also change. Here, as seen in Interview 10, the **practices** are tuned toward reassuring the employee's **motivation** and overall feeling of satisfaction with the employer.

> "We have the follow up meetings we do to check if everything is ok, if the consultant has any kind of doubts, if he needs something to, to improve his happiness in work or his happiness with the project." (Interview 10)

Another HR practice used is **training**, which covers all the organized formation activities that are implemented to satisfy the needs of the professional growth of the employees. Even more, the companies develop training plans for their employees, as we can see in the example below.

> "And then we have training plans very adjusted to the needs of the various relationships. Okay, what does this allow us to do?" (Interview 8)

Besides that, companies implement **performance evaluation** practices to keep the employees motivated and focused towards the company's goals that need to be achieved. The practices are applied among all the employees, as mentioned in the statement below, and serve as a base for understanding how successful a particular employee was.

> "…where the evaluation of performance is the base, we do it for all employees in a harmonious and continuous way. We work by objectives too, and that includes the performance evaluation and …" (Interview 8)

This company also implements the **competences assessment** mainly to help understand even better the potential that each employees has, their strong suits and what are the competences that still need to be improved.

> "the evaluation of competences and also the objectives at the level of the whole organization." (Interview 8)

Many times the competences assessment and training also leads to the use of **career management practices** in the companies. This means that they develop a career plan and think about the future of the employees, as shown in the Interview 8.

> "It allows us, in fact, also complementary, to have career plans that we are also improving and working on right now, so that we can essentially have two main areas of career planning here." (Interview 8)

The companies are inclined towards using **retaining practices** that mostly consist of other HR practices that were already referred above. As the participant of Interview 10 described, these practices consist of retention reunions from which the company tries to understand the employees' motivations.

> "Also we have the retention reunions, that is when the consultant is thinking about leaving the company and again we try to understand his motivations and what we can do to make him feel better." (Interview 10)

In order to improve the retention, **exit interviews** are also conducted to understand why somebody want to leave the company and to find out ways to improve. Or in the words of the participant number 4, companies try to understand the employees' motivations.

> "And we also have exit interviews when somebody wants to leave Company 4 continue so we try to understand this decision, we try to understand why, the motivations." (Interview 4)

One of the interviewed companies faces a unique situation when being compared to others. Since they act in a different market and have thousands of employees, the **market aligning of HR practices** presents one of the greatest challenges they are facing. There troubles are synthesized in the statement below.

> "The greatest concern that we have had until now is because there was a lot of work developed here in Portugal, aammm, but was not replicated in other markets. The objective now is to standardize this, and it has been a concern for many years already, trying to adapt that what happens in Portugal to other markets, …" (Interview 5)

Suggestions for improvement of EB is a subcategory that seeks to explore how HR employees would change the company's current processes and organization of EB. This subcategory is the only one that does not reflect the current situation, but rather focuses on the future possibilities of the EB implementation. The public **awareness** about the company was the suggestion that was mostly highlighted as the one that needs the most improvement.

Almost all the participants wish to increase the company's level of recognition, like for example the participant of the Interview 9.

"The hardest question ... But if I could, so in the ideal world? [Yes, in the ideal world] Amm, in the ideal world, I would have closer contact with more universities, ammm, I would have a closer contact with the people who are interested in us and who want to know more about Company 9 as their potential employer." (Interview 9)

Besides that, many participants agreed that the company is already well-organized in terms of EB process, so they suggested to **continue** the implementation of the **current work.** This means, like the example below illustrates, to persist with the processes, because they already are a good strategy.

"Above all, I would do the changes that are already in progress, so what we want to implement,…" (Interview 5)

However, a few participants mentioned they would change the **prioritization of the EB** process. As the following statement of participant number 2 refers, it happens that some departments do not see the same value in EB as others do. For example, HR and marketing department see the importance, but the technical part or even administration department do not, at least not at the same level. This is the main reason for the desired changes.

"so what I mean is am, the employer branding is not always completely understood by everyone, so people who work in HR or marketing or communication areas really see the need in these, in these employer branding and the efforts that we need to do, to attract and retain people in the company. But this is not always seen in the same way by people working on a more technical side. You know what I mean?" (Interview 2)

In addition, the participant from the Interview 1 also suggested to change the **way the tracking of EB** is done, since the current one is not structured. This means defying the tools and the attributions that need to be followed with a certain frequency or in a certain situation.

"… how we measure it, here, yes, here is still a very superficial work, therefore, this we would undoubtedly like to develop, do better, without a doubt." (Interview 1)

Various participants went even further and suggested to rethink and reorganize the **overall process**. In other words, this means the whole structure of EB that currently exists in the company. As said in the Interview 8 they would change the structure and the ways of attracting and retaining.

"Well, we actually have several things to improve (cough). It's true, we have several things to improve and we will improve them in the whole process, (cough) I would say we will almost reorganize, not implement, but it is almost redesigning a new, whole process in order to what, to be exactly even more competitive in the ways of attracting, but then also in fact on the internal level after to motivate and retain them." (Interview 8)

Besides that, five of the companies also wish to improve their **communication**, which means applying a structured, consisting and personalized way of communicating the company as an employer through social networks and the company's website. For example, HR feels the

need to make the websites more recruitment friendly. Similarly, they wish to have more freedom in sharing information and more expertise for designing the communication itself, as is illustrated in the Interview 10 below.

> "Ok, first of all, I would like to, to implement structured process of employer branding in internal and external communication. I think we should, need one more, two more people to help us with that, to define specifically what fields should we hacked and how should we do thing in internal and external communication ,…" (interview 10)

Another point of improvement that was suggested was **innovation**. This suggestion characterizes the constant strive for improving the employee offer and to be and do better as an employer. This can mean something as simple as organizing new team-building activities for the employees, like it is summarized in the following example of the Interview 10.

> "For example, weekly doing something, and something nice like running or like going to the Porto wine caves, or are doing a boat trip or something like that, …" (Interview 10)

Company's framework

The next category, *company's framework* describes the company's unique characteristics, organization and processes. It emerged from the following subcategories **the monetary EVP, non-monetary EVP, defying EVP, company as an employer and company's differentiation.** The results are illustrated in the Table 6, where all the selective, axial and open codes that emerged from the interviews are identified.

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING
	Non-monetary EVP
	Monetary EVP
COMPANY'S FRAMEWORK	Defying EVP
	Company as an employer
	Company's differentiation

Table 6. - Category of Company's Framework

The subcategory *monetary EVP* is the financial offer that the company provides for their employees. This money related employee value proposition consists of all the that financial incentives that a company designs for the employees. The most common proposition is the **salary**, or in other words, the monthly regular payment the employee receives. According to the participants, and as illustrated in the example of the statement from the Interview 10, a salary should be a competitive one and not an above average one, because companies do not wish that the employees join only for this reason.

> "Afterwards we have a set, we try to have and we have in fact also package salaries that are competitive with the market." (interview 10)

Instead of offering a higher salary, some of the participant companies offer a higher value of **subsidy**, a division of **company's profits** or **an award** for employee performance and employee seniority. So employees that fulfil the performance objectives or stay with the company for a longer period of time are entitled to receive a financial award, as illustrated in the example below.

> "And performance awards, seniority awards, and a lot of thing that we have in Company 4." (Interview 4)

Another, not very common, monetary propositions are the **incentives**, which are offered mainly to the employees that work abroad and **scholarships**, which are offered to employees or their children.

The next subcategory, ***non-monetary EVP,*** represents the company's offer to the employees, however with a non-financial basis. The participants' answers show that the non-monetary EVP is the unique set of benefits that differentiates the company. The one that repeated the most among the companies' packages was **health insurance,** so paying for the employee's medical expenses. As said in Interview 2, usually the majority of the employees is entitled to it.

> "… currently not all our locations offer that, but most of them also offer benefits with health insurance,…" (Interview 2)

Similar to health insurance is the **life insurance,** which is a part of many interviewed companies' EVP. This promises a sum of money in case of the employee's death, as is mentioned for example in the Interview 10.

> "… the life insurance …" (Interview 10)

Another non-monetary proposition is **protocols** that companies have with other entities for their employees. Like illustrated in the Interview excerpt below, these protocols can include gyms or banks.

> "We have protocols, national level and local level with several companies for example, amm, gyms, or veterinarian hospitals or restaurants or car repair shops,so we have these protocols that really help our employees to have some discounts in, in these areas." (Interview 2)

Besides that, other common benefits are the **career opportunities** available inside of the company, meaning that the employees have the possibility for a future improvement and progress of their career at the company.

> "I can, I can, for example, career management. We have, ammm, a career management project where it is not necessary for the person to progress in his or her career to do it vertically. Even more, it almost does not happen. So, we have a model of zig-zag careers, in which, at any function that the person is, he always has the possibility of, if wanting to change or to show that he has the ability to change, of going to a horizontal function, of going to a diagonal function or even even vertical. But it is not obligatory that the progression is done via progression in terms of amm, of function." (Interview 9)

Similarly, **challenges** at the workplace are yet another proposition that companies use in the EB process. Since the employees seek a challenging work, meaning they appreciate a demanding work that tests their abilities, the companies benefit from offering them these conditions. We can see this proposition in the following excerpt of the Interview 2.

> "and developing challenging projects is also something that we live by and that we focus all our EVP on. (Interview 2)

Connected to the career opportunities and the challenges comes the proposition of **personal realization**, which includes not only the career but also the company's environment and appreciation of the employee. This benefit, was, for example, mentioned in Interview 9.

> "And, with having these challenges and having these possibilities for people to get to know several areas and several, …, and keep progressing through various areas, I think it is our great, our great value proposition really, the amount of challenges and possibilities that of internal progression that we have...." (Interview 9)

Another benefit that the companies offer is the **innovation** opportunity. This means being an employer that improves continuously and makes new changes, like the participant number 2 describes in the following excerpt of his interview.

> "We influence change and we shape the future and so of course, this promise of creating, creating tendencies worldwide…" (Interview 2)

Another proposition that is being used in two of the companies is **doctor** services at the workplace. This means, as referred in the Interview 5, having medically trained staff that employees can access if they need to.

> "Ammmm, we have a service of doctor also, of medicine not only to have him at work but more in a curative matter that is also available to the collaborators who wish to have the access." (Interview 5)

One of the companies also uses the possibility of **traveling** as a non-monetary proposition. This benefit is an additional part of EVP and allows the employees to convert the extra salary part into travels, as stated below.

> "… and then we have the flex, the extra part of the salary that the employee can chose, he can convert that kind of amount of money in tickets for travel destination for example." (Interview 10)

In addition, this same company also offers **travelling insurance** to their employees. Like referred by the participant of Interview 10, this travelling insurance is just one part of all the insurances available.

> "So, we have aaa, we have a lots of insurances like travelling, ..." (Interview 10)

Besides that, this company also offers the company's **car** to some of their employees. As participant number 10 explained, these employees are even entitled to have superior cars with time.

> "Am, in a better, in a better car for example, because some of our consultants have cars and can increase the model off the car, so I think it's pretty much that, …" (Interview 10)

Another proposition is the **company's values** that reflect and transpire their culture and behavior. The example of Interview 2, stated that they live by them every day.

> "so we live by the values that were first implemented by somebody from Company 2, we still live by them today." (Interview 2)

One participant also referred the **company's work-life balance** as one of the non-monetary EVP. This distribution of personal and career time is a valuable factor for the employees and, as seen in the example, the company 1 offers that.

> "Yes, I think, Company1 has, and this is recognized by the employees themselves, the balance between personal and professional life and is one of the factors that I think we can offer to the employees as of something of value …" (Interview 1)

Another company's EVP is the offer of **training**. As stated in the Interview 2, companies wish to offer training to the majority of the employees.

> "Ammm, the training issue is also one of the important pillars, to which we give a great concern to every year, am, the training needs diagnostics and enabling that the most people receive numerous topics…" (interview 2)

Similarly, one company referred the **evaluating performance** as one of the offered propositions as well. This means they evaluate the employee's success in accomplishing a goal. An example of such proposition was mentioned in the Interview 2.

> "we evaluate our performance, …" (Interview 2)

Likewise, the company's positioning in terms of **stability** is a non-monetary proposition too. This is felt especially in financial terms where security is key, as is also described in the statement below.

> "And stability ... stability in the sense of amm, security …" (Interview 1)

Another original benefit from the EVP, as stated in the Interview 1, is also hours dedicated to **family care.** This means that a company provides a certain amount of hours that employees can dedicate to their family issues, without this having any effect on the salary. Therefore, their absence is justified.

> "…. am, we for example offer, we have available, ammmm, hours for family care, …" (Interview 1)

This same company also applies hours dedicated to **medical care**. These function in a similar manner as the family care ones. So here hours are dedicated for medical examinations or other health issues, as stated below.

> "or medical examinations which aren't deducted in the payroll of the employee…" (Interview 1)

An **office** space is on this non-monetary EVP list as well. As the Interview 7 summarizes it, relaxing offices are used by companies too, for making the company more attractive.

> "We have office spaces that are, you know open space, sometimes people like it, I think because they are small, it's more cozy and it's quiet, and I think it's cool to have that." (Interview 7)

Besides the physical office space, the **location** of the company is also considered a EVP benefit. The Interview 3 explains how the fact of company's location is used for attraction.

> "… we have am, the place where we are inserted, it is attractive, because it is near the great centers …" (Interview 3)

Furthermore, giving employees **autonomy**, which means offering a certain level of freedom so they can grow and have the power to change their workplace.

> "We do have, I think the most important thing would be autonomy. It's an environment where you can build your autonomy and grow it. It's not mandatory, but you can do that here and you can't do that in many places." (Interview 7)

In addition, one company also provides the help of a **financial advisor**, so the possibilities of receiving help from a financial expert. As the participant number 5 described below, his company offers this possibility of support to their employees.

> "ammmm, and here there is another support, sometimes more at the level of financial adviser who also exists to help employees." (Interview 5)

In collaboration with partners from the market, companies also offer benefits such as **means of transportation**. This means the companies cover the employee's transportation expenses. An example of this non-monetary EVP is referred in the Interview 2.

> "Am, we also have some benefits for, am, OK, how how will I explain it, amm, like do you know carpool and transportation methods, so sometimes within the location we also have some benefits related to that." (Interview 2)

Yet another part of EVP is the **pharmacy services**. This means bringing pharmaceutical services to the company, as referred in interview 2, avoiding the employee's need to go there.

> "We also more, more currently have had some other services in house, like for example in Aveiro, we have a pharmacy coming to the location to provide prescription, prescript medication so that our employees don't need to, to go to the pharmacy you know." (Interview 2)

The possibility of **parking** at the companies is also one of the non-monetary EVP. Similar to cars, this proposition is also offered to some of the employees, like described in the Interview 2 statement.

> "Ammm, we have what kind of other benefits... Am, so we have a parking and, well we are growing very fast right now specially in Braga so, we are creating new, new spaces to solve some parking issues, but generally we have parking for our employees. Am…." (Interview 2)

One company also uses **portable Wi-Fi hotspot**, as a non-monetary EVP. With this proposition the employees receive a hot spot for internet use, as mentioned by the participant number 7.

> "a hot spot for internet for free internet on the go." (Interview 7)

Next subcategory is called ***defining EVP*** and it explains how companies tackle the process of the EVP definition. Since each company has a unique EVP offer they also have a different form of designing the whole proposition package. When defining the EVP, the majority of

companies **adapt the EVP** according to their limitations, local standards or according to employees' level of seniority, function or performance. The company 9, for example, adapts it according to its departments.

> "We, I do not know if we can say that we only have one Employer Value Proposition, why, we work, and in my specific case, I work in a transversal department of all retail areas and all retail areas have their own Employer Value Proposition." (Interview 9)

Besides that, some companies consider the **employees** when defining the EVP. So, as indicated in the Interview 3, the companies have a special **concern** about their growth and well-being.

> "and then we also have concern about the people, that the people continue growing within the company, but within the limitations we have, because we are not a very big company either. But we are having this concern." (Interview 3)

On the contrary, other companies focus their EVP more towards what is important for the well-being of the company rather than the well-being of their employees, so for example, the company's **market positioning.** When designing the offer for the employees, the company number 3 compares their offer to others.

> "And comparatively I think we should be well positioned." (Interview 3)

Interconnected with the positioning is also the company's **importance of retaining**. If the retention is low the company tries to redesign the EVP so that the same rises. Therefore, for the company 1, this represents one of the main designing factors.

> "Right now, we are working precisely on this issue of retention," (Interview 1)

Another aspect that participants also mentioned is the **EVP indicators,** which basically means that the EVP is defined according to established indicators that reflect what is currently most important for the company. As is illustrated in example of the Interview 6 below, defining EVP according to the company's everyday operations and the employees. Interview 2.

> "And, therefore, we felt it was necessary to follow some operational indicators not only for the employees, but also for the EVP, that is now being introduced for all companies. So we are doing this in Portugal." (Interview 6)

A practice used by three of the interviewed companies is the **revision** of the current **EVP** package to keep their offer up to date. We can also infer from the Interview 6 that this is being done even on a multinational level if the company is of foreign origin.

> "As I was telling you, our EVP is being redefined. From outside to inside of Portugal." (Interview 6)

One of the companies also mentioned that it does **not** apply any kind of **results driven strategies**, but rather defines their package in a more personalized way per employee. We can see from the description of the participant number 7 that this is a practice in his company.

"We are, I mean, we don't look too much at graphs and return on investment and other things that some companies value. But that doesn't mean that we don't think about that, but maybe we think about that in another way." (Interview 7)

The subcategory *company as an employer*, describes the companies' wishes about their public perception as an employer. The image that companies wish to be perceived for the most is being recognized as an employer of **innovation**. So being the institution known for revolutionizing the market. In the Interview 2, they want to be perceived as organization that shapes the future.

"… and then of course innovation, so we strive for innovation every day, this is our, our core activity. We influence change and we shape the future and so of course, this promise of creating, creating tendencies worldwide …" (Interview 2)

Another perception for which the companies wish to be recognized as, is being the employer of **impact**. This means being considered as the employer that knows how to tackle the challenges and obstacles on the way and that also generates profit. Below we have an example from Interview 5, where the company refers to its capacity to overcome internationalization challenges.

"which is the successful internationalization process, the fact that it is a Portuguese company in the sector of activity that is passing thorough a complicated phase in Portugal, but has managed to internationalize" (Interview 5)

In addition, companies also wish to be perceived as an employer that has a great **work offer**. This means that they wish to be seen as a workplace that offers conditions and benefits that facilitate these realization of the employees. In the statement below of the Interview 6 one of these conditions of the work offer is illustrated.

"… that fulfills the work-life balance, that is involved very ammm, ..., dedicated to having work out of the office and not having a fixed schedule, …" (Interview 6)

Likewise, the **importance of values,** so what the company believes in and lives by, is also how the company wishes to be perceived. According to the participant of the Interview 2 this importance of values plays a crucial role in the differentiation of the company as well.

"So we, we know, of course that Company 2 is still in an industrial sector so, amm, it may be difficult to compete with purely service, software services companies, so our proposition is that we focus on our values." (Interview 2)

Moreover, the companies strive for **recognition** in the market. They want to be seen as a company that cares for their employees and that attracts and retains the best ones. The Interview 6 also refers to being recognized as the best company to work for.

"A company known for having talented people. Ammmm .... And a company that ends up being one of the best companies to work for." (Interview 6)

The ***company's differentiation*** is yet another subcategory of the ***company´s framework*** that is crossing very closely with the company's EVP offer. Results show that many benefits of the EVP offer are also considered as the differentiation factors that companies see in themselves. The differentiation factors are the factors for which the companies believe are unique to them. The company's **positioning**, so its presence and recognition in the market and among competitors, is the most mentioned differentiation factor. As the participant number 8 stated their stronger factor is being a Portuguese company present in foreign markets as well.

> "Well, that's a good question. At this moment we differentiate ourselves mainly by 2 or 3 fundamental factors. On one hand, we are a Portuguese company, we sell ourselves a lot as well, that's okay, people come to work for a Portuguese company, so we basically work our know-how and sell our know-how out there." (Interview 8)

Besides that, companies believe that the **career opportunities** they offer make them different from the others as well. According to the Interview 6, the internal possibilities for career development and growth is what makes them unique.

> "… we have opportunities for internal mobility, amm, everywhere that we are present, in several countries. This is our differentiating factor. Then we also have the plan and management of careers." (Interview 6)

The multinational **dimension** with the diversity of areas is also considered as an important distinct factor among participants. As referred in the Interview 2, the dimension covers not only the size of the company but the diversity of areas as well.

> "… due to the fact that we are such a big multinational, we have everything from start-up companies to well established corporate divisions, …" (Interview 2)

Furthermore, the company's **organization** itself is unique too, for example a case of a company where there is no hierarchy and where the process is untypical. Or on a contrary note, as stated in the Interview 2, a company where there are strict implementations of the employee's objective definitions and evaluations.

> "so we have a very well structured and defined HR processes to ensure that we have, am, the, the definition, the goals definition done correctly, the evaluation done correctly." (Interview 2)

Companies also refer the **employees** as a factor that makes the difference, because it is them with their know-how and personalities, that bring additional value to the company. This differentiation was highlighted in the Interview 5.

> "What differentiates us are the people, it's the know-how that these people have, and from here it derives what I was telling you,…" (Interview 5)

Yet another differentiation is the **company's environment** that promotes mutual help and transparency, or fosters a culture of acceptance and cherishes connections between

employees. The example of such differentiating environment is explained in the Interview 4 statement below.

> "But it is the work environment, ok, it's the everyone helps another in the working process ok. Of course you have to ask, no one comes to you, and ok do that way or other way, no. You have to ask, but if you ask, ok no problem. There are no secrets." (Interview 4)

This same participant referred that the differentiation of the **company** also lies in their **benefits**. This means, company salary and other attractive benefits to employees, as stated below in the Interview 4.

> "we know, we pay above the average, ok. we have another benefits that our employees value a lot." (Interview 4)

Another differentiation is the **training** offer. In the statement below of the Interview 9, we can see how the participant is sure that training contributes to the employees' development and that is what makes them outstand form the crowd.

> "we differentiate ourselves by the way of training and the focus that we give to the development of our people." (Interview 9)

Furthermore, the work organization of the company matters too. According to declarations in the Interview 10, the employees seek **challenging** work, so therefore the company offers them complex projects where they can prove themselves.

> "And of course, we always try to, to have more complex projects and one of the things we try to best with the new employees and of course our, our employees is that, ammm, to, to be smart, to be capable of doing lots of things, lots of complex things in many different areas." (Interview 10)

Another part of work organization that was perceived as as a differentiating factor is the possibility of doing **investigation** work at the company. So, giving the employees time to explore new methods and do researches in the fields, is what makes a company different. As explained in the excerpt of the Interview 9, it is exactly this factor that makes them unique in Portugal.

> "But besides that we also have a very important role in the research. And our role is not just to store cells, but also to investigate, the use of cells in other, other diseases. And this is the big difference. No other company in Portugal does this." (Interview 3)

Besides the strive for investigation, some of the participants believe it is the company's **continuous improvement** that gives them a unique distinction. This inclination towards constant learning and ways of perfecting the current ways of dealing with the problems, is the one key factor. Or as the participant number 4 referred in his statement, always being in the improvement process.

> "Always in the process of continuous improvement." (Interview 4)

Employee attraction

The next category is the *employee attraction*. This category has emerged from 4 subcategories which are *strategy intention, strategy used, candidates' attraction motives and attraction alterations.* It explains which approaches are used in the organization to influence the employee attraction, what were the trends over the last years and what is the the employee's reason for joining an organization.

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING
	Strategy Intention
EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION	Strategy used
	Candidates attraction reasons
	Attraction alterations

Table 7. - Category of Employee Attraction

We are going to start by explaining the details of subcategory of *strategy intention.* Since it describes the company goals of employee attraction, it emerged from 5 different codes. The most frequent goal of attraction strategies is to **share the company's image,** so to share the values, beliefs and perspectives to the outside. An example of this image is stated in the following excerpt from Interview 2.

> "And we we try to pass on those core messages either through our website, so,…" (Interview 2)

Another similar, however different goal is to **share company's offer.** Here instead of sharing the company's belief, they share their monetary and non-monetary EVP. By showing what the company has and does for the employees, such as the inclusion processes and freedom that are mentioned in the statement of the Interview 4 below.

> "We have inclusion process, we have freedom to act, ok, you want to improve the work quality. (Interview 4)

Apart from these company's information sharing, the focus of strategies is also to cause an impact on the general public, so **mobilizing people** and **attracting new employees.** The difference between these two goals is that the latter focuses on a particular target group, so on potential candidates with the only aim of attracting, whereas the first one just seeks to generate any kind of response form public. So for instance, when mobilizing, as the statement from Interview 3 explains, a company only wishes to reach out to people.

> "and at the same time in a very simple way to reach out to all people." (Interview 3)

In comparison to what was expressed in the excerpt from the Interview 2, the companies number one goal is to attract.

> "for not also recruitment but to really show we are, we are invested in this in, that we really want to attract people for these projects." (Interview 2)

The next subcategory that composes the *employee attraction* is the *strategy used.* It illustrates all the means that employers use to attract the potential employees. The prevalent strategy that is used by companies is the organization of **academic activities** at universities, such as student awards, internships and study visits. On top of that, as expressed in the following excerpt from the Interview 6, the activities can also be high school's related.

> "Here it is more correlated to the young, ammm, through our plan of activities namely along with universities and another one through I-on related to high school education." (Interview 6)

The latter strategy, together with the presence at **events**, like job fairs and conferences, represents the two forces that companies use with most frequency to increase attraction among potential employees. It is important to mention that the events do not only cover the company's presence in outside events, but also events inside the organization, as is seen in the following statement from Interview 10.

> "Ok, what we do? Ok we try to be present, everywhere. Since the universities, events, Lan parties for example, that kind of thing parties that people from IT like. What more? Event, cocktails, breakfasts with other company so we try to appear in everywhere and say we are here and we are hiring." (Interview 10)

Besides that, having a strong, well thought **communication** is yet another strategy adapted by companies. This means, as shown in the excerpt of the Interview 8, adapting it to the audience, sharing their offer.

> "So, at the same time we have also done, in recent years, that what is small presentations of various businesses, or in other words, instead of taking a single macro presentation of the company that is a more generic presentation, more okay what we do, where we are at a geographical level, am also amm, also take the more technical presentations of each business area,…" (Interview 8)

In correlation all actions of the **recruitment** process, such as job ad design and involving current employees in the recruitment processes, is also a used strategy. The companies wish to present themselves fully and honestly in the process, and apply different measures to do that. For example, as the participant of Interview 10 summarizes in his statement, his company tries to put more of their personality into their job ads.

> "… we are trying to improve our announcements, recruitment announcements because not to be so serious, we try, we are trying, it's a thing we need to improve." (Interview 10)

The same posture and logic is applied in **interviews** as well, which represent another strategy that company number 1 uses for employee attraction.

> "And it's a little bit because of this that, all I'm going to do in an interview, …" (Interview 1)

Besides that, the **company's offer** or in other words the company's EVP, is also used to help attract the potential employees. Once again this means the monetary and non-monetary

benefits that are offered to the employees. As we can see in the statement below, the company number 2 communicates these benefits for example through their website.

"we also keep some information about our EVP in our, in our website, …" (Interview 2)

Having or knowing the **work experience** does also attract potential employees. Employees can this way get to know the diversity of areas that a company has and find an area that suits him them the best. This first-handed demonstration can be the strategy that makes a difference in attracting.

"Of course after, the experience inside of the organization, will make all the difference…" (Interview 1)

On the other hand, two interviewed companies mentioned that they do **not** have a **structured process,** meaning they do not apply any special strategies only with the intent to attract the employees. This implementation of strategies or actions is not organized as explained in the statement below, but rather happens naturally.

"I think, as I told you, it's not, we do not do it in an organized way …." (Interview 3)

Continuing with the subcategory of the ***candidates' attraction reasons,*** participants explained what in their opinion are the candidates' main reasons for joining a company. By far the **company's image** and **offer** were referred as the most powerful motives. So the company's product and employer brand covers the company's values, beliefs, processes whereas the offer includes the EVP package. The latter, the company's offer, was expressed as a motive in Interview 9, where the participant referred specifically the offering of challenging work.

"I think, I think that it's this and the multiplicity of challenges we have to offer to them." (Interview 9)

Additionally, the company's image was mentioned by the participant of the Interview 3, where he stated that the employees see the company as successful. For this particular case we can say it is this successful image of the company that encourages the employees to join.

"and they see the Company 3 as a successful company, to which they want to be connected." (Interview 3)

Closely connected to these two reasons is the employee **identification** with this company that also instigates employee attraction.

"and come here because they often already know our mission and identify themselves with it. It's more or less this." (Interview 3)

Besides that, it was also mentioned that the employee's reasons for attraction are **different** person to person, since people have different interests. As a consequence, each employee prioritizes differently their reasons. These different reasons are not only different in the

individual sense, but also when comparing the, in relation to attraction or retention. As referred in the statement from Interview 4, these are two separate reasons and the attraction ones do not automatically apply to the retention ones.

> "…, but it's not why they join and not why they stay, so it's different things. You join Company 4 and after 3 months ok, I don' like this, this is not for me and I change. Depends." (Interview 4)

The subcategory, *attraction alterations*, indicate all the changes that occur in the attraction processes of the companies in the last years. It emerged from the following open codes: r**ecognition, dimension, demands, candidates, market conditions, different recruitment tools and organization.**

What changed profoundly are the **demands** of the companies, so for example, companies notice the change and also feel the need to rejuvenate the teams in order to have better appreciation in the market. Another example of companies demands is the shift towards certain areas, as explained in the Interview 2. This company for example experienced a shift toward software development needs.

> "Well, I can only answer for 2 or 3 years back, am, what I see is that there's been a very big shift towards software development within Company 2." (Interview 2)

One more noticeable alteration is in the company's **recognition.** For instance, the companies that were not well-know a few years ago, now are or vice-versa. As we can see in the example of the Interview 2, the company's recognition passed from being an industrial employer to a software technology employer.

> "So like I said some years ago Company 2 was seen as a purely industrial company or acting in the industrial sector, and you now we are developing apps and developing a lot of software technology for our products, …" (Interview 2)

Furthermore, the companies' **dimensions** changed as well. This means a higher number of employees and consequentially different recruitment requirements, as also noted in the statement below.

> "so we are in expansion and we are hiring more people." (Interview 4)

Companies also noted changes at the level of the **candidates**. Among them, there is a shift from individuals with a traditional work perspective where a job position lasts a life time and security matters, to millennials that seek changes in positions and new knowledge as fast as possible. The participant of Interview 9 summed up a part of this alteration that his company is facing.

> "Nowadays, the young people are very fast, they enter a company, but they quickly want to leave or they enter into a job and they want to change. The fact that we can provide this conditions is our greatest advantage." (Interview 9)

On top of everything, the **market conditions** changed as well. The market is now faster moving and more demanding, joining different kinds of generations and where different candidates' requirements are needed and appreciated. The statement of participant number 8 alerts on how competitive the market is and how the company needs to adapt and act quickly to stay among the best.

> "Why, because every time the market is more dynamic, more demanding and every time companies have more means to be able to captivate and attract the best. This speed does indeed, make the time to make the decisions is very important, …" (Interview 8)

Another alteration is the **different recruitment tools** that are being used by the companies. For example, companies started collaborating with HR business partners to recruit a sufficient number and keep the quality of new employees. Others, as the statement from Interview 5 shows, started using online recruitment tools and started recruiting from their network of contacts.

> "I think it is often, and by the way we feel it every time more, the network in terms of recruitment, the network of contacts is an important source that has a weight, maybe it starting to have, maybe a greater weight than an advertisement add for recruitment. Ammm, and these are especially important for the key positions of civil engineers or electrical technicians, mechanics, and are many times done through this network of contacts." (Interview 5)

Another attraction alteration that one company witnessed is the **organization**. This means the internal processes they are using now are different, as for example the holidays software described in the statement below.

> "So what has changed a lot, we learned that we don't want to be together in an open space we learned that those little offices were good. It was a result of not enough available open space to be, but we like that result and we keep doing it like that. Sometimes we had to had process, so we didn't have a software for holidays, we had a spread sheets on Google Drive, and it became so heavy that if two people were opening it at the same time, it just crashed. So we had to change, because of the size we had to change. But it was so hard to find a software where we could remove all managers. This one you can add managers, but you can also remove them, so we talk to them and say, we don't want a manager, so how can we do this because everything is prepared outside to have that kind of structure that king of hierarchy, so we struggle with software for that." (Interview 7)

Employee retention

Finally, we are going to analyze the category of ***employee retention*** that embraces the actions and goals of a company's retaining process. It emerged from the following subcategories**: strategy intention, strategy used, employee retention reasons and retention alteration.**

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING
EMPLOYEE RETENTION	Strategy Intention
	Strategy used
	Employee retention reasons
	Retention alterations

Table 8. – Category of Employee Retention

The subcategory of **strategy intention** describes the goals of retention. It is composed by from the following open codes: ***Employees well-being, Valuing employees, Integration and Employee freedom.***

When retaining, companies pay great attention to the employees emotional and psychological bond with the company. Therefore, the most important retention strategies intention is the **employees well-being.** Companies, such as Company number 3 in the example, wish that the employees feel satisfied with the job and feel happy to work for their company. Besides that, they also like to show how much they value their employees and let them know they are an essential part.

> "… all these things so that people feel good when working here." (Interview 3)

For a similar reason, the companies give the employees the power to choose what is the best for them, even if that means leaving the current company. As seen in the statement from the Interview 7, the participant event encourages the employees to follow their aspiration. This complete **employee freedom** represents yet another goal of retention, because it is only if the employees follow what is the best for them, that they can also truly contribute for what's the best for the company as well.

> "I encourage people to be where they feel better, they feel well, they feel complete, they feel fulfilled and they feel they are following their values and principles. If we are not the place, we should not try to keep that person." (Interview 7)

Closely related to the goal of employees' well-being is the goal of employee **integration**. With this retention intention, companies seek to increase the employee's level of participation in the company. Furthermore, when companies try to create an even deeper sense of belonging they also try to include the employee's family, as described in the interview number 4.

> "Integration and all his and her, well more his then her by now, but not only for he or for her but for all the family. We bring all the family to Company 4…" (Interview 4)

The next subcategory of ***employee retention***, the ***strategy used***, catalogs all the company's implemented activates that help achieve higher retention levels. The most used one is the **company's offer** that includes advantages such as financial stability, fringe benefits, health insurance and an office space with good environment. As stated in the example of the Interview 10, this offer can be composed of simple things such as a better laptop.

> "Sometimes it's a very simple questions, like the need of a better laptop, ..." (Interview 10)

Next used strategy is the **career opportunities** inside the company. This includes all the communications of job offers internally and the definitions of employees' career plans that consider their development. The company number 2, for example uses the strategy of the internal recruitment, hence it considers the company as an inside market.

> "We are able to show people that they have opportunities inside, so before going to another company or going back into the market, they really can look inside, because we have a kind of the inside market with opportunities and that's one of the things that we use for retaining employees." (Interview 2)

One company also uses its **activities** as a strategy for retention. By implementing practices that bring closer the whole company and the employees' families, such as celebrations and holiday season events mentioned in the statement below, they influence retention.

> "And the anniversary of the company, we have a lot of activities for kids, and at Christmas" (Interview 4)

Another strategy used to retain the employees is the **performance evaluation**. Here, companies give special value to the employees that have the best abilities and that contribute the most to delivering results. So, as the participant of the Interview 5 referrers to, they follow a meritocratic treatment and performance results to prevent employees from leaving.

> "It is very much this, it is a great job that the group does and need to continue to do, that is very much on the level of ammm, spreading throughout the meritocracy, the performance of the employees because of this motive too, I think we consider that it is an important tool at the level of management this, this evaluation of performance, to spread throughout , to manage to spread throughout the performance, the good of our employees to then evaluate, measure and spread throughout the meritocracy. This is it, basically."(Interview 5)

Similarly, as the employee performance, employee **feedback** gathered through meetings and surveys, is also used as a strategy for retention. Companies believe, it is only by understanding the employees' drives and needs, that they can control and leverage the exits. So not only accepting the employee feedback and new suggestions, but also giving them attention and consider them in practical terms.

> "Another thing that I think also contributes to retention is the capacity that we have to integrate the feedback that is given to us by our employees. We value a lot the opinions of everyone, the constrictive opinions and everything that is done with the aim of helping us to develop. And the new blood brings a lot of that, the new blood brings new ideas, brings changes of paradigms and we really do incorporate this into our teams, so I think people really feel that they are being heard and that they feel so even if they are recent in organization, their opinion is taken into account, which is also a factor of commitment and engagement with the company." (Interview 9)

The next subcategory, ***employee retention reasons,*** characterizes the employee's reasons for staying within the company. By far the **company's offer** is the reasons that influences them the most. As already described before and as seen in the statement of the Interview 10, it covers the benefits, from salary to work conditions, and contributes to the employee's positive experience.

> "but also the conditions, the working conditions, not in this particular office that they're not very good, but in general the salary, aaa, the environments, the conditions of, of cars and benefits and so on." (Interview 10)

Participants also highlighted the fact that there are **different retention reasons per area**. Like the statement from the Interview 2 shows, this for example means that employees from the sales department appreciate other things that the employees from production do. Similarly, this difference is also dependent of the generation, since older ones care for different reasons than the younger ones do.

> "I think, I think it depends on the areas,…" (Interview 2)

The employees of higher hierarchal jobs, especially in IT areas, give great importance to the **challenges** they face at the work place. This means they like to test their capabilities of solving a particular problem or situation and confront demanding work. Besides that, as described in the Interview below, having diversity in a work day and constant new challenges also increases the employee's possibility of staying at the company.

> "I think there are several things, so, we at Company 6 we do not have two days that are the same, and therefore, because we use technology, the challenges are constant, so, we do not have one, whereas not only the planning, a team, that does not have in the second year, the same objectives, the same plan that it had the previous year." (Interview 6)

Similar to the motive of challenging work is also the level of **innovation** at work, that was mentioned in the Interview 6. The company is innovative when it is aware of its surroundings and the state of the art of their field, and acts upon to achieve it or even overcome it. In practice this means being up to date, technologically evolved and revolutionizing current procedures, products or services.

> "I think it's this innovation incentive that makes everything different and makes people stay." (Interview 6)

Moreover, the employee's **autonomy** and **attention** are another two reasons for employee's staying. The **autonomy** at the workplace, means that the employees have a space to lead and fulfil their professional aspirations, whereas **attention**, means the company's time dedicated to the employees and consideration given. The reason of **autonomy** was expressed in the statement of the Interview 3, where the participant said the employees like having autonomy.

> "… they like because they have autonomy… " (Interview 3)

The example of the **attention** motive was illustrated in the Interview 4, where the participant mentioned how the employees like to feel that they are being part of the company's decision and processes.

> "and work with them to make them feel that they are important to all the production process and decision." (Interview 4)

For those cases where the company's offer and treatment given are not enough, the **performance evaluation** plays a key role. This measured performance, means evaluating the employee's effort and results achieved, that therefore serve as a base for the appreciation and eventual rewards. As explained in the statement of the Interview 5, this reason is important for at least a part of the employees and that's why the company uses it.

> "But for others it is not enough, therefore it is important that we use and value the performance." (Interview 5)

Besides that, the reasons related to the employee's feelings, such as **integration** also contribute towards retention. When the employees feel like they are a part of the company, being accepted, they develop a certain affection with the employer which lowers their chances of leaving. Same goes for the integration of their families in the company as well, so employees appreciate when their family is considered and integrated. As the participant of the interview 9 stated, the feeling of belonging to a place is crucial.

> "but transversely there is a feeling of very great belonging to the organization. During the time that people are here there exists this, this strong culture and this strong feeling of belonging that people have, and this makes them stay." (Interview 9)

On top of that, **satisfaction** was referred as another motive too. Employees seeks a company where they can be happy and pleased with the conditions. As we can see in the following quote from the Interview 3, employees stay because they like to work there.

> "Because they like to work here. We do an annual satisfaction questionnaire about the organizational climate and one of the questions is, do I like to work in the Company. And what happens normally, we do not have 100%, but we have 99% of positive answers. Yes, they respond a lot with, 4 or 5, the scale is from 1 to 5 and 99% percent responds or 4 or 5. That's why people really like to work, to be here. (Ok) Although, they like it because they feel good, ..." (Interview 3)

Closely connected to satisfaction is also good **employee relations,** which are yet another motive for the employee's staying. When employees get along one with another and become friends, this make it harder for them to leave the workplace. The participant of the Interview 3 even noticed that these relations among employees sometimes continue even if one of them leaves the company.

> "because they normally make friends here. When someone leaves, it's enough just to look at Facebook and see that at the weekends they continue to keep the same friendship they had while they were working here. It's very much visible. (Interview 3)

We are finishing the description of category of *employee retention* with the explanation of **the *retention alterations*** subcategory. The retention alterations subcategory summarizes the retention changes over the past year at companies. What was discovered is that there are several **turnover tendencies**, such as the occurrence of lower turnover in traditional areas (e.g. management, accounting) or of higher turnover at operational areas where work conditions are hard, but employees are easily replaceable. The statement from Interview 1

below summarizes these tendencies. However, besides this tendency of particular areas, other ones like the difference in international and national retention levels or exits to companies inside the group or to the competitors, were mentioned as well.

> "Where we have the turnover? Especially in the more operational functions, we have here besides the headquarters have 3 factories, and factories have functions of production, line management, production, manufacturing the products and logistic functions also, warehouse operators At these functions, we have work in shift, rotating, aa, work in cold warehouses, because our products, some of them, have to be preserved in the cold, and these are in fact difficult conditions for long-term employees. Here, yes, we're having some turnover." (Interview 1)

Among the participating companies the alterations in terms of turnover are completely different, meaning some have **low**, some **constant** and some **high turnover**. Since the turnover represents the rate at which the employees leave the employer and are substituted by new ones, it means these companies face different flows in terms of exits and entrances. The alteration of **low turnover**, is illustrated in the Interview 4, where the participant states that his company currently doesn't face high numbers.

> "We don't have much turnover." (Interview 4)

The most frequent alteration was the **constant turnover**, which is illustrated in the Interview 6, where the participant states that the rate has maintained itself over the past years.

> "No, I can say that in recent years it has maintained itself. So we have exits, but we also have new entrees. No, I can say that in recent years it has maintained itself. So we have exits, but we also have new entrees." (Interview 6)

Two of the interviewed companies are having **high turnover** rates, especially because of the conditions on the labor market. The company number 10 is even facing the worst time turnover since their existence.

> "Mhm, over the past years, I know that unfortunately we are having the worst time turnover ever." (Interview 10)

For those who face high turnover, the retention represents a big **challenge.** This basically means that they are facing problems of unsuitable workforce and have problem with employee's absence. As referred in the Interview 10, it is especially hard with IT employees since it is the most difficult group to retain, because they have innumerous opportunities in the market.

> "Mainly because IT market is really, really hot in this time and so we have these notions that our people are always being harassed to other companies to, to join other companies of course." (Interview 10)

Among the participant companies, one referred there was no big employee **profile shift**. As we can see in the statement below, the trend for particular hires is staying the same.

> "So, the profiles that we seek are more turned toward annalistic people, that is, people of technology, people of management, of marketing, etc. We didn't, in recent years, noticed any trend at all." (Interview 6)

However, companies have shifted their focus onto **retaining only the best** employees and not the vast majority. In the example of the Interview 8, where they have big amounts of engineers it is only logical not trying to retain them all, except for the ones that are the most important to the company.

> "we have 1000 engineers, naturally as I was saying, we do not want to retain the 1000 engineers, even because as you know in terms of dynamics in the market it has changed a lot in fact in recent years, so nowadays we recruit engineers and amm, we have changed this part." (Interview 8)

One company also faced a change in their company's **organization,** not only in terms of dimension, meaning a higher number of employees, but also in the company's general culture. For that reason, as illustrated below, they even presume to face constant exists in the future.

> "Some people identify themselves with those values and principles and size, and once we grew and we change and more people have their say, they don't see, they don't see themselves here anymore. So I think it has evolved in that way. And we will see probably a steady pace of people leaving." (Interview 7)

Chapter IV – Discussion

In the present chapter we create a connection between the results of this study and the state of the art of EB. By linking them we address the research question and discuss how EB practices are used amongst the most attractive IT and Engineering companies in Portugal.

The four dominant categories identified from the data used by this study, meaning: the EB Process, the Company's Framework, the Employee Attraction and the Employee Retention, are deeply interconnected and effectively influence one another in several ways. They work for the same fundamental goal: attain the perceived image of being the best employer by the market (Love & Singh, 2011). A good reference for these intertwined connections between these dominant categories of EB is the fact that the shared content used by the EB Process is in fact the Company's Framework. Similarly, the EB Process serves as a mean to increase the Employee's Attraction and Retention (Amelia & Nasutionb, 2016; Cooper, 2008), and reciprocally, the attraction and retention represent the most basic objectives of the EB Process.

USE OF EB PRACTICES

Although EB has been present in the market since 1996 (Ambler & Barrow, 1996), this study revealed that EB is still seen as a new and trendy concept. Nonetheless, the results show that the companies are already familiar with EB, since their interpretation of it aligns with what was already stated by previous studies. One of the examples of such interpretations identified by the participants of this study is seeing EB as a concept that joins the area of HR and marketing (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Cable & Turban, 2003). The same way, interpreting it as the organization's image and its recognition in the market was also one of the already previously identified perspectives (Edwards, 2009; Ewing *et al.,* 2002; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Thorne, 2004). Similarly, by simply viewing it as the company's offer also was one of the common perspectives previously identified and corroborated by this study (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Love & Singh, 2011).

Various studies indicated that EB positively influences employee attraction and retention (Amelia & Nasutionb, 2016; Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Berthon *et al.,* 2005; Crous, 2007; Dell & Ainspan, 2001; Minchington, 2006) however in spite of this conclusions, it appears that EB still does not represent a priority among the employers that incurred in this study.

Furthermore, according to the results obtained, the process is not fully structured and exploited.

Nevertheless, an EB Process basic skeletal structure is indeed common to all the participant companies, according to their interview responses. We can basically sketch it in the following manifested steps:

1. Companies define their EB fundamental objectives and design their intended perception as an employer.
   a. EVP is readjusted.
2. According to the ideal outcomes, different EB Usage is put in practice alongside choosing the desired EB communication channels and content.
   a. EB guidelines are used as orientation during the implementation of the process.
3. Several company's departments are involved into the implementation of the chosen EB Usages with different responsibilities.
   a. The HRM, marketing and communication departments are present throughout the whole process.
4. Some forms of KPI tracking are used to understand the EB success.

Similar conclusions in relation to the EB process were already suggested by previous studies. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Lievens and Highhouse (2003) and Lievens (2007) divided the process into the 3 steps: firstly, the employer brand and EVP definition, secondly the design of the EB's external marketing and thirdly the design of the EB's internal marketing. If we try to compare these steps with the ones identified by the current study, they are contained in the first 2 steps of it, where the EB objective and usages are defined.

Other authors (Deb, 2006; Miles & Mangold, 2005; Barrow & Mosley, 2005) suggested another initial step should exist, even before the ones we identified by this study. This initial step's purpose is to analyse the current perception of the employer by the market, with the goal of better designing the new company's image to be perceived by the market, and ultimately, to be able to define a clearer roadmap of actions to attain it. Our study revealed, with its results, that such practice is not used at all by the participants, at least deliberately.

The competition became global (Sparrow, 2008), which forced the companies to develop marketing driven strategies with a global consideration (Sparrow & Balain, 2008). The results indicate that some of the multinational companies have a well-defined EB process,

and they usually receive guidelines from their international corporate. However, at the same time, some other multinational companies face obstacles due to this multinational dimension.

In spite of their dimension, participants know that the strategic alignment between the EB and their business is crucial. Both can be stronger if they work together towards the same goals (Chew, 2005). In order to attain these business goals, build a long-lasting employer brand and have the best results, the literature also suggests the alignment of the EB strategy among all the departments involved (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Biswas & Suar, 2016; Edwards, 2009; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Our results show that the departments are indeed aligned and that the companies developed a general strategy where each department involved in EB has a different responsibility, but always with a common goal. Of the three most involved departments; HR, communication and marketing; the first was identified as the one with the biggest role (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Besides that, it was concluded that the HR departments adopt strategic stances in order to align their HR practices with the business objectives (Ulrich, Younger, & Brockbank, 2008).

This study confirms the EB objectives identified by previous researches. According to our results the main goals of EB are to fulfil the business objectives (Barrow & Mosely, 2005), to attract, to motivate and to retain the current and potential employees (Dell & Ainspan, 2001) and finally to be used continuously (Wong, 2014). The EB objectives were proven to coincide with the participant's desired employer image. This is no surprise, since literature (Biswas & Suar, 2016; Miles & Mangold, 2005) shares the view of EB as a process that helps internalize and achieve the desired brand image.

Furthermore, the study results support the idea from Barrow and Mosely (2005) that there is no universal, ideal template for the employer brand and that the same should be shaped to reach the employer's objectives. However, the EB Usages identified may be quite the same. Events and academic activities were referred as an EB Usage so frequently, that one can argue that there is a common base for the selected usages of the EB process. The study of Wong (2014) had a similar conclusion and related the use of activities and events to higher employee commitment, engagement, and performance.

Since market conditions and the needs of the employees are constantly changing, the EVP needs to be constantly redefined. When we asked the participants how their organization deals with its EVP process, the majority stated that they adapt to the market and to the EVP target group (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The participants are aware of the fact that a good

EVP provokes attractiveness (Berthon *et al.,* 2005; Backhaus, 2004) and retention (Morton, 2004) amongst candidates, so they revise it regularly and check whether or not it is up to date. This process also adapts according to the company's market positioning and their concern about the employees. Added to that, the results show that when defining EVP, the organizations use EVP indicators that are designed according to their business necessities (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010). By implementing a certain offer they filter individuals that have the skills and the personality for the job, which consequently attracts and retains a specific profile or the talented individuals (Heger, 2007).

EVP OFFER

This study explored not only the EVP's process definition, but the current organization's EVP offer as well. Results confirm the conclusions of previous studies (Gibbons, 2006; Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013) that the emotional drivers, i.e. non-monetary EVP, have greater impact on employees than the rational drivers, i.e. monetary EVP. According to the participants and again in consonance with previous studies, employees value their personal realization (Berthon *et al.,* 2005) or career opportunities (Horwit , Heng, & Quazi, 2003; Lievens *et al*., 2005) more than a one-time bonus in amount of money. Nevertheless, this does not mean that other money incentives such as incentives or scholarships are not used and appreciated (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Berthon *et al.,* 2005; Lievens & Lighthouse, 2003), it is just that the non-monetary package brings more value to the employees in the long term.

These findings support the studies that have proven that strong employer brands invest in training and development activities (Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016; Wilden *et al*., 2010). We can assume that is also why the EVP offer includes the employee's autonomy to execute challenging tasks (Horwitz *et al.,* 2003) inciting him to show his best work performance.

Nowadays, employers give more importance to the company's values and culture comparing to what they used to. Even more, this study revealed that they even consider them as a part of their EVP offer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Therefore, the company's values and culture (Berthon *et al.,* 2005), alongside empowering people to change their workplace and balance their work and personal life (Christeen, 2015; Hillebrandt & Ivens, 2013; Tanwar & Prasad,

2016) represent the most frequent EVP offers. Since each company has a different EVP, the employee chooses the employer who has the offer he most relates to and the employer with whom he identifies the most (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter *et al*., 2004).

The EVP offers also consist of fringe benefits that vary from company to company as was shown by our results. This uniqueness also builds a stronger and more successful employer brand, since it contributes toward the company's differentiation (Minchington 2006; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Nonetheless, the offer of health insurance or life insurance was present in many of the participant's EVP offers, which shows a general organizational concern about keeping employees healthy and safe (Wong, 2014).

At the present time, the company's differentiation is what makes the company stand out among competitors (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Becker & Huselid, 2006) and the results state that the employers considered almost all the differentiator factors as a part of their EVP (e.g. challenging work, career opportunities, training). As of other differentiator factors (e.g. company's environment, organization, positioning in the market), these were proven to be very similar to the attraction factors in the Randstad study too (Randstad, 2015). It was also found, that employees with their know-how are what makes the company special, which supports the previous research conclusions (Gomes *et al.*, 2010) that people are a key factor to a company's success.

THE ROLE OF HRM IN THE EB PROCESS

Since HRM is responsible for all the policies, practices and systems used to influence the employee's behaviors (Gomes *et al.*, 2008), we further examined their role in the EB process. As Hughes and Rog (2008) suggested in their study with the integration of some HRM practices, many organizations, no matter the size or business activity, could improve their attraction of talent and retention as well.

The results suggest that HRM has a special care for the recruitment practices (Barrow & Mosely, 2005; Horwitz *et al*., 2003; Miles & Mangold, 2005; Subramony, 2009), since it is often the first and the last contact that an individual is going to have with the employer. Similarly, the HR departments also use practices of selection (Miles & Mangold, 2005) and on-boarding in the EB process. These two not only ensure that the candidate's first contact

with the employer is positive (Chew, 2005) but also that the entrance of new employees into the company runs smoothly.

Our study established that the HR departments endorse formations and trainings (Biswas & Suar, 2016) to satisfy the employees' wish for career growth and consequently to raise the company's retention levels. It became also clear that the HRM does not only supervise employees' progress by assessing their competencies, but also the employees' effort and results by evaluating their performance (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Subramony, 2009), to then manage the employees' career path in the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Deery & Jago, 2015)

Multinational companies try to adjust their strategies on different markets by aligning the HR practices between them. This increases the practices' level of coherency which is according to Razouk, Bayad and Wannenmacher (2009) one of the conditions for having a strategic HRM. Similarly, in order to make the company more attractive and compelling (Wilden *et al*., 2010), companies use communication practices (Biswas & Suar, 2016) internally and externally as well.

It was revealed by this study, and also by previous studies, that the HRM applies retaining practices such as activities that contribute towards the employees' well-being at the workplace (Horwitz *et al*., 2003). If the employer fulfils the promised set of benefits to the employees, meaning his part of the psychological contract, employees tend to stay longer at the company (De Vos & Meganck, 2008; McInnis, 2012). This study confirmed earlier studies findings that for a similar reason as retaining, the HRM also uses motivation practices (Chew, 2005; Horwitz *et al.,* 2003) and the exit interviews (Wong, 2014). By applying them, the HRM departments understand what are the employees' motivators and what are the employees' reasons for leaving.

EB COMMUNICATION

As HRM influences the employees' behaviour, the communication also influences the employees' and the public perception (Einwiller & Will, 2002; Wilden *et al.,* 2010). This study revealed that the company's communication is conveyed through various digital and non-digital channels with different messages. Among the most used digital channels are the intranet (Dawson, 2009), social networks (Kent, 2010; Saffer *et al*., 2013; Sivertzen *et al.,*

2013; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016), websites (Searle, 2006) and videos (Allen *et al.,* 2007; Biswas & Suar, 2016), whereas among the non-digital are events (Allen *et al.,* 2007) and academic activities.

Based on our findings, it is evident that the internal communication content is different in relation to the external one, however, both contents need to be consistent and not contradictory (Barrow & Mosely, 2005). As some previous researches highlighted (Love & Singh, 2011; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016) the communication of the organization's offer needs to be genuine and transmit the employer's offer.

TRACKING KPIs

Even though it is only by measuring the impact of EB that we can say whether it was successful or not, the results of this study reveal that tracking EB is a rather problematic chore for the companies. Although some forms of tracking KPIs are applied, these are not regular nor structured. Internally the companies measure employees' satisfaction and overall feelings through surveys, general feedback and exit feedback (Barrow & Mosely, 2005). Here, they try to understand what is working, what pleases the employees and how they can improve the weaker points. Besides that, they take into account the employees' reviews about them as an employer, the referrals given and the retention levels (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

The majority of the participants of this study stated that their external tracking is done by gathering feedback from events where the organizations are present or by examining the company's ranking among different studies. Some rarer forms of external tracking are benchmarking (Barrow & Mosely, 2005; Wong, 2014) and comparisons between the company's before and current position. Besides the retention level mentioned above, the most closely linked quantitative tracking KPIs of EB used are: the number of job vacancies, the number of candidates that applied and the average time to fulfil these job vacancies with a suitable candidate (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION PRACTICES

The results of this study suggest that the strategies used in employee attraction are not the same as in retention (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Besides that, both, the attraction and retention strategies were also proven to be used in EB process.

It became obvious with the results that the aim of employee attraction is to provoke the feeling of attraction among potential candidates through sharing the company's image, offer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and persuading the potential employees (Dineen & Allen, 2015). However, the results also revealed another less self-evident aim, the mobilization of people. This means, the organizations reach out to people only to tell them that they exist in order to increase their own visibility, which consequently provokes feelings (Rampl, Opitz, Welpe, & Kenning, 2016) and can have a determinant role in future decisions.

Even though each individual prioritizes differently his necessities (Lievens *et al.,* 2001), some of their reasons are common. For example, the results show the company's image on the market and its offer, is what makes the candidates more prone to join. Nonetheless, the companies can influence this decision by applying strategies that will increase the chances of the desired outcome. Various authors have explored more thoroughly which are these tools that help in attraction (Allen *et al*., 2007; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Horwitz *et al*., 2003). Similarly, the research of Horwitz and colleagues (2003) about the most effective HR attraction strategies, referred the career development, the opportunities and competitive pay as the main strategies used, which are also represented in one of this study's strategies, the company's offer.

EMPLOYEE RETENTION PRACTICES

This study suggests that the organizations wish to improve the employees well-being, their integration and their sense of freedom, with retention strategies to keep their employees for the maximum time possible (Cascio, 2003; Kossivi *et al.,* 2016). Participants adopted strategies such as internal recruitment and career management, which have already been proven to minimize turnover (Ghapanchi & Aurum, 2011; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Leidner & Smith, 2013). Furthermore, they also use performance evaluations to showcase the employees' contributions, to analyze them and also to appraise them. This employee's job performance can be positively related to the job satisfaction and negatively related with the

turnover intention, as concluded in the study of Joseph and his colleagues (Joseph *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, the employee feedback and the sponsored activities aim to integrate employees in the work decisions and consequently provoke a positive feeling among employees (Thatcher, Liu, Stepina, Goodman, & Treadway, 2006). Added to these strategies, is the company's EVP offer (Gibbons, 2006; Ghapanchi & Aurum, 2011; Horwitz *et al.,* 2003), which is also the only strategy that is common between attraction and retention practices.

The study also identified that some of these companies' strategies were also labelled as the employee's reasons for retention. This could mean that the companies, until a certain point, understand what the employees want (Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015). Although the employees' reasons are different per business area, some common ones exist. For example, the company's offer is considered as the employees' reason for staying, if it corresponds to their needs (Gibbons, 2006). Same goes for the employee performance evaluation (Joseph *et al.*, 2007) that highlights the employees' achievements, so they can consequentially feel more accomplished, proud and more motivated to stay. The employees' reasons to stay are: employee's satisfaction, so being pleased with work and conditions (Deery, 2008; Doh *et al.,* 2011); attention, being heard and taken into consideration; autonomy, having power over their work (Andrews & Wan, 2009; Kooker, Shoultz, & Codier, 2007; McKnight, Phillips, & Hardgrave, 2008) and integration, so the feeling of belonging and being part of the company.

Keeping the employees engaged, by giving them a challenging and innovative work that has significance to the company (McKnight *et al.,* 2008; Igbaria *et al.*, 1994) are also reasons for their stay as well. Employees cherish the role of employee relations, which are an important part of the organization culture and environment that also reinforces employee retention (Ghapanchi & Aurum,2011).

One noteworthy finding of this study was that the organizations face low, constant or high turnover and have consequentially different turnover tendencies. These results are partially contradictory to previous findings (Douglas, 2007; Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012), where the conclusions were that the best employers with strong employer brands have lower turnover rates. The results also show that ones with low turnover, only lose employees to companies inside the group, or, lose employees of lower ranked job positions. On the other hand, organizations that face constant turnover see the retention as a challenge, since they

lose employees to other competitors on the market. Knowing that their employees will be constantly leaving, they try to focus only on retaining the best individuals instead of all the employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

The reason for higher turnover rates could be related to nonfulfillment of the psychological contract (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004), but results suggest that the cause may depend of the business area. The results reveal that the companies from the IT sector have a tendency for having a high turnover. The IT area is nowadays an area of very big demand, which means the IT employees have a lot of offers available in the market and can decide to choose between the ones that suit them the best and satisfy their needs. As a consequence, IT organizations face bigger retention problems and higher turnover rates (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

From the qualitative interviews, it seems that the employer's attraction and retention alterations coincide in some aspects. Organizations change with time, as well as the market conditions, which affect both of the processes. It also consequently implies different demands and tools for attraction (Nolan, Gohlke, Gilmore, & Rosiello, 2013) or the need to retain different profiles.

Chapter V – Conclusion

In the present study we have scrutinized the EB implementation process and the employers' perspective rather than the EB outcomes and the employees' perspectives (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Collins & Han, 2004; Heilmann *et al.,* 2013; Dell & Ainspan, 2001; Lievens *et al.,* 2005; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Sullivan, 2004; Wilden *et al.,* 2010). The two latter perspectives have been the most researched topics in the area of EB until now as opposed to the first ones.

In the last decades the work market has suffered great changes (e.g. globalization and technology improvements) and the organizations were forced to adapt to these new conditions (Gomes *et al.,* 2010). We now live in a world where employees are valued more than ever, in a world where competition is ruthless, so the organizations need to attract and retain the best individuals to keep its competitiveness.

As literature suggest the EB can be a tool to help companies attract and retain future and current employees (Amelia & Nasutionb, 2016; Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Berthon *et al.,* 2005; Crous, 2007; Dell & Ainspan, 2001; Minchington, 2006). Since EB is a marketing concept, it aims is to create a relationship between the employer and the individual, and also to communicate a certain image about the employer. With EB the companies convey what can be expected from them as an employer. Therefore, the same way people feel more connected to a certain product brand, they can also feel more connected with an employer brand. By shaping an employer brand, the companies give meaning to themselves as employers and define their identity (Cable & Turban, 2003; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Elving *et al.,* 2012). The individuals then choose a certain employer over the competition due to this perceived identity.

In this study we seek to understand how EB practices are applied among the employers that are considered as the most attractive in the IT and Engineering companies in Portugal (Trendence institute, 2016). We conducted a semi-structured, in-depth interview among these companies to gather insights about their current EB processes. We explored not only the EB implementation, but also discovered which practices are commonly used, until what point the HR department influences it and which practices are used in employee attraction and retention.

We concluded that the EB represents an important part of the company's responsibilities, however not with a high priority. Despite its contributions to employee attraction and retention, the top management and other company's departments do not valorize it as much

as its founding areas, the HR and marketing, do. We have inferred that externally, companies use EB externally to influence their recognition in the market and internally to influence its current employees (Edwards, 2009; Ewing *et al.,* 2002; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002; Love & Singh, 2011; Thorne, 2004). Either way it is a continuous never-ending process in which different strategies are applied according to the company's objectives (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010).

We discovered that the EB process is partially structured and that some usages of EB are common, such as events and academic activities which should be considered as universal EB practices according to their frequency in use (Wong, 2014). Based on our findings, the EB process is also adapted according to the target group and the employer's business needs. The KPI tracking process, used to measure the success of the whole EB process, is also not very structured because of the usual hardship of defining what to track. Though some forms such as satisfaction surveys or event feedback have been identified (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Moroko & Uncles, 2008), tracking EB success represents a big difficulty for the companies.

In this EB process, communication represents a core part of it. We came to the conclusion that although there are many non-digital communication channels (e.g. events, manuals), the digital ones are gaining importance (e.g. intranet, social networks, website) (Balmer and Greyser, 2003, Miles & Mangold, 2005. In addition, we found that the communication channel is equally important as the content (Barrow & Mosely, 2005). The latter consists of all the information about the company, from its work related matters to job opportunities and the company's image.

The company's offer, so its EVP, is one of the main messages communicated throughout the EB process. It is rather unique per company, and according to previous studies it contributes to a stronger employer brand and its differentiation (Minchington 2006; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The non-monetary EVP factors were found to be more important than the monetary ones (Gibbons, 2006; Sivertzen *et al.,* 2013), the more frequent non-monetary EVP factors were career opportunities and health insurances. This offer is often readjusted since the market and employees needs change over time (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

We concluded that the HR department has the biggest responsibility among all the departments involved in EB, however an overall department collaboration is essential, especially for the other prevailing departments, such as management, communication and marketing (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Edwards, 2009; Moroko &

Uncles, 2008). As the HR department acts as the pillar of EB, this research has highlighted the HR practices that contribute to it too. The recruitment, training and evaluating performance are the ones that were used most frequently among many others.

We can conclude that the employee attraction and retention are the desired outcome of EB (Amelia & Nasution, 2016). However, the employee attraction and retention can also be considered as two separate processes, independent from the EB with their own implementation. The attraction and retention strategies are similar to EB usages, however when compared to each other they are completely different (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The only common point is the company's offer, which has, curiously, also been revealed as the employee's number one reason for joining or staying at the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Wilden *et al*., 2010).

We observed that the employee retention intentions are focused towards the employees well-being, whereas the employee attraction ones towards the candidate's perception. This kind of differentiation has been found in the future and current candidates' reasons for staying as well. Here, we identified reasons such as the company's image among attraction and among retention reasons such as employees' autonomy and integration.

LIMITATIONS

It should be noted that this study has been conducted in English, however a big part of the implemented interviews was done in Portuguese to assure the richness of the data and the participant's unlimited freedom of expression. Even though we tried to maintain the meaning when translating each sentence of the participant's native language, there is a possibility that the original essence may be partially lost in the translation. At the same time the participants who chose to conduct the interview in English may have limited themselves to the vocabulary that they dominate, which may represent a restriction in some cases.

Even though the research guaranteed the participant anonymity, the information passed in the answers may be not be completely genuine. This research used the qualitative methodology and our data consisted of the participant's opinions, these might be more acceptable and positive about the company rather than the actual reality. We could have better mitigated this problem by implementing the study on a bigger sample.

Finally, the participating companies act in a different areas of engineering (e.g. IT, chemical, civil) where conditions on the markets vary, which may have been the reason for a greater diversification of results.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Although we successfully structured the EB process there are still further steps that need to be followed in order to fully understand the EB process. We have provided a starting point, but further research may showcase each one of these particular stages of the EB process more thoroughly or compare relations between them, for example between the EB objectives and the EB Usages.

Throughout the study we also noticed there were different tendencies between the engineering and IT companies in some aspects (e.g. turnover, employee profiles), so therefore we suggest further research for each of these engineering areas. Similarly, we noticed a few variations between the perceptions of EB in multinational and national companies, so we suggest a comparative study to provide further insights on the differences between the two.

In conclusion, we did achieve our objectives and understood how the most attractive IT and engineering employers in Portugal implement their EB. Although EB has been present in the market for years and has already proven to bring value to employers (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Edwards 2009; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Collins & Han, 2004; Heilmann *et al.*, 2013; Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012; Lievens *et al.*, 2005; Schlager *et al.,* 2011; Towers Perrin, 2003; Wilden *et al.,* 2010), it seems that it still needs to gain a higher level of maturity to earn the deserved respect. As suggested by the participants, more work is still needed not only in raising awareness over the concept, but in structuring it as well. Since HRM has the leading role in the EB process now and is the only department with the business and the people's visions, we see it as the only possible game changer of EB making it shift from the current underrated perception to a more valuable one.

Finally, on a personal note, this study allowed us to perceive how Employer Branding is used and its evolution on the most attractive Portuguese employers of the IT and Engineering sector. This first-handed research with one-to-one interviews, allowed us to obtain real information about the employers and unique insights of their everyday struggles.

Furthermore, it led to the understanding how every organization functions differently and how various strategies work. Even though we did not discover a recipe for instant, higher employer's success, we undoubtedly noticed a special care for the employees' well-being among the participant employers. We believe it is for this reason that their employer brands stand out among the rivals, aiming to create environments and offer conditions for employee growth, which can only generate higher success levels for the companies as well.

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Annex

Annex 1

a)

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Here, I state a few questions about sociological and demographic characteristics that will contribute to the master thesis research with the theme of "Employer branding practices amongst the most attractive employers of the IT and engineering sector in Portugal". We thank you in advance for your participation and ensure that all information collected in this survey by questionnaire is completely confidential and anonymous.

Please answer the questions below.

1. Gender: □ Male □ Female

2. Age: _____ years

3. Level of Education:
□ 1st Cycle of Basic Education
□ 2nd Cycle of Basic Education
□ 3rd Cycle of Basic Education
□ Secondary Education
□ Post-Graduation
□ Degree
□ Master
□ PhD

4. What is your area of expertise? _____

5. How many years have you been working in the current company? _____ years.

6. What is your function in the company? _____ _____

COMPANY

1. Company location: ___ _____
2. What is the main sector of the company: □ IT □ Engineering
3. What is the main origin of the company's capital? □ National □ Foreign
4. How old is the company? _____ years.
5. How many employees does the company have? _____ employees.

b)

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Here, I state 17 questions about the process of employer branding that will contribute to the master thesis research with the theme of "*Employer branding practices amongst the most attractive employers of the IT and engineering sector in Portugal*". I kindly remind you to respond to the questions honestly, stating what is a common practice in your organization.

1. Based on your own professional experience, how would you define employer branding?
2. I would like you to describe the whole process of employer branding in your organization - from preparation, planning, implementation etc.
3. What are the most important goals that your organization wishes to accomplish through its employer branding?
4. What kind of employer does your organization want to be?
5. How does your organization differentiate itself from other competitors?
6. How does your organization define its employee value proposition (EVP) - employee offer?
7. What does the EVP consist of?
8. How do you communicate your employer branding messages inside of the organization?
9. How do you communicate your employer branding messages outside of the organization?
10. How do you measure the success of employer branding?
11. Which organization's departments are involved in employer branding and how?
12. Which Human Resources practices are used in the process of employer branding?
13. What does your organization do to attract the potential employees?
14. How has the attraction of new hires changed over the past years?
15. What does your organization do to retain current employees?
16. How has employee turnover changed over the past years?
17. If you could, which changes would you suggest to improve the employer branding process of your organization?

Annex 2

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, agree to participate freely in the study conducted by Lea Gregorka, within the course of the Human Resource Management and Development course, by the Higher Institute of Accounting and Administration of Porto (ISCAP) – Polytechnic Institute of Porto.

It has been explained to me that the theme of this work is *Employer branding practices among the most attractive employers of the IT and engineering sector in Portugal*, as well as the main objectives of it.

I have been informed that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may quit at any time, without having any kind of penalization for this action.

I was further assured that all information that I will share, will be confidential and solely used for the study and that my identity will be protected, unless I authorize by writing a disclosure of it.

I agree to respond a brief questionnaire and to participate in the subsequent interview.

I also allow the interview to be voice recorded for better data collection.

Signature of the participant: _____ Date: ___/___/____

Signature of the researcher: _____ Date: ___/___/____

Annex 3

Category – EB Process

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING	OPEN CODING
EB PROCESS	EB Interpretation	Concept
		Image
		Recognition
		Activities
		Ability to attract
		Ability to retain
		Offer
	EB Guidelines	Multinational orientation
		Adaptation
		Partially-structured process
		Strategy aligned with business
		Obstacles
	EB Usage	Common practices
		Academic activities
		Internships
		Promotional material
		Events
		Plan
		Environment
		Structure
		Dissertation projects
		Competitions
		Foundation help
		Campaign definition
		Everything a company does
		Recruitment
		Selection
		Company's offer
	EB Objectives	Proximity with academia
		Influence employees
		Promotion
		Fulfil demands
		Influence recognition
		Continuous influence
	Departments involved in EB	HR
		Communication
		Technical department
		Marketing
		Management
		Sales
		Employees
		Operations team
	Department's contributions to EB	Different responsibility per departments
		Designing materials
		Event presentations
		Organizing communication
		Overall strategy
		No policy
		Television
		Campaigns
		Magazine
		Intranet
		Events
		Social networks
		Academic activities
		HR
		Video

			Employees
		EB Communication channel	Manual
			Posters
			Training
			Website
			Foundation website
			Emails
			Newsletter
			Meeting
			Press releases
			Entities
			Interactions
			Selection
			Recruitment
			Customers
		EB Communication content	Company's image
			Work information
			Job opportunities
			CEO's feedback
			Challenges
			Customer experience
		Tracking EB KPI	Event feedback
			Benchmarking
			Studies
			Obstacles
			Number of job vacancies
			Time to fulfil the job vacancies
			Number of candidates
			Satisfaction
			Surveys
			Company's position
			Reviews
			Exit feedback
			Referrals
			Retention level
			Employee feedback
		HR practices used in EB	Recruitment
			Selection
			Communication
			Strategy
			Retaining
			On-boarding
			Training
			Performance evaluation
			Exit interview
			Motivation
			Career management
			Competences Assessment
			Market aligning of HR practices
		Suggestions for improvement of EB	Continuing current work
			Prioritizing EB
			Overall process
			Awareness
			Tracking of EB
			Communication
			Innovate

Category - Company's framework

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING	OPEN CODING
COMPANY'S FRAMEWORK	**Monetary EVP**	Salary
		Subsidy
		Profits
		Awards
		Incentives
		Scholarships
	Non-Monetary EVP	Personal realization
		Work-life balance
		Stability
		Training
		Family Care
		Medical Care
		Culture
		Innovation
		Company's values
		Evaluate performance
		Challenges
		Health insurance
		Life insurance
		Travelling insurance
		Travelling
		Car
		Doctor
		Carpool
		Means of transportation
		Protocols
		Pharmacy services
		Parking
		Location
		Office
		Food
		Career Opportunities
		Financial advisor
		Autonomy
		Portable Wi-Fi Hotspot
		Power to change the workplace
	Defining EVP	Employee concern
		Retaining importance
		Market positioning
		Revisions
		Adapting
		EVP indicators
		Not results driven strategies
	Company as an employer	Innovation
		Importance of values
		Impact
		Work offer
		Recognition
	Company's Differentiation	Career opportunities
		Dimension
		Training
		Investigation
		Continuous improvement
		Monetary EVP
		Environment
		Challenging
		Employees
		Positioning
		Organization

Category – Employee attraction

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING	OPEN CODING
EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION	Strategy Intention	Mobilizing people
		Share the company's image
		Attracting new employees
		Share the company's offer
	Strategy used	Recruitment
		Interview
		Company's offer
		Work experience
		Communication
		Events
		Academic activities
		Not structured process
	Candidates attraction reasons	Company's offer
		Company's image
		Identification
		Different reasons
	Attraction alterations	Recognition
		Dimension
		Demands
		Candidates
		Market conditions
		Different recruitment tools
		Organization

Category – Employee retention

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING	OPEN CODING
EMPLOYEE RETENTION	Strategy Intention	Employees well-being
		Integration
		Employee freedom
	Strategy used	Company's offer
		Career opportunities
		Activities
		Performance evaluation
		Employee feedback
	Employee retention reasons	Company's offer
		Different motives per area
		Challenges
		Innovation
		Integration
		Satisfaction
		Attention
		Autonomy
		Employee relations
		Performance evaluation
	Retention alterations	Low turnover
		Turnover tendencies
		Organization
		Constant turnover
		Retaining the best
		No profile shift
		Challenges
		High turnover