
CREATING AND MAINTAINING EMPLOYER BRAND DURING COVID-19 IN NGOS: NOT A LUXURY, BUT AN IMPERATIVE

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of organizations since it appeared. This study investigates the support offered by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to their workers to create and maintain an attractive employer brand (EB). The research qualitative data was drawn from 38 semi-structured interviews with NGOs workers.

This study used Hobfoll’s conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a theoretical framework to explain how EB can be sustained during the COVID-19 pandemic. COR theory was developed to explain individuals’ attitudes and actions when they face stressful situations.

The study found that organizational support is a key dimension of EB-COVID-19-support. Offering significant organizational resources to the employees enhances the EB in the eyes of current employees. This support takes many forms, such as providing protection tools, easy access to the COVID-19 tests, sharing information, and conducting awareness workshops. In addition, well-being support programs appeared to be a significant strategy that has been emphasized since the pandemic began (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020).

Offering technical support and training on how the effectiveness of telecommuting can be enhanced to telecommuting employees was found to be very important, particularly for employees and NGOs who had no experience of this type of job design previously.

Social support also appeared to be a key determinant of EB. It can be experienced from several perspectives, such as collegueship support during the pandemic such as sharing tasks and responsibilities with absent colleagues, this creates and promotes a healthy work environment, which is a major EB dimension (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017).

In addition, online work engagement (OWE) is one of the key attitudinal subjects of the social life of organizations (Saks, 2019; Carasco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2015). Currently, creating and maintaining strong ties and harmony inside organizational social networks is a key challenge that needs new ways of thinking to be sustained and to flourish. Employee engagement for instance will witness huge changes in its meaning and practices that therefore need new ways of engaging remote employees, which can mainly be achieved by new technologies and automation (Yawson, 2020). As shown in the results of this study, people used several online activities and gathering to enhance their interaction and commitment, such as online daily happy hours, online lunches, sharing strange recipes or photos, and memories.

The findings also showed that online training is prevailing nowadays, due to the difficulties in offering physical training in organizational premises or sending them to training centers. Training is one of the major dimensions in EB (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017), especially for current employees (Heilmann, Saarenketo, & Liikkanen, 2013). The need for upskilling and reskilling has been increasing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this momentum will continue in the coming years due to fundamental changes in the digitalized global economy (Yawson, 2020).

Finally, the findings revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic the important role of leaders in clarifying organizational objectives and strategies has significantly increased. Emotional support from leaders was found also to be a key indicator of effective leadership during the current pandemic. Relation-oriented leadership behavior is crucial in maintaining service employees' work performance, especially in virtual environments during crisis situations (Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen, & Huber, 2021). In addition, the study found that leadership, integrated with a virtual working environment, plays a key role in building cohesive and harmonious teams, which are required during crises (Liao, 2017). Leaders were also found to be a key factor in improving employees' abilities to make decisions by themselves, and be more self-directed and autonomous in their performance (Cheong, Spain, Yammarino, & Yun, 2016).

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