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Remote Employer Branding and its implications on future Employer Branding Strategies

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Introduction

The pandemic and its effects on the labour market

The working environment is changing constantly and employees are asked to keep up with new management techniques, new skills to acquire and to adapt. An unforeseen event, such as the global pandemic in 2020 has led to a different dimension of company and employee adjustment. This came not only with a quick change to remote working, but also with a high uncertainty among employees about how they should proceed with current projects. On the other side, also the management and superiors needed to cope with uncertainty regarding the organization´s performance and viability. New solutions needed to be found as soon as possible for all different dimensions of the organization. The pandemic did not only force the workforce and management to adjust, but it came also with socio-psychological, physical and technical implications for the whole organization. The long-term effects out of this situation are not known yet, but it is clear that the implications out of the pandemic will affect the organizations and the workforce way beyond the time of the pandemic. It would be inadequate to assume that the current challenge is only a singular one. The so called "New Reality" is offering new opportunities in the working environment and organizations together with practitioners will need to stay attentive to how this changing environment affects the employees adjustment and well-being (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) the global labour market has been severely impacted by the Corona Crisis. In the first half of 2020 alone, there were almost 93% of the global workforce that resided in regions with certain workplace closure measures in place (e.g. switching to remote working options). The working-hour losses worsened in 2020, which was influenced by a number of factors, however significantly impacted by rising unemployment rates. The highest working-hour losses in the second quarter of 2020 have been registered in Americas (18.3 %) and Europe/Central Asia (13.9 %). (ILO, 2020) In general, countries that are navigating in the category of lower to middle income did register the highest rise in working-hour losses with 16.1 % in the second quarter in 2020. Overall, the economic and business environment is currently rather unstable and many businesses do not see a quick restore of their operations to full capacity in the near future. (ILO, 2020) Additionally to these significant challenges on the economic and labour market, there are also the challenges that arose within the organizations. Due to a rising number of companies offering (or urged to be offering) flexible working conditions since the Corona outbreak, we will be seeing a

lasting transformation in this area also after the pandemic. More employers will implement remote working policies, as well as more employees will demand to have this kind of flexibility in terms of structuring their own working hours and schedules. Connected to this fact, there will be probably a decline in the need of office real estate, as less people will be working the full working week in the office building. (Nelke, 2021) This kind of change does not only come from the fact of the pandemic, but has also shown more advantages to the companies throughout the last two years, for example time savings, cost efficiency and more sustainable business practices (e.g. less business trips necessary). (Nelke, 2021) As the working environment is changing, also the organizational environment or corporate culture will be adapting to the new circumstances and styles of working, as well as cooperating together. Furthermore, it is also evident how difficult the recruitment of new talents and retention of employees has become in the last two years of the Corona pandemic. This development showcases how important it will be to professionalize the external and internal employer brand, adapting it to the online channels (such as Social Media) that are not bound to any region or office building (Nelke, 2021). By adapting the employer brand to online channels, Employer Branding Specialists should be aware and take into account what their target audiences are interested in or what kind of employer attributes are attractive to them. The key here should be to analyse the specific target audience, knowing how the preferences did change within the last months, as well as knowing how they do differ across different age groups or generations.

Different generations, different needs

The current labour market is represented by different generations, with different needs and expectations towards the employer. By definition, those differences among generations occur because of major influences in their environment throughout their lifetime and these experiences influence the development of the personality, values, beliefs and expectations. That is why with four different generations at the workplace, there will be four groups that are driven by different values and motivations, partially even speaking a different language. (Susan J. Reilly, 2010) An attractive employer can be seen very differently, depending on the job seeker´s generation and his or hers current needs. Organizations must be attractive to their specific target group, attracting the right talent to make sure that there is a good fit with the corporate culture. The process of finding the right employee with high potential became more complicated as different generations

are in different stages of life, demanding different aspects from an employer. The Generation Y (born after 1980) for example, is particularly looking for an employer that can offer more flexibility, a meaningful job, professional freedom, higher rewards and a better work-life-balance. Their needs are very much different than those of the older generations, for example the generation of Baby boomers. Generally speaking, individuals do have different needs according to different life stages, so they look for jobs that are able to satisfy what they are currently striving for. (Elving et al., 2013)

The below graph shall give a rough overview of the currently present generations at the workplace, their credos and values.

	Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)	**Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)**	**Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)**	**Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)**
Credo	"If you have it, flash it" (Dries, 2008)	"Time values more than money" (PeopleSpirit, 2021)	"Let's make this world a better place." (Dries, 2008)	"Realism" (PeopleSpirit, 2021)
Values	very process-oriented and methodical, focus heavily on their careers, called "workaholics." (Dries, 2008) Freedom is less important than for younger generations, hierarchical thinking and group-oriented (Schneider, 2016)	independence, scepticism, fun, and balance (Dries, 2008). Work-life-balance tends to be more important than for the Baby boomers. (Schneider, 2016)	collectivism, balance, passion, civic mindedness, and confidence (Dries, 2008) Tends to be less in need of harmony, however more flexible in times of change. (Schneider, 2016)	Realistic and partially becoming more optimistic, distinctive pragmatism, performance and enjoyment equally important, tired of politics, individualism but also family-oriented (Schneider, 2016)

Graph 1: Generations: overview of values and credos according to own visualisation

Employer Branding in times of a global pandemic

In the year of 2020 the Corona Crisis has changed the way of working and living. Companies needed to adjust to certain restrictions and remote working became the new normal. The Human Resource (HR) departments in all companies became also a leading force in terms of administering all changes, setting up flexible working policies and were also one of the main contacts to keep in touch with employees while working from home. (David G. Collings, 2021) Managers were also facing the challenge of making many decisions in a short period of time, under stress and uncertainty. It was and still is important to settle how and where employees should work from, how to keep them safe and how to support them while working remotely. (Caligiuri et al., 2020) The Corona crisis is being described as a human one, putting the HR leaders in a central position to drive the organization and enable it to exit the crisis successfully. At the same time, this situation offers opportunities to the HR function to elevate the status and reinforce the influence of the HR department in the organization. The people-centred function is being often underestimated, however it is a vital role of any company. A well-structured and operating HR department can have a very strong impact on a more sustainable performance of the workforce by aligning the purpose and the organization's short- and long-term objectives. (David G. Collings, 2021) Corporate Employer Branding, as part of the HR department, takes on the difficult task to make sure to attract and especially retain the right talents in the organization. Due to the changing environment on the labour market (also known and described as the "war for talents"), this function has greatly gained importance in the last years. (Nelke, 2021) Due to the Corona pandemic, the area of activities in the Employer Branding function became even more challenging. The Employer Branding Specialists are normally the responsible persons from companies that go outside of the company to talk to potential employees, spreading the USP (Unique Selling Proposition) and EVP (Employer Value Proposition) of the employer to attract the right talents. As the circumstances have changed, for example lack of face-to-face communication due to the pandemic (i.e. events and fairs were cancelled), Employer Branding Experts needed to adjust to digital-only events and stay connected and attractive as an employer (Nelke, 2021). They faced the challenge to keep in touch, though only in a virtual way. The aim of this Master thesis is starting at this point and aims to highlight the side of potential applicants and job-seekers, therefore focusing on the external Employer Branding perspective. The goal is to find out which specific *Employer Branding Dimensions* (see all dimensions listed under the chapter "Employer Branding Dimensions"*)* became more or less important for job-seekers during the crisis. The expectations and needs of

current job-seekers shall be highlighted and surveyed in the course of this research. The final result should contribute to the theoretical basis and give Employer Branding Experts an insight about the status-quo of what job-seekers are looking for. These insights can be of high value in the current European labour market, which presented a challenging labour gap in 2021 (Wolf, 2021).

Research objective and Hypotheses

Based upon the stated facts that describe a challenging labour market and difficulties for the employers to attract their target groups in terms of potential employees, there is a need to examine the current needs and expectations of job-seekers. Especially the fact of the persistent corona crisis is playing a vital role in this research, as it has a strong impact on the economic environment as well as on the private life of each individual.

Therefore, this research will be focusing on the stated challenges by analysing the theoretical framework of relevant Employer Branding concepts. Furthermore, a quantitative research by conducting an online survey shall contribute with the current sentiment of job-seekers and include a practical insight into how the corona crisis has impacted the perception of a potential employer by job-seekers as well as the expectations of the job-seekers. Based on the theoretical and quantitative research, the analytical objective shall be to contribute to the theoretical basis and give Employer Branding Experts an insight about the status-quo of what job-seekers are looking for.

The **research question** leading on this thesis is as follows:

> *How did the expectations towards a potential employer from current job-seekers have changed compared to expectations from job-seekers before 2020?*

The underpinning hypotheses are stated as follows:
- **H1:** Current job-seekers value a company known for a stable working environment higher in the current search than in a previous job search (before pandemic).
- **H2:** Current job-seekers would rather accept a job with lower Economic value, but higher Work-Life-Balance.

Thesis structure

The thesis structure is starting with an in-depth theoretical analysis of relevant Employer Branding frameworks and theories. The focus is set on the Employer Branding dimensions, followed by the PE (Person-Employer)/PO (Person-Organization)-fit, the Signaling Theory, Employer Attractiveness Scale as well as the generational differences within the Employer Attractiveness Scale. Based on the theoretical basis, the quantitative research conducted with an online questionnaire is set-up and shall analyse the sample of current and potential job-seekers, understanding how their expectations have changed during the time of the pandemic. While connecting the output of the quantitative research with the theoretical basis, an analysis and interpretation will bring both aspects of theory and research together. Finally, an outline of potential future research as well as important outcomes that do have an impact on the professional area of Employer Branding Experts shall conclude this thesis.

Employer Branding and it´s theoretical framework

According to Moroko, L. & Uncles, M. (2008) the topic of Employer Branding is a mixture out of different marketing approaches, i.e. Consumer and Corporate Branding. In general, Employer Branding connects the actions and disciplines of Marketing and Human Resources. In many companies the Employer Branding teams are working closely with Human Resources colleagues and Marketing colleagues to publish HR-related messages, attracting the best talent. The theoretical definition of Employer Branding states it as "*the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work*" (Moroko & Uncles, 2008, p. 161) or often also described as "*the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company*" (Moroko & Uncles, 2008, p. 161). However, there are multiple definitions of the Employer Brand like "*a set of attributes and qualities – often intangible - that makes an organisation distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience, and appeals to those people who will thrive and perform best in its culture*" (Walker & Platt-Higgins, 2009, p. 3) or *"the image of your organisation as a 'great place to work'"* (Minchington & Australia, 2006).

As per the study by Ambler and Barrow (1996), "Employer Brand" refers to overall benefits provided by the company, for which job seekers and employees believe that it could create distinctive employer enthusiasm so that they are willing to join or stay in the company (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2015). The term Employer Branding, coined by Ambler and Barrow (1996), refers in this case to a package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment of the specific organization. The employee identifies those benefits also with the employing company. Furthermore, the concept of Employer Branding (EB) is explored in greater detail in studies as for example by de Bussy et al (2002) and by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004). (Elving et al., 2013)

Employer Branding Dimensions

The fundamental theory on Employer Branding and its dimensions has been described in seven aspects, according to Ambler and Barrow (1996) and Dabirian et.al. (2017):

- **Interest Value:** Describes the degree of attractiveness of the employer, who provides a work environment and situation with opportunities for innovation and for creativeness.
- **Social Value:** Describes and calculates the mark of attractiveness of the firm, that provides a work environment with good and welcoming team spirit and friendly relations among co-workers.
- **Economic Value:** Describes the financial part of the employment package, which reflects the value of attraction of an employer providing a worthy remuneration and profits.
- **Development Value:** Describes the attractiveness of the employer according to the training and development offer for employees.
- **Application Value:** Describes the attractiveness of the organization according to the degree, to which the employee can apply the learned skills and knowledge.
- **Management Value:** Describes the generally perceived influence of the management team and supervisors and in which way it determines employee retention (positively or negatively correlated).
- **Work-life Balance:** Describes the balance between employees´ work and private life and how this allows them to work efficiently and in harmony.

The last two Employer Branding Dimensions, i.e. Management Value and Work-Life Balance, have been added to the overall framework by Dabirian et.al in 2017. All of these dimensions influence the Employer Brand and are being perceived by employees and partially by candidates as an influential aspect on the organization´s image (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). The theoretical work by Ambler and Barrow has been fundamental for further research on Employer Branding and initiated more publications, that started to connect the Marketing theories with Employer Branding. The following EB Mix by Barrow and Mosley can be seen as sequential theory, that includes more detailed aspects of the EB Dimensions.

In 2005 Barrow and Mosley published a book titled, The Employer Brand, with the main aim of promoting clarity regarding the concept of EB, especially due to the stronger focus on EB and the growing "War for Talent" (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, p. 3-13). They developed an "EB mix", comprising 12 key dimensions of EB that can be used by a company to attract, engage and retain the workforce. These factors influence the employees' experiences with regard to the Employer Brand. Those 12 key dimensions are further split into two parts, i.e. "Big Picture: Policy" and "Local Picture: Practice" (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The graphic below shall represent the overview of this concept.

Graph 2: 12 dimensions of the EB Mix by Mosley and Barrow (p. 150)

The Big Picture is corresponding to the wider organizational context and policy. Each of the six Big Picture aspects (i.e. External reputation, Internal communication, Senior leadership, Values and CSR, Internal measurement systems and Service support) represents a touchpoint with the Employer Brand (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

1. **External reputation**: A general assumption reflects that a company with a positive reputation to the outside, is also being seen as a good or attractive employer. Employees working at a company with a positively known brand, feel connected and experience a recognizable status when working at a successful firm. It is therefore inevitable to pay attention to the external brand, not only for customers but equally also for the employees.

2. **Internal communication**: Generally, it can be said that all internal communication is regarded as employer brand communication, because every news or piece of communication does reflect a part of the organization itself. The communication and experience across the organization should correspond to the overall Employer Brand and most importantly, should be also aligned across different departments and functions. Furthermore, the style of communication should be aligned as well and consistently support the desired values and culture of the company.

3. **Senior leadership**: One of the most powerful roles in terms of communication lays in the hands of the Senior leadership, which should be reflecting the Employer Brand in behaviour and in what is being communicated and how. Employees do listen very carefully, therefore it is important to make sure that the leadership team communicates trustful messages, connected to the Employer Brand and cultural spirit.

4. **Values and CSR**: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been put very much into the focus of corporate strategies in the last years and has also gained immense interest across employees and candidates. According to a study in 2001 by the Work Foundation (Barrow & Mosley, 2005), 20% of employees agreed that employers with a positive socially responsible image are more attractive.

5. **Internal Measurement Systems**: Organizations that measure employee satisfaction and engagement on a regular basis, do perform generally better with a stronger Employer Brand.

6. **Service Support**: A critical moment of truth can be experienced by the employees in difficult times or challenging situations (e.g. this might be even a technical problem with

the IT equipment) when asking for help in the organization. If employees are being asked to work efficiently and effective, but they do not experience the same from their teams and organization, this leads to an unsatisfying and negative experience.

(Barrow & Mosley, 2005)

The Local Picture is corresponding to the local context and practice within the Employer Brand Mix and includes as well six important aspects (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

1. **Recruitment and Induction:** The recruitment as well as the induction process do have a very strong influence on how the candidate and potential employee gets to know the Employer Brand. It is the best opportunity to showcase the organizational culture and what it expects from its team.

2. **Team Management:** The local team management directly influences employee engagement and should also reflect the corporate spirit in how it behaves and communicates. Having a good relationship with the team and supervisor is a key element for the employee.

3. **Performance Appraisal:** the performance appraisal or review is one of the best opportunities to observe how the Employer Brand is being lived in the team. Core values of the organization should be embedded in this process.

4. **Learning and Development:** in a study conducted in 2004 by IES (Barrow & Mosley, 2005), Learning and development has been rated as the most important influential factor on employee satisfaction (feeling valued, involved and engaged). It reflects the Employer Brand in an aspect how it is touching the employee´s development journey within the firm.

5. **Reward and Recognition:** just as important the recognition of the employee and its accomplishments is, the reward also needs an equal attention. It is an important driver for employee engagement and an essential part of the employment package.

6. **Working Environment:** the working environment influences the well-being of the employee as well as their perception of the Employer Brand. Modern and well-furbished surroundings positively influence the employee´s perception. It does also communicate the spirit and culture of the organization.

(Barrow & Mosley, 2005)

All of these factors are important and have a strong influence on the candidate (before joining the company) and employee experience. Therefore, it is inevitable to make sure the Employer Brand is well represented and communicated across all stages and aspects, as shown within the dimensions of the Employer Branding mix. Even though each aspect plays an important role and can be influenced by the employer to a certain degree, a general fit between the employee or candidate and the organization is also very important.

The P-E/P-O fit

As already mentioned, organizations are looking to attract the best talent which shall be the perfect fit for the organization and the organizational culture. The respective theory, which describes this relationship and functionalities, is the P-E (Person-Employer) or P-O (Person-Organization) fit. This theory states that job-seekers are attracted to and selected by the employer whose work environment (including overall culture, job specific activities, etc.) reflect the same values, cultures and work features as the ones of the individual (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). How and if the employer is attractive to the individual is related to the manner in which particular characteristics of the job and the work environment are perceived by the individual. Depending on how this organization is being represented to the outside (External Reputation), potential employees use their perception of those represented characteristics as signals and determine if this employer would be a good fit and how it could be working there. The P-O fit paradigm includes two different traditions, as described by Cable and Edwards (2004):

1) **The complementary fit:** this describes the situation when the weaknesses of the environment are offset by the strengths of the person or firm. In practical this can mean that the candidate or potential employee offers skills and know-how, that the firm needs. At the same time, it could be also vice versa, i.e. the firm offers the reward that the potential employee needs.

2) **Supplementary fit:** this situation can be described as if the person and the organization are attracted to or possess matching characteristics. In practical this could mean that the individual as well as the firm value the same cultural aspects, e.g. valuing autonomy, being performance oriented, etc.

(Cable & Edwards, 2004)

Several studies have been conducted on the importance of the right P-O fit and underlined the positive effects of such. The right match between personal and fundamental organizational characteristics and values enhances the attractiveness of the organization and also supports the employee in identifying with the employer (Elving et al., 2013). It has been also shown that employees with a maximized P-O fit entering the new organization flourish and experience higher levels of satisfaction, engagement and overall well-being (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Originally this theory stems from the person-environment paradigm, based on the proposition that attitudes and behaviours are the result of the congruence between attributes of person and environment. Empirical studies focus on the antecedents and consequences of compatibility between a person and an organization. In general, the P-O fit has been also described as the theory where the compatibility between an individual and an organization can occur either when at least one entity provides what the other needs, or if they share similar fundamental characteristics. Also both situations may be represented. A study from 2004 by Slaughter and colleagues suggested that potential employees feel more attracted to an organization that represents traits which match those that the individuals may describe as their personality traits (Elving et al., 2013). The direct perception of a fit between individual and employer has been suggested as an explanation for organizational attractiveness. In order to make sure that job seekers are able to determine the level of their personal P-O fit, organizations should take care of their recruitment advertising strategy and the so-called "signals" that they are sending to potential job seekers. The employer must present sufficient information about essential matters as the mission, values and achievements. The activities of Employer Branding must take this into account and adapt to the importance of the P-O fit. Furthermore, the image perceptions by job-seekers and potential employees must be supported by a unique and attractive brand image of the employer. (Elving et al., 2013)

Signaling Theory

Adding to the P-O fit and the right match between the potential employee and employer, the Signaling theory may provide an explanation for this relationship. Generally, job-seekers tend to inform themselves about the potential employer on different channels, collecting as much information as possible to reflect if the respective organization may be a good fit. However, potential applicants do not receive the complete information on the work environment, different internal processes and other internal values or activities. Job-seekers use then job and organizational characteristics to form an image or an idea out of the available information to decide how it would be to be part of that organization. Such job and organizational information which is available to potential employees are used as signals that reflect the working conditions within the organization. (Elving et al., 2013) The Signaling theory takes into account the impact of many factors that may act as predictors for attracting candidates and potential employees and several studies have shown that there is a number of different environment variables, that individuals perceive as signals, which can be organizational characteristics or policies, recruiter characteristics, recruiter behaviour and recruiting activities. The understanding of the Signaling theory shall facilitate the firms to understand the psychological processes that potential employees get involved into when they subjectively and individually judge the employers´ attractiveness. However, due to the broadness of this theory it is difficult to understand the depth of it and consequently difficult to characterize which variables are the most important in the different stages of the attraction process. (Erhart & Ziegert, 2005).

Employer Attractiveness Scale

Compared to the Signaling Theory, the Employer Attractiveness Scale (also referred to as *EmpAt*) might be perceived as a less broad theoretical framework, however concentrates on the depth of the specific variables, which are characterized as attractive regarding the employer or organization from the employee´s or candidate´s view. The specific employer or organization has different characteristics that can be seen as particularly attractive and therefore desirable for individual job seekers, group of job seekers, as well as the existing workforce. The concept of Employer Attractiveness has been already broadly discussed in different areas, such as vocational behaviours, applied psychology, management, communication or marketing. As more and more organizations are striving to become the "Best Employer" or "Employer of Choice", the topic of

measuring Employer Attractiveness has gained more attention across HR and Recruiting Experts. Berthon and Hah define "employer attractiveness" as "*the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization*" (Berthon & Hah, 2005, p. 156). By measuring those benefits or characteristics, that are perceived as attractive, the organization is able to analyse its employer brand equity. In other words, the more attractive the employer is to the outside (candidates), the stronger the employer brand equity. According to Berthon´s studies (Berthon & Hah, 2005) the EmpAt characteristics can be essentially grouped into five values:

1) **Interest value:** describes the working environment and if it is perceived as exciting, interesting and to what extend innovation and creativity are being implemented in daily working routines (often referred to as the innovation value).

2) **Social value:** describes to what extend the individual feels welcome in the social work environment, having good relationships with colleagues and superiors and the overall work atmosphere (often this is also being addressed by the corporate culture).

3) **Economic value:** describes the financial part of the employment package and to which extend this is being perceived as attractive to the employee (e.g. above-average salary, bonus programs and other salary components). It might also take the job security and career opportunities into account.

4) **Development value:** describes to which extend the organization does offer career development opportunities and whether the work environment offers recognition to the individual.

5) **Transfer or Application value:** describes to which extend the work environment allows the employee to apply the individuals´ skills and know-how. It might as well include aspects about environmental and social goals.
(Berthon & Hah, 2005)

It can be easily observed that Berthon and Hah based their EmpAt scale on the theoretical foundation from Ambler and Barrow´s Employer Branding Dimensions (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). By including Ambler & Barrow´s three dimensions (functional, psychological and economic), which are described as deductive, and including additional two inductive dimensions (development and transfer value), the EmpAt scale can support a substantial measurement of the Employer brand and help understand factors contributing towards employer attractiveness.

By integrating these factors into the Employer brand and focusing on attracting and retaining employees with the right (advertising) messages, companies can better position themselves on the competitive employment market. (Berthon & Hah, 2005)

The Generational perspective of Employer Attractiveness

Further research about the employer attractiveness has been done in 2016 by Braga and Reis in their academic paper about the generational perspective and its implications for Employer Branding. With new generations entering the job market and organizations, new challenges as well as opportunities arise for companies to attract, motivate and retain different generations (Braga & Reis, 2016). As already touched upon this topic under the chapter of "*Different generations, different needs*", there are many differences in how those generations view the employer, what they value and what their needs are in daily lifes as well as aspirations for the future. Different generations may prefer different people management practices, obviously also in the recruitment and retention process, as mentioned by Braga and Reis (Braga & Reis, 2016). In their research, Braga and Reis focused especially on the different EmpAt factors and less on general values and personality traits of the generations. By asking the question "Which are the employer attractiveness attributes prioritized by different generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y?", they aimed to directly touch upon the EmpAt scale and contribute to this theoretical framework with the generational view. A survey has been conducted with 937 individuals from different age groups, companies, industries and mostly with a high educational level. The foundation for the EmpAt scale was the framework by Berthon et al. with five dimensions (Interest value, Social value, Application value, Economic value and Development value). The research has shown significant differences concerning the Economic value, which appeared to have decreasing importance from younger generations to older generations. The Application value, on the other side, showed higher interest and value among Generation Y and decreasing interest among older generations. Exactly the opposite result has been shown with the Interest value, i.e. the older generations (with more experience) are attracted to organizations that can offer a more challenging work environment, using new work practices and products as well as offering an innovative and creative working atmosphere. Interesting findings were presented among the three generational groups (Baby boomers, Generation X and Y), as for example Baby boomers see the Interest value as the most important dimension when choosing an employer.

Relying on existing literature (Dries, 2008), this finding may approve that this generation tends to be differently committed to work compared to other generational groups. Among the Generation X it was shown that the Development value and Economic value were seen as the most important dimensions. This might also reflect findings from previous studies (Dries, 2008), that this generation tends to see itself as more independent and less committed to the employer. Generation Y ranked the Economic Value as the most important dimension, followed by the Development value. This generation values rewards, development opportunities and the working environment itself. In general, the result analysis has shown that more experienced generations struggle with differentiating the five EmpAt dimensions, whereas the younger generations (X and Y) were more sensitive with regard to the different employer values and attributes. Finally, the research has shown that it is essential and important to differentiate the EB strategies according to different target groups (in this case generations) and customize EB initiatives accordingly. (Braga & Reis, 2016)
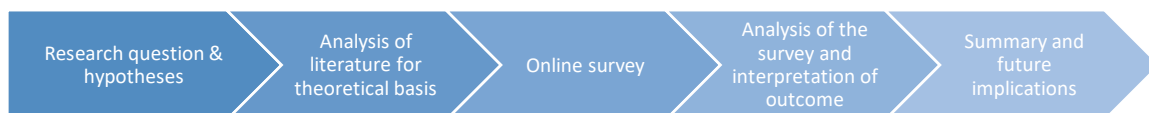
Methodology

Description of research method

After the in-depth analysis of relevant Employer Branding theories, the next step included the set-up of the research methodology i.e. analysing how to approach the research question with a quantitative analysis including the planned online questionnaire. A variety of techniques are available to collect data and gain information on a topic.

The survey (or "Ex-post-facto-survey-design") is the most frequently used instrument for data collection. It can be conducted orally as a face-to-face interview, in written form or, for example, as a telephone interview (Klandt & Heidenreich, 2017). In this case, the empirical research has been conducted as an online survey with the free-of-charge tool **Sosci-Survey** provided by the University of Vienna. This research method offers a variety of benefits in this scenario, as it does directly take the natural sentiment of the target audience into account. Also, this method offers a quick and direct approach, which is helpful in a short time period and considering the unusual situation of a pandemic and the general instability or time-sensitiveness of markets and economies. On the other side, there are also some disadvantages. For example, it is difficult to interpret

the collected data with a respective causality and due to the low number of participants (in most cases), general observations are difficult to obtain (Klandt & Heidenreich, 2017).

As visualized with the graph below, the research design of this thesis starts with an in-depth literature analysis. Based on the theoretical input, the online survey has been set-up and conducted. The collected data has been later analysed with the programming tool **R Studio**. The chosen analysis method of comparing the means of the results and comparing the data tables appeared to be the most relevant, taking into account the independent sample of respondents with more than two groups and mostly metrical data (in this case mostly 5 point Likert scale). Finally, the outcome of the online survey and data analysis is being interpreted and discussed, giving potential suggestions for practical relevance and further research.

Research question & hypotheses	Analysis of literature for theoretical basis	Online survey	Analysis of the survey and interpretation of outcome	Summary and future implications

Graph 3: Research framework (own illustration)

Description of the process

Based on the theoretical foundation and aligning with the research questions and aim of this research, an online survey has been set up with 18 questions. During the set-up of the survey, it was important to analyse if the questions are well aligned with the aim of this research, understandable for the target audience, as well as check the technical functionalities. For this reason, two pre-tests have been conducted with 15 independent users. According to their feedback and analysis, the questionnaire has been restructured and some questions re-written. Additionally, the appropriate length of the questionnaire as well as the structure of questions has been consulted with the thesis supervisor. The survey was structured in four categories:

- **Category 1: Personal facts** containing 8 questions regarding the demographics of the users.
- **Category 2: Current preferences** containing 6 questions regarding current preferences of the users in terms of working environment, (fringe) benefits and other work-related elements.
- **Category 3: Before Pandemic + Changes** containing 2 questions regarding the users´ perception of the change in their behaviour related to the Corona pandemic.
- **Category 4: Work Life Balance and Performance**, containing 2 questions regarding the user´s perception of their Work Life Balance and work-related performance.

The questions have been designed as a mix of multiple-choice, single-choice and rating-scale questions (i.e. 5 point Likert scale). Finally, the online survey has been published from 27th of June 2021 until 15th of August 2021. The final questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

The target group for the online survey has been set very broadly for multiple reasons. On the one side, it was important to not only analyse the behaviour of current job seekers, as an essential part of this research is also the comparison between job seekers before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other side, it was also important to reach as many participants as possible. Therefore, a targeting according to age, industry or other aspects was not relevant in this case. No active targeting has been set according to region or employment status. However, the survey has been sent out to a network of individuals at working age. Finally, the survey has been sent out to a broad network via different channels (i.e. Social Media and Email).

Type of research questions and survey biases

The survey has been set up with a majority of rating scale questions (i.e. 5 point Likert scale), as it presents a great benefit in terms of delivering quantitative data for the analysis. At the same time, it is an easy-to-use method for the survey participants. However, it is vital to concentrate on the questions and type of rating scale items in the set-up phase, as it can have a major effect on the research analysis and outcome. (Hussy, 2013)

Using rating scale questions comes also with the potential of influencing judgmental tendencies, which must be mentioned upfront. Especially in the case of a 5 point Likert scale, it is important to highlight that the Center tendency is inevitable to a certain degree. Additionally, if the survey questions do include similar items, which is also important to double check the answers, a certain mindless reproduction might occur throughout the sample. A similar survey bias which can happen throughout the sample, is the Primacy effect. This distortion can potentially occur if initial ratings influence subsequent and similar rating items. (Hussy, 2013)

Furthermore, it is also important to mention that the survey including the pre-COVID questions has been conducted in the same time period and no pre-COVID data (i.e. before 2020) has been collected by myself as a separate survey. Therefore, another potential survey bias influencing the rating of the questions can be connected to the retrospective analysis of job-seeker behaviour pre-COVID, as individuals do have a differentiated perception of retrospective behaviour. (Ottenstein, 2018)

Before presenting the further process of the research as well as the outcomes, it is important to keep those potential biases in mind.

Hypothesis and intended outcome

Based on the theoretical basis and planned research the following research question shall be analysed:

> *How did the expectations towards a potential employer from current job-seekers changed compared to expectations from job-seekers before 2020?*

The research hypotheses are stated as follows:

- **H1:** Current job-seekers value a company known for a stable working environment higher in the current search than in a previous job search (before pandemic).
- **H2:** Current job-seekers would rather accept a job with lower Economic value, but higher Work-Life-Balance.

The aim of this research is to analyse how the perception of current and potential job seekers have changed, taking into account the different generational groups and their perceptions in times of a global pandemic and furthermore, to draw conclusions from the research on

Employer Branding strategies. Moreover, to understand which factors have become more important in the job search experience from the candidate perspective and based on this, to give suggestions to Employer Branding experts on what to focus on when advertising the company and employer to their target audiences.

Data collection

The online survey has been promoted on a number of different channels, i.e.: Social Media (Facebook, WhatsApp and LinkedIn) and via e-mail. The target was to achieve a minimum of 100 valid responses. The questionnaire received within the time frame of being online a number of 200 clicks, however due to the exit-rate or non-finalized questions, a total of 81 valid responses has been collected. The reason for a high exit rate could be the length of the questionnaire, i.e. too many or too long questions. However, this cannot be confirmed at this stage. It shall be stated here that 81 responses reflect a relatively small sample to draw significant research conclusions.

The graph below shall visualize the number of users that accessed the online survey. The orange bar reflects in this case valid surveys (i.e. users finalized all questions), whereas the grey bar reflects the total amount of users accessing the link to the survey.
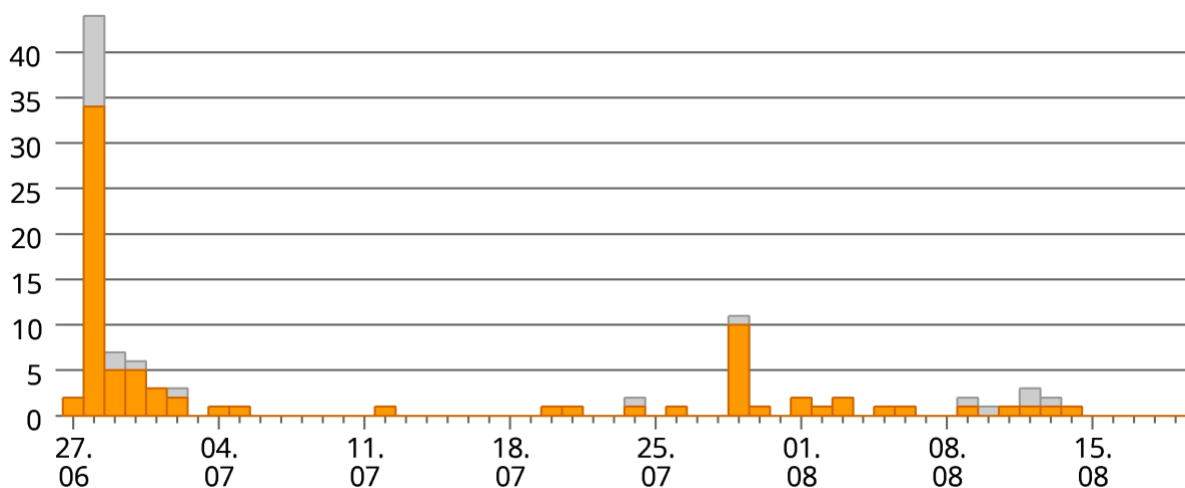
Graph 4: Total accesses to the online survey within the timeframe of the published questionnaire.

Online Survey

Demographics and characteristics of survey participants

The following demographics and characteristics description shall give an insight and understanding of the survey participants. The sample of 81 valid responses consisted of 65% female participants and 35% male participants. There were no participants in this survey that chose for the first question of gender the options "other" or "prefer not to answer". In terms of generation groups of the sample, approx. 65% of the respondents classified themselves as the Generation Y (i.e. born 1981 – 1996, which reflects an age group between 26 and 41 years old, as of the year 2022). The minority of respondents classified themselves as the Generation of Baby boomers (i.e. born 1946 – 1964, which reflects an age group between 58 and 76 years old, as of the year 2022), with a participation rate of 3.7%.

The graph below reflects the full overview of gender and generations of this sample and it must be mentioned, that the sample distribution does not reflect the current labour market. This sample reflects to a certain degree my own professional and private network. This fact is also being reflected in the generational distribution.

Generation and Gender	Respondents
Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)	**3**
Female	3
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	**18**
Female	10
Male	8
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	**53**
Female	41
Male	12
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	**7**
Female	6
Male	1
Total number of respondents	**81**

Graph 5: Gender and generation of survey respondents

The employment status of the survey respondents is very diverse and varies also across the generational groups of the sample. The majority of the respondents (approx. 63% of the sample) were searching for a job before the beginning of 2020, therefore before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of generations, the majority of Generation X (approx. 7% of the sample) were searching for a job over a period from 2019 until 2021 and might still be involved in an ongoing job search. The majority of Generation Y (approx. 41% of the sample) and Generation Z (approx. 6% of the sample) were searching for a job before the pandemic. Baby boomers were all involved in a job search before the pandemic.

Job search per Generation	Sum
I was searching for a job after the beginning of 2020 (2020 and later)	**19**
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	2
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	16
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	1
I was searching for a job before the beginning of 2020 (2019 and earlier)	**51**
Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)	3
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	10
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	33
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	5
I was searching for a job over a period from 2019 (or before) until 2021 (job search might still be ongoing)	**11**
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	6
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	4
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	1
Total number of respondents	**81**

Graph 6: Job search status per generation of survey respondents

A detailed overview of the employment and pay level information of the sample can be analysed in the graphs below (Graph 7 and Graph 8). It is interesting to see that the majority of the sample are currently (self-) employed and have been working for the same company for more than three

years at the time of this survey (2021). The majority is also working in a full-time employment. The pay level as per generation gives us the information that the majority of the sample classifies themselves as level 4, which reflects an income of more than 40,000 Euro per year and on a full-time employment. The pay-level questions has been also structured in the way, that the individuals were asked to classify themselves into a certain pay-level reflecting a full-time employment (i.e. if the individual was working part-time, the classification shall reflect the aliquot full-time salary). This reflects also the majority per each generational group, except Generation Z, where respondents classified themselves mostly as level 1 (i.e. yearly income of less than 20,000 Euro per year). As seven respondents did not classify themselves into none of the pay levels, it can be interpreted that this is the same group of the sample that stated to be unemployed in the previous question.

Employment information	Generations				
Employment status / Working hours / Income	Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)	Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	Sum
I am currently employed (or self-employed) and have been working for this company for more than 1 year.		2	15	5	22
Full-time (35 – 40 h / week)		2	12	1	15
Part-time (below 35 h / week)			3	4	7
I am currently employed (or self-employed) and have been working for this company for more than 3 years.	3	13	22		38
Full-time (35 – 40 h / week)	1	11	17		29
Part-time (below 35 h / week)	2	2	5		9
I am currently unemployed (unemployment started in the last 12 months).		1	4	1	6
I am currently unemployed (unemployment started more than 1 year ago)			1		1
I´ve just started an employment (or self-employment) at a new company (start in the last 12 months).		2	11	1	14
Full-time (35 – 40 h / week)		2	9	1	12
Part-time (below 35 h / week)			2		2
Total number of respondents	3	18	53	7	81

Graph 7: Employment information per generation of survey respondents

Generation	count
Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)	**3**
level 4: > €40,000	3
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	**18**
level 1: < €20,000,	2
level 3: < €40,000,	2
level 4: > €40,000	13
no response	1
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	**53**
level 1: < €20,000,	7
level 2: < €30,000,	5
level 3: < €40,000,	11
level 4: > €40,000	25
no response	5
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	**7**
level 1: < €20,000,	5
level 2: < €30,000,	1
no response	1
Total	**81**

Graph 8: Pay level information per generation

In terms of the living aspects of the survey respondents, the majority (approx. 79%) is living in a city or close to a city with good public transportation. Only 17 out of the 81 survey participants are living on the country side or rural area, with Generation Y being the biggest generational group in this aspect.

Respondents	Distance to work				
Living aspects per Generation	**Between 30 and 60 minutes**	**Less than 30 minutes**	**More than 60 minutes**	**non working**	**Sum**
City or close to a city with good public transportation	**14**	**40**	**3**	**7**	**64**
Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)	1	1			2
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	1	9		1	11
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	12	24	3	5	44
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)		6		1	7
Country side or rural area with limited access to public transport (a car is necessary for daily activities)	**5**	**10**	**2**		**17**
Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)			1		1
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	2	4	1		7
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	3	6			9
Total number of respondents	**19**	**50**	**5**	**7**	**81**

Graph 9: Living aspects per generation of survey respondents

Current perception of (potential) job seekers

Which corporate offers are more attractive for job seekers?

Gen.	count	Mean CP01_01	Mean CP01_02	Mean CP01_03	Mean CP01_04	Mean CP01_05	Mean CP01_06
Corporate offers							
Baby boomer	3	1.333333	2.333333	2.666667	5.000000	4.000000	3.333333
Gen X	18	2.833333	2.833333	2.944444	4.055556	2.555556	2.500000
Gen Y	53	2.962264	3.018868	2.584906	4.226415	2.283019	2.547170
Gen Z	7	3.000000	2.714286	2.285714	4.142857	2.000000	3.000000

Graph 10: Current favourable corporate offers

Interpretation of results:

- CP01_01: Baby boomers are showing strong interest for **home-office** offer instead of open office

- CP01_02: Baby boomers are showing strong interest in **lunch subsidy** instead of office canteen

- CP01_03: A **Public transport subsidy** seems to be the most interesting benefit for the youngest generation, i.e. Gen Z.

- CP01_04: All age groups favour the **flexible working hours**, instead of a 4-day-working week. However, the strongest interest comes from the Baby boomers.

- CP01_05: As for the **fitness training opportunities**, the baby boomers show strong interest in online courses, whereas the youngest Gen Z would rather be attracted to an office gym.

- CP01_06: **Regular online catch-ups** do not seem to be attractive to none of the age groups. However, the highest interest for online employee events was shown by baby boomers.

In terms of the corporate offers that companies are offering to their employees or potential candidates, it can be reflected in the answers from the participants that Baby boomers feel the most attracted to corporate offers related to a fully remote working style. Younger generations (X,Y,Z)

did not show any particular strong favour for specific offers with a mean of answers around 2.5 and 3 (middle rating), except for the flexible working schedule, showing strong preference for this instead of a 4-day-workweek.

Which corporate offers are the least attractive for job seekers?

Generation	CP02_01	CP02_02	CP02_03	CP02_04	CP02_05	CP02_06	CP02_07
Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)			1		2		
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	3	2	6	7	6	5	2
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	9	9	9	7	22	7	8
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	**14**	**12**	**17**	**15**	**31**	**13**	**11**

Generation	CP02_08	CP02_09	CP02_10	CP02_08	CP02_11	CP02_12
Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)	1	1		1	1	1
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	6	8	8	6	3	6
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	11	10	21	11	9	24
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	1	3	3	1		2
Total	**19**	**22**	**32**	**19**	**13**	**33**

Graph 11: Current least attractive corporate offers

Analysing these results as per generation we see that:

- Most **Baby boomers** chose the **company car** (CP02_05) as the least attractive corporate offer (2 respondents).

- Most **Gen X** respondents chose the **company gym** (CP02_09 with 8 respondents) and the **online fitness offer with full free access** (CP02_10 with 8 respondents) as least attractive company offers.

- Most **Gen Y** respondents chose the **online networking opportunities** (CP02_12) as the least attractive company offer (24 respondents).

- Most **Gen Z** respondents chose, similar to Gen X, the **company gym** (CP02_09 with 3 respondents) and the **online fitness offer with full free access** (CP02_10 with 3 respondents) as least attractive company offers.

According to the results of the full sample, it can be said that the least attractive company offers are company cars (CP02_05), online fitness offer with full free access (CP02_10) and online networking opportunities (CP02_12). This could be interpreted as a rather negative experience of more online (remote) corporate offers to the employees.

How important is the brand identity of the employer?

Brand Identity					
Generations	count	Mean CP04_01	Mean CP04_02	Mean CP04_03	Mean CP04_04
Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)	3	4.333333	4.666667	4.000000	4.666667
Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)	18	4.055556	3.944444	3.944444	4.333333
Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)	53	3.924528	3.679245	3.094340	3.886792
Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)	7	4.428571	3.857143	3.857143	4.285714

Graph 12: Importance of brand identity

Interpretation of results:

- CP04_01: **"The brand identity and image of my employer is very important to me."** This statement was rated highest ("strongly agree" with a mean of 4.42) by the youngest Gen Z and lowest by the Gen Y (with a mean of 3.92), however this still reflects a positive preference towards "agree".

- CP04_02: **"I tend to associate myself with the corporate brand (i.e. if my employer´s brand is known for the attributes "performance-driven", "teamwork", "passionate" I associate myself to these attributes too)"**. This statement was rated highest ("strongly agree" with a mean of 4.66) by Baby boomers and lowest by Gen Y (with a mean of 3.67), however this still reflects a positive preference towards "agree".

- CP04_03: **"My employer is an important part of my self-concept and my social identity."** This statement was rated highest ("strongly agree" with a mean of 4.0) by Baby boomers and lowest by Gen Y (with a mean of 3.09).

- CP04_04: **"When searching for a job, I also consider the image of the company."** This statement was rated highest ("strongly agree" with a mean of 4.66) by Baby boomers and lowest by Gen Y (with a mean of 3.88), however this still reflects a positive preference towards "agree".

It can be observed that Baby boomers tend to have a stronger connection to an Employer´s brand and see it as a more important attribute when searching for a job or associating themselves with it, than younger generations. This finding corresponds well with the previously analysed theory on generational perspectives of the Employer Attractiveness (Dries, 2008).

Current expectations of (potential) job seekers

Current Expectations according to generations					
Generation	count	Mean CP06_01	Mean CP06_02	Mean CP06_03	Mean CP06_04
Baby boomer	3	5.000000	3.000000	3.666667	4.000000
Generation X	18	3.555556	3.777778	4.055556	3.666667
Generation Y	53	3.660377	3.377359	3.962264	3.867924
Generation Z	7	4.000000	3.714286	4.285714	3.857143

Graph 13: Current Expectations according to generations towards (potential) employer

Interpretation of results:

- CP06_01: **"I feel that I value different attributes about my employer compared to before the pandemic (e.g. remote working, less face-to-face interaction, different way of working, etc)."** This was rated highest ("strongly agree") by the Baby boomers (mean of 5.0) and lowest (with a mean of 3.55, i.e. rather middle rating) by Gen X.

- CP06_02: **"The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a high salary package."** This statement seemed to not be of high relevance for none of the age groups. However, the highest mean of 3.77 (reflecting a positive preference towards "agree") occurs with Gen X and the lowest mean occurs with Baby boomers with 3.0.

- CP06_03: **"The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a very good work-life-balance."** This statement was rated highest ("strongly agree") by Gen Z, i.e. the youngest generation in this sample. The lowest rating with a mean of 3.66 occurs in the age group of Baby boomers.

- CP06_04: **"The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a stable work environment."** This statement had the highest mean of 4.0 in the age group of baby boomers and the lowest mean of 3.66 in the group of Gen X, still reflecting a rather positive preference towards "agree".

It can be observed that current expectations towards the employer tend to be very different across the generations. A stable working environment seems to be the most relevant for Baby boomers, whereas a good work-life-balance occurs to be the most relevant for the youngest age group of Gen Z. Comparing the rating of attributes "high salary package" and "a very good work-life-balance", it can be observed that throughout all generations all respondents did value a higher work-life-balance more than a high salary package. Overall it can be also observed that the pandemic did have an effect on what employees value about the employer as all of the age groups consciously rated that they feel a change in their own perception.

Taking a look at the different groups of job-seekers before and after the outbreak of the pandemic, we can see a difference in the data analysis.

Current Expectations according to job status					
Job search status	**count**	**Mean CP06_01**	**Mean CP06_02**	**Mean CP06_03**	**Mean CP06_04**
I was searching for a job **after the beginning of 2020** (2020 and later) i.e. after the outbreak of the pandemic	19	3.526316	2.894737	3.789474	3.631579
I was searching for a job **before the beginning of 2020** (2019 and earlier) i.e. before the pandemic	51	3.686275	3.529412	4.039216	3.901961
I was searching for a job **over a period from 2019 (or before) until 2021** (job search might still be ongoing) i.e. over a period of time before and including the pandemic	11	4.181818	4.272727	4.181818	3.818182

Graph 14: Current expectations towards (potential) employer according to job status

Analysing the statement of CP06_04 which is about **"The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a stable work environment."**, it is obvious that there are small differences across the sample groups. However, all of the mean outcomes are slightly higher than a middle rating of 3.0, which can be interpreted that they all show a rather positive interest. Still, the highest mean for the attribute of CP06_04 is the mean of 3.9 across the group of before-pandemic job-seekers. This is showing the exact opposite of the hypothesis 1, which stated:

- **H1:** Current job-seekers value a company known for a stable working environment higher in the current search than in a previous job search (before pandemic).

According to this data analysis, hypothesis 1 cannot be confirmed.

Analysing further the two statements about work-life-balance and the salary package, we can see the following: The attribute CP06_03, which corresponds to the statement: **"The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a very good work-life-balance."** shows the highest mean (4.18) outcome across the sample group of ongoing job-seekers, i.e. individuals searching for a job over a period of time before and including the pandemic. This can be interpreted that current job-seekers value an employer with very good work-life balance higher, than previous job seekers. Taking a closer look at the group sample of (potentially) ongoing job-seekers, we see an even higher mean outcome (4.27) with the attribute of CP06_02, which corresponds to the statement **"The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a high salary package."**. These outcomes can be interpreted that (potentially) ongoing job-seekers value in the first place a high salary package and in the second place an employer with a very good work-life-balance. Also this analysis is showing the opposite of the hypothesis 2, which stated:

- **H2:** Current job-seekers would rather accept a job with lower Economic value, but higher Work-Life-Balance.

According to this data analysis, hypothesis 2 cannot be confirmed.

Overall, the analysis does show differences across generational and job-seeker-status groups in their current expectations towards the employer. From the attribute of CP06_01, which shall give an indication if the survey participants individually perceive a change in their expectations, we can see a positive trend towards "agree/strongly agree" across all sample groups.

Valuable employer-attributes as of today
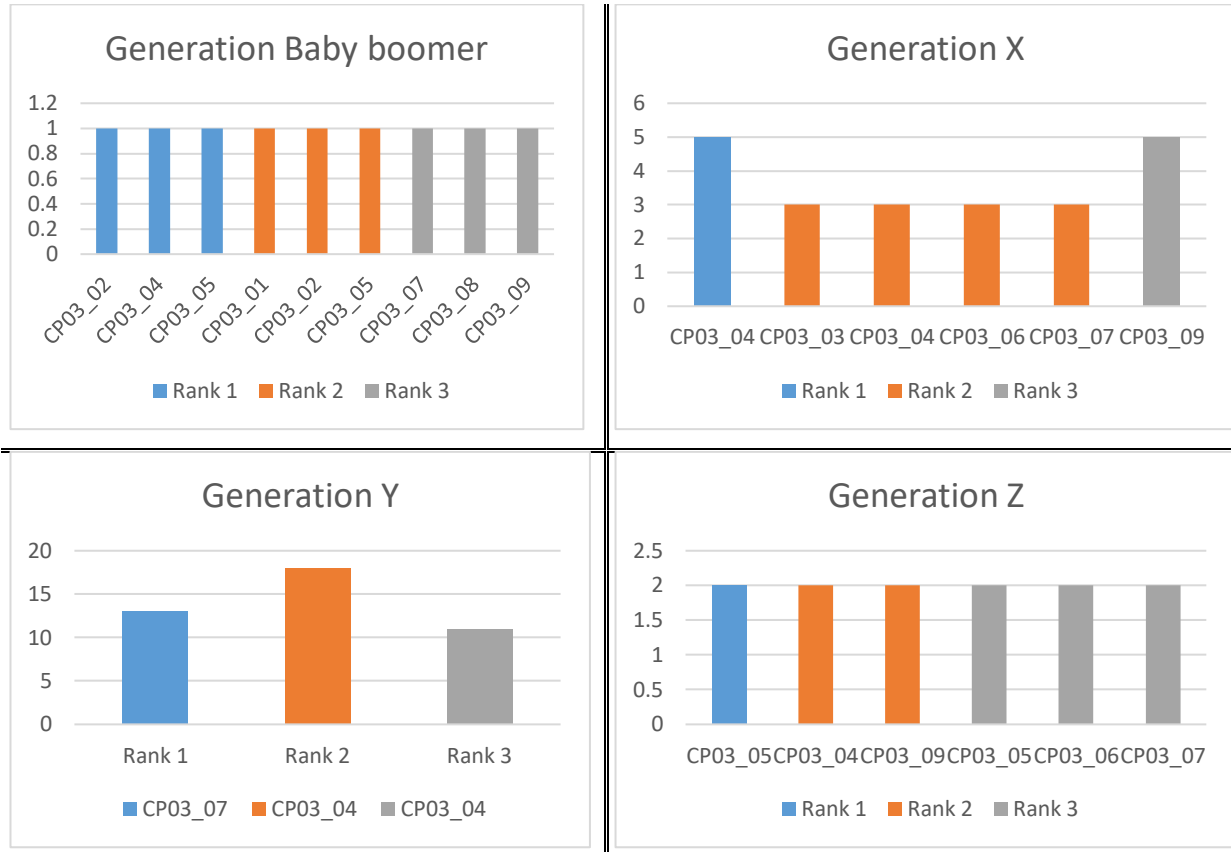
Graph 15: Valuable employer-attributes as of today across generational groups

Note on the graph design and data: due to the low sample number, the ratings of different items were identical, e.g.: The sample of Baby boomers consisted of three participants and each participant rated a different item as rank one. Additionally, the data has been analysed according to the number of ratings per rank, i.e. why for example CP03_04 (offers high salary packages) was rated by the most Generation X participants as rank one as well as the most Generation X participants chose this item for rank two.

Interpretation of results:

- **Baby boomers** ranked each different attributes as valuable for each rank. As the most valuable attributes (i.e. assigning them as rank 1), this generational group has chosen the following:
  - has a well-known brand, i.e. internationally known company
  - offers high salary packages
  - offers home-office opportunities

  followed by the second-most-valuable attributes (i.e. assigning them as rank 2):
  - has very high ratings on online "rate your employer" websites
  - has a well-known brand, i.e. internationally known company
  - offers home-office opportunities

  and finally assigning the following attributes as rank 3:
  - has the image of a very fun and dynamic atmosphere at work (e.g. like at a young start-up with a small number of young employees)
  - offers a stable working environment (e.g. a traditional company that is well situated in the market operating already for many years)
  - offers a dynamic environment that offers quick career development according to performance (up-or-out system)

- **Generation X** participants have ranked their preferences less diversified and according to the data analysis the following was ranked as the most valuable attribute of a potential employer:
  - offers high salary packages

  as for the second-most valuable employer attributes, this generational group has answered in a very diverse way with a number of attributes that were chosen by the same amount of participants:
  - has the image of being a family-friendly employer (e.g. no extensive working hours, less overtime)
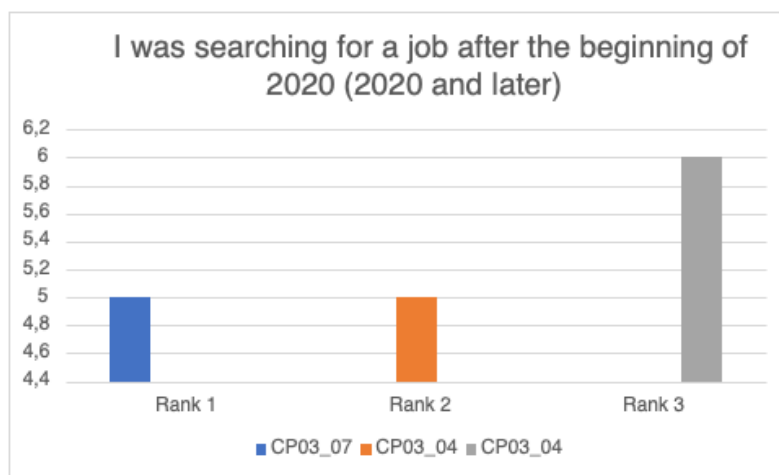 - offers high salary packages
  - has a well-situated office in the city center
  - has the image of a very fun and dynamic atmosphere at work (e.g. like at a young start-up with a small number of young employees)

finally the following attribute was assigned by the majority of this generational group as rank 3:

- o offers a dynamic environment that offers quick career development according to performance (up-or-out system)

- The sample of **Generation Y** did deliver clear preferences and chose the following as the most-valuable attribute for a potential employer:
    - o has the image of a very fun and dynamic atmosphere at work (e.g. like at a young start-up with a small number of young employees)

  as the second-most valuable attribute (i.e. rank 2) as well as the third-most valuable attribute (i.e. rank 3), Generation Y assigned the following:
    - o offers high salary packages

- The youngest generational group, **Generation Z**, did show clear preferences as for the most-valuable employer attribute (i.e. assigning as rank 1):
    - o offers home-office opportunities

  as for the second-most valuable attributes (i.e. assigning as rank 2), this group has chosen equally the following:
    - o offers high salary packages
    - o offers a dynamic environment that offers quick career development according to performance (up-or-out system)

  finally, ranking the following attributes as rank 3 equally across this generational group:
    - o offers home-office opportunities
    - o has a well-situated office in the city center
    - o has the image of a very fun and dynamic atmosphere at work (e.g. like at a young start-up with a small number of young employees)

Analysing these outcomes, it can be said that the responses of Baby boomers are very diversified and showcase different values across this generational group. However, it must be said that this generational group was not well represented in this survey (3 out of 81 participants) and each three participants seem to have a diverse set of values and expectations. Still, there is a sense of high value for home-office opportunities, a well-known brand, as well the image and ratings on external rating platforms. This corresponds well with the theory, which describes this generational

group as especially bounded and attracted to the company´s image, which is also representing the individual in a certain degree.

Generation X seems to assign much interest to the economic value, which corresponds also well with the theoretical input. Also a dynamic environment with quick career development opportunities seemed to find much interest in this age group. Generation Y did show very clear preferences for fun and dynamic work atmosphere, as well as high-salary packages. This reflects well, that this generational group does assign much interest to the social value of the Employer Attractiveness scale. Finally, the youngest group of generation Z did show the biggest interest for home-office opportunities, high salary packages, as well as a dynamic work atmosphere.

Analysing further the sample according to their job status, we can see the following:

For job-seekers after the beginning of the pandemic, the most valuable employer attributes are:

- Rank 1 "CP03_07", i.e. the employer has the image of a very fun and dynamic atmosphere at work
- Rank 2 "CP03_04", i.e. offers high salary packages
- Rank 3 consists as well of the most votes for high salary packages

I was searching for a job before the beginning of 2020 (2019 and earlier)
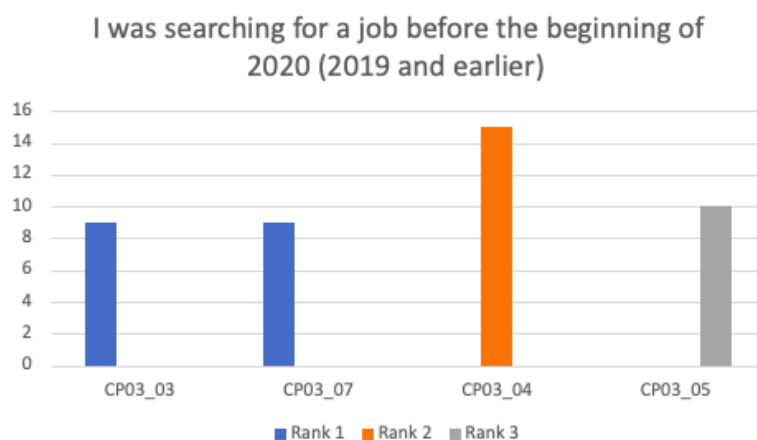
For job-seekers before the outbreak of the pandemic, the most valuable employer attributes are:

- Rank 1 "CP03_03", i.e. has the image of being a family-friendly employer and equally "CP03_07", i.e. has the image of a very fun and dynamic atmosphere at work
- Rank 2 "CP03_04", ie. offers high salary packages
- Rank 3 "CP03_05", i.e. offers home-office opportunities

I was searching for a job over a period from 2019 (or before) until 2021 (job search might still be ongoing)
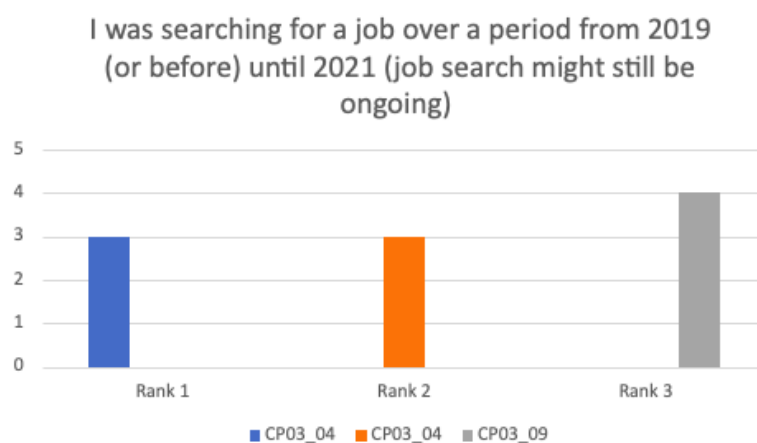
For (potentially) ongoing job-seekers, the most valuable employer attributes are:

- Rank 1 "CP03_04", I.e. high salary packages
- Rank 2 "CP03_04", equally rated as well for high salary packages
- Rank 3 "CP03_09", i.e. offers a dynamic environment that offers quick career development according to performance

Graph 16: Valuable employer-attributes as of today according to job-status

According to these outcomes, it can be interpreted that high salary packages are attractive employment attributes for all groups of job-seekers, as these attributes has been among the top 3 ranks in all sample groups above. Therefore, we can see that the economic value is very much important to all groups of job-seekers, including the different generations of this sample.

Employer scenarios

Three different employer scenarios were presented to the group of survey participants to test again the individual perception and individual preferences for specific Employer Branding Dimensions, however in a different setting of presenting the attributes. Each company shall represent different employer values and attributes to the potential job seeker.

Company A: International corporation with locations worldwide. Employees receive a vast number of benefits and development opportunities. The employer is known for supporting a fast career development and offering high salary packages incl. performance bonus programs. The workload is very high with an average of 60 hours per week of working time. According to an online "rate your employer" website, the management of this company is mainly focused on the company performance. Employees feel under pressure to perform well. On average the employees do not stay longer than 3 years at this company.

This employer scenario includes strong indications for high economic value and low work-life balance.

Company B: Medium sized enterprise with 150 employees, mainly operating in Austria and Germany. The employer is known for a very good working atmosphere, with multiple on site employee events throughout the year. Corporate offers and benefits are limited, however, the salary packages are higher than the market average. According to an online "rate your employer" website, overtime is rare but there is no home office possibility as the management did not agree to have employees working from home.

This employer scenario includes strong indication for high social value.

Company C: This medium sized enterprise with 300 employees operating in the whole DACH (Germany, Austria & Switzerland) region is one of the best rated employers on an online "rate your employer" website. Employees are given full flexibility in managing their working time and location of work. The headquarter in Germany offers working spaces for 60% of the employees with an open office and desk sharing. Besides two on site employee events (Christmas party and summer retreat), the company offers online-only networking opportunities. The salary packages are rated to be average.

> This employer scenario includes strong indication for high work-life balance and low economic value.

Analysing first the employer scenarios according to generation and gender:

Employer scenarios				
Generation and Gender	Company A	Company B	Company C	Sum
Baby boomer			**3**	**3**
Female			3	3
Gen X	**8**	**8**	**2**	**18**
Female	5	4	1	10
Male	3	4	1	8
Gen Y	**7**	**14**	**32**	**53**
Female	4	10	27	41
Male	3	4	5	12
Gen Z	**3**		**4**	**7**
Female	2		4	6
Male	1			1
Respondents	**18**	**22**	**41**	**81**

Graph 17: Employer scenarios per generation and gender of survey respondents

Interpretation of results:

- **Baby boomers** seem to have a clear preference for Company C, which indicates a higher work-life balance. This result does align strongly with the previously analysed theory, which indicates a stronger interest for work-life balance across this generational group.

- **Generation X** shows a rather diversified but equally high interest for Company A and Company B. Both employer scenarios share the attribute of rather higher salary packages, which seems to attract this generational group.

- **Generation Y** shows very strong interest for Company C, which reflects an employer offering good work-life balance, but a rather low economic value.

- **Generation Z** shows the most interest for Company C, similar to Generation Y and Baby boomers.

Analysing further the employer scenarios according to job status:

Employer scenarios				
Job search status	**Company A:**	**Company B:**	**Company C:**	**Sum**
I was searching for a job after the beginning of 2020 (2020 and later)	2	4	13	19
I was searching for a job before the beginning of 2020 (2019 and earlier)	10	16	25	51
I was searching for a job over a period from 2019 (or before) until 2021 (job search might still be ongoing)	6	2	3	11
Respondents	**18**	**22**	**41**	**81**

Graph 18: Employer scenarios according to job-status

Analysing these results, it is obvious that most respondents voted for Company C as the most attractive employer. According to the job search status, Company C was especially attractive for job-seekers after and before the outbreak of the pandemic. As this employer scenario (Company C) reflects an employer with strong indication for high work-life balance and low economic value, it is interesting to observe that those attributes seem to have attracted especially previous job-seekers. Analysing the sample of (potentially) ongoing job-seekers (i.e. "I was searching for a job

over a period from 2019 (or before) until 2021"), we can see that the majority voted for Company A. This employer scenario includes strong indications for high economic value and low work-life balance. This result corresponds well with previous outcomes from current attractive employer attributes and indicates that the economic value is a more important and valuable employer attribute for potential and current job-seekers (in this sample).

Before-pandemic perception of (potential) job seekers and individual perception of a change in expectation

Which corporate benefits or employer attributes were valued most in the job search before the pandemic?

Before the pandemic											
Gen.	c.	mean BP01_01	mean BP01_02	Mean BP01_03	Mean BP01_04	Mean BP01_05	Mean BP01_06	Mean BP01_07	Mean BP01_08	Mean BP01_09	Mean BP01_10
Baby boomer	3	2.666667	3.666667	3.333333	2.333333	3.000000	4.333333	3.000000	3.000000	3.000000	3.666667
Gen X	18	2.444444	3.611111	3.944444	3.444444	3.944444	3.055556	2.888889	3.555556	3.222222	3.222222
Gen Y	53	2.886792	3.320755	3.660377	3.415094	3.962264	2.943396	3.245283	3.452830	3.396226	3.339623
Gen Z	7	3.142857	4.285714	4.428571	3.142857	3.857143	3.000000	3.714286	3.571429	3.285714	3.857143

Graph 19: Valuable corporate offers before the pandemic

Interpretation of results:

The following attributes were rated as the most relevant while searching for a job before the pandemic:

- BP01_01: **very high ratings on online "rate your employer" websites**: highest mean can be observed with a 3.14 in the group of Gen Z

- BP01_02: **a very good working atmosphere that offers many employee events and also afterwork networking:** highest rating can be observed in the youngest age group of Gen Z with a mean of 4.28 which is relatively higher than the lowest rating of mean 3.32 (Gen Y).

- BP01_03: **a well-known brand, i.e. internationally known company**: highest rating can be observed in the youngest age group of Gen Z with a mean of 4.42 which is relatively higher than the lowest rating of mean 3.33 (Baby boomers).

- BP01_04: **the image of being a family-friendly employer** (e.g. no extensive working hours, less overtime): rated highest among Gen X

- BP01_05**: high salary packages**: rated highest among Gen Y with a mean of 3.96

- BP01_06: **home-office opportunities**: rated highest among Baby boomers and lowest among Gen Y (mean of 2.94)

- BP01_07: **a well-situated office in the city centre**: rated highest among the youngest age group of Gen Z (mean 3.71)

- BP01_08: **the image of a fun and dynamic atmosphere at work** (e.g. like at a young start-up with a small number of young employees): rated highest among Gen Z (mean 3.57)

- BP01_09: **a stable working environment** (e.g. a traditional company that is well situated in the market operating already for many years): rated highest in the age group of Gen Y and lowest by the Generation of Baby boomers

- BP01_10: **a dynamic environment that offers quick career development according to performance (up-or-out system)**: rated highest among Gen Z with a mean of 3.85

The job search before the pandemic was dominated by different attributes which the respondents valued differently, however the majority of the ratings are around the middle rating. There are only three attributes that seemed to dominate the job search before the pandemic in terms of being rated as the most valuable ones, i.e. a very good working atmosphere (rated highest by Gen Z), a well-

known brand (rated highest by Gen Z) and home office opportunities (rated highest among Baby boomers).

Individual perception of a change in expectations

Change in expectations								
Generation	count	Mean BP02_01	Mean BP02_02	Mean BP02_03	Mean BP02_04	Mean BP02_05	Mean BP02_06	Mean BP02_07
Baby boomer	3	3.666667	4.000000	4.666667	4.666667	2.666667	5.000000	4.333333
Gen X	18	3.388889	3.111111	3.277778	3.111111	3.000000	3.277778	3.444444
Gen Y	53	3.754717	3.849057	3.660377	3.886792	3.886792	3.679245	3.792453
Gen Z	7	4.142857	4.000000	4.285714	3.428571	4.000000	3.571429	3.571429

Graph 20: Individual perception of a change in expectations

Interpretation of results:

- BP02_01: **"I feel that my expectations have changed towards my potential employer."** This statement was rated highest among the age group of Gen Z (mean 4.14) and lowest among Gen X (mean 3.38).

- BP02_02: **"I feel that I value different attributes now about my potential employer."** This statement was rated highest among Gen Z and baby boomers equally (both with mean of 4.0). The lowest rating was among Gen X with a mean of 3.11.

- BP02_03: **"When looking for a job now, I would focus on different attributes of a potential employer."** This statement was rated highest among Baby boomers with a significantly high mean of 4.66.

- BP02_04: **"I feel that my expectations towards my employer have changed due to my changed life circumstances."** This statement was rated highest among Baby boomers (mean 4.66) and lowest among Gen X (mean 3.11).

- BP02_05: **"I feel that my expectations towards my employer have changed due to my previous experiences at work."** This statement was rated highest among Gen Z (mean 4.0) and lowest among Baby boomers (mean 2.66).

- BP02_06: **"I feel that the pandemic had an impact on what I value about an employer."** This statement had on average a middle rating among the generations, except

for the Baby boomer generation with a significantly high rating (mean 5.0, i.e. "strongly agree").

- BP02_07: **"I feel that due to the pandemic I experienced a shift in my expectations towards my current and any potential employer."** This statement had on average a middle rating among the generations, except for the Baby boomer generation with a significantly high rating (mean 4.33).

It can be observed that all of the respondents did experience a change in expectations towards the employer, however with slight differences in the strength of perception among generational groups. It is interesting to observe that the generation of Baby boomers experience a change in expectations primarily due to changed life circumstances, whereas younger generations especially Gen Z experienced a change in expectations due to previous experiences at work. The change in expectations towards potential employers did have a significant effect on the Generation of Baby boomers, as they would focus on different attributes now if looking for a job than before the pandemic.

Perception of the effects of the pandemic on the individuals Work-Life-Balance and performance at work

Individual perception of change in the Work-Life-Balance

Work Life Balance							
Gen.	**count**	**Mean WB01_01**	**Mean WB01_02**	**Mean WB01_03**	**Mean WB01_04**	**Mean WB01_05**	**Mean WB01_06**
Baby boomer	3	4.666667	3.666667	3.666667	5.000000	3.666667	3.333333
Gen X	18	3.888889	3.444444	3.222222	3.777778	2.888889	3.611111
Gen Y	53	3.716981	3.339623	3.094340	3.981132	2.981132	3.735849
Gen Z	7	4.000000	3.285714	3.000000	3.714286	3.428571	3.571429

Graph 21: Individual perception of change in the Work-Life-Balance

Interpretation of results:

- WB01_01: **"I feel that my Work-Life-Balance has changed over the last 12 months."** This statement was rated highest among Baby boomers (mean 4.66) and lowest among Gen Y (mean 3.71).

- WB01_02: **"I feel very satisfied about my current Work-Life-Balance."** This statement was rated highest, however still in the middle rating, among Baby boomers (mean 3.66). The lowest rating (compared to the highest rating with only a slight difference) was among Gen Z (mean 3.28).

- WB01_03: **"I feel that my Work-Life-Balance has improved over the last 12 months."** This statement was rated highest, however still in the middle rating, among Baby boomers (mean 3.66). The lowest rating (compared to the highest rating with only a slight difference) was among Gen Z (mean 3.00).

- WB01_04: **"I feel that the COVID-19 pandemic had an effect (in general) on my Work-Life-Balance."** This statement had a significantly high rating among Baby boomers with a mean of 5.0 (i.e. "strongly agree" on the rating scale). The lowest rating with a mean of 3.71 was among Gen Z.

- WB01_05: **"I feel that the COVID-19 pandemic has improved my Work-Life-Balance (i.e. a more satisfying / higher Work-Life-Balance)"** This statement had an overall lower rating across the generational groups. The highest rating with a mean of 3.66 was among Baby boomers. The lowest rating with a mean of 2.88 was among Gen X.

- WB01_06: **"I feel that my Work-Life-Balance is positively correlated with my performance at work (i.e. the higher the Work-Life-Balance, the higher also the performance or vice versa)."** This statement had an overall middle rating (with a mean between 3.3 – 3.7) across all age groups.

In general it can be observed that a significant change in the Work-Life-Balance has been experienced across the respondents, also directly connecting the pandemic and its effects on the Work-Life-Balance. It cannot be exactly observed that the pandemic had a positive effect on the Work-Life-Balance, i.e. an effect of improvement. The means across all generations were rather in the middle rating.

Individual perception of change in the performance at work

Performance at work.						
Gen.	count	Mean WB02_01	Mean WB02_02	Mean WB02_03	Mean WB02_04	Mean WB02_05
Baby boomer	3	3.333333	3.333333	1.666667	4.333333	4.333333
Gen X	18	2.888889	2.833333	3.222222	3.333333	2.888889
Gen Y	53	3.169811	3.226415	2.830189	3.433962	3.113208
Gen Z	7	3.428571	4.000000	2.857143	4.000000	2.571429

Graph 22: Individual perception of change in the performance at work

Interpretation of results:

- WB02_01: **"I feel that my performance at work was higher during the pandemic than before (e.g. better results, higher efficiency, etc.)"** This statement was overall rated in the middle rating scale, however the highest rating with mean of 3.42 was among the Gen Z.

- WB02_02: **"I feel that my workday was more efficient during the pandemic (e.g. quicker processes, quicker realization of projects, shorter meetings with more outcome, etc.)"** It can be observed that this statement was significantly higher rated by Gen Z (mean 4.0). Other age groups rated this statement along the middle rating scale (mean between 2.8 and 3.33).

- WB02_03: **"I feel that my performance at work was negatively impacted (= lower performance) by the pandemic and its implications on my daily work (e.g. less face-to-face interactions, online-only communication, less breaks, etc.)."** This statement was overall rated along the middle rating scale (mean 2.8 – 3.2), however the lowest rating (i.e. "strongly disagree") was among the Baby boomer generation.

- WB02_04: **"I feel that my employer supported me in remaining productive and motivated during the pandemic."** This statement was relatively highly rated by Baby boomers (mean 4.33) and the lowest rating was in the middle scale with mean 3.33 for Gen X.

- WB02_05: **"I feel that I had more support from my superior and colleagues during the pandemic than before (e.g. in solving problems, mental support, sharing experiences, etc.)."** This statement was relatively highly rated by Baby boomers (mean 4.33) and the lowest rating was in the middle scale with mean 2.57 for Gen Z.

Overall it cannot be observed that the pandemic had an immediate effect on the performance at work. However, Baby boomers would rather disagree with the statement that the performance was negatively impacted by the pandemic (i.e. lower performance at work). It can be observed that the respondents did perceive that they have received support from their employer in the pandemic, however not a significantly stronger support than before the pandemic.

Conclusion and further research

The COVID-19 pandemic did have a strong effect on the labour market and the way how we are working. Still today, in 2022, the pandemic is not over and still does influence our everyday lifes. The survey analysis, which was conducted in summer 2021, does show strong indices that a change in terms of the mindset and expectations of employees and job-seekers did change. Additionally, this change is being reflected very differently across different generations. We can see that each generational group of this sample is showing a diverse set of values, expectations and behaviour if it comes to rating their potential employer or workplace. Younger generations of this sample do show strong preferences for a fun and dynamic work atmosphere, as well as home-office opportunities and high salary packages. Looking back at the job search before the pandemic, a well-known brand seemed to have been valued more than in the current job search for the younger generations. More senior generations do show a higher interest in having a good work-life-balance in the current situation. However, pre-COVID-19 Baby boomer´s job searches were rather driven by attributes such as home-office opportunities and a fun working-atmosphere. Clear preferences in terms of the most attractive employer can be seen in the employer scenario analysis. Most of the respondents chose Company C, which reflected a medium sized enterprise offering full-flexibility in the work schedule, a good work-life-balance and a rather average salary package. This corresponds well also with the previously rated employer attributes, as strong preferences for a flexible work schedule have been given throughout all generational groups. However, if analysing only the group of (potentially) ongoing job-seekers, there is always a clear difference in

the analysis. Even though all generational groups do show higher preferences for a good work-life balance, (potentially) ongoing job-seekers still have a slightly higher interest in high-salary-packages. This is one strong outcome of this survey and reflects the importance of the economic value (i.e. salary package), which has been rated among the highest valuable attributes across this sample. This outcome is very interesting, as it did not approve the second hypothesis of this thesis, which stated, that todays (potential) job-seekers would rather value a higher work-life-balance than a high salary package. Also the first hypothesis, which stated that a stable work environment is more important today than before the pandemic could not be approved. No clear preferences for a stable work environment have been reflected in this sample. The contrary could be observed, as it was rather a fun and dynamic work atmosphere that has been rated as a valuable employer attribute across the generational groups and job-search groups. However, it must be highlighted that this sample is not reflecting a high number of participants and is also not reflecting the current labour market in terms of generations and gender. Also, this survey has been conducted in summer 2021 and is simply a snapshot of a short time period in the middle of a pandemic. Still, it does give an insight into the current preferences and expectations of potential job-seekers and can be of great interest for Employer Branding Specialists. It is important to highlight here as well, that there will be surely differences across different target audiences in terms of educational background or industries for example. Having this in mind, Employer Branding Experts can use this information and build upon this to further understand the current expectations of their specific target audiences. According to this, Employer Branding strategies and Talent acquisition approaches might need to be re-checked if they still do attract the talent that is needed in the organization. Aligning with the theoretical foundation of this thesis, a company needs to send the right "signals" to their target audience in order to attract them to the organization. Those "signals" must be aligned with the EVP and directly approach the current preferences of the audience. Connected to this, it is obvious and clear that the organization should only attract the talents with attributes (e.g. benefits) that they can really deliver to the candidates and later employees.

Further research could add on the output of this Master Thesis and examine if or how companies did adjust to the overall sentiment of job-seekers during the Corona crisis. Such research could help Employer Branding Experts in comparing different industries with the job-seeker market and explore new ways of attracting talent. Additionally, a bigger sample could show more details and insights in terms of the generational aspects in this thesis. Due to the low number of participants,

the conclusions of this research are very limited. Therefore, a higher participation rate could support in drawing clearer conclusions and give a more detailed insight into the current preferences of job-seekers and the job-seeker behaviour.

Appendix:

Abstract in English

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 the world has changed. It affected, and still does affect in 2022, our lifes in many aspects. One of the aspects is the labour market, or the working conditions for individuals. Many companies needed to switch to a fully-remote working style and employees were asked to proceed with their tasks and activities in a (mostly) completely different environment. With this sudden change Human Resource Managers were strongly needed to make sure that employees, as well as the organization, are able to continue working. Next to the task of keeping employees engaged came the challenge to continue recruiting and attracting new talent to the teams. Representing the corporate culture and making sure, that the Employer Brand is attractive and known to the target audience, is one of the vital roles of Employer Branding Specialists. However, due to the pandemic and the respective restrictions, no onsite events were possible and additionally it became clear that a change in terms of values and expectations from job-seekers was ongoing. This situation lead to the motivation of this research, as to understand how the expectations of potential and current job-seekers have changed since the outbreak of the pandemic. Furthermore, this research shall contribute and deliver insights for Employer Branding Specialists about what different generations currently expect from potential employers and what they currently value. The chosen research methodology of an online survey shall deliver this insight into different job-seeker audiences in terms of generations and job-search status.

Abstract in German

Mit dem Ausbruch der COVID-19-Pandemie im Jahr 2020 hat sich die Welt verändert. Sie hat unser Leben in vielerlei Hinsicht beeinflusst und wird es auch weiterhin im Jahr 2022. Einer dieser Aspekte ist der Arbeitsmarkt bzw. die Arbeitsbedingungen für den Einzelnen. Viele Unternehmen mussten auf eine vollständig digitale Arbeitsweise umstellen, und die Mitarbeiter*innen wurden aufgefordert, ihre Aufgaben und Tätigkeiten in einem (meist) völlig anderen Umfeld zu erledigen. Bei dieser plötzlichen Veränderung waren die Personalverantwortlichen stark gefordert, dafür zu sorgen, dass sowohl die Mitarbeiter*innen als auch das Unternehmen in der Lage sind, weiterzuarbeiten. Neben der Aufgabe, das Engagement der Mitarbeiter*innen aufrechtzuerhalten, bestand die Herausforderung darin, weiterhin neue Talente zu rekrutieren und für die Teams zu gewinnen. Die Repräsentation der Unternehmenskultur und die Sicherstellung, dass die Arbeitgebermarke attraktiv und bei der Zielgruppe bekannt ist, ist eine der wichtigsten Aufgaben der Employer Branding Spezialist*innen. Aufgrund der Pandemie und der damit verbundenen Einschränkungen waren jedoch keine Vor-Ort-Veranstaltungen möglich, und außerdem wurde deutlich, dass ein Wandel in Bezug auf die Werte und Erwartungen der Arbeitssuchenden im Gange war. Diese Situation führte zur Motivation dieser Untersuchung, um zu verstehen, wie sich die Erwartungen potenzieller und aktueller Arbeitssuchender seit dem Ausbruch der Pandemie verändert haben. Darüber hinaus soll diese Untersuchung dazu beitragen, dass Employer Branding Spezialist*innen Erkenntnisse darüber gewinnen, was die verschiedenen Generationen derzeit von potenziellen Arbeitgeber*innen erwarten und worauf sie derzeit Wert legen. Die gewählte Forschungsmethodik einer Online-Umfrage soll diesen Einblick in die verschiedenen Zielgruppen von Arbeitssuchenden in Bezug auf die Generationen und den Status der Arbeitssuche liefern.

Online survey - Questionnaire

soSci
oFb - der onlineFragebogen

0% completed

Dear participant,

My name is Evelyne Panzenböck and I am a Master´s degree student at the University of Vienna. This online survey is part of my Master Thesis "*COVID-19 pandemic implications on future Employer Branding strategies*", which shall give new insights into how the expectations of current and potential applicants changed over the course of the last year and how the pandemic will influence future Employer Branding strategies.

This survey is <u>anonymous</u> and will take about <u>10 minutes.</u>

Thank you very much for participating!

Evelyne Panzenböck

Next

B.Sc. Evelyne Panzenböck – 2021

soSci
oFb - der onlineFragebogen

1. I identify myself as:

◯ Female
◯ Male
◯ Other
◯ Prefer not to answer

2. Please choose your respective generation:

◯ Baby boomer (born 1946 – 1964)
◯ Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)
◯ Generation Y (born 1981 – 1996)
◯ Generation Z (born in 1997 or later)

3. I live in a:

◯ City or close to a city with good public transportation
◯ Country side or rural area with limited access to public transport (a car is necessary for daily activities)

Next

soSci
oFb - der onlineFragebogen

4. Please choose:

Note: Job search can be caused by various reasons (unemployment, next career step, unsatisfaction at current employer, for market offer comparison, etc.)

◯ I was searching for a job before the beginning of 2020 (2019 and earlier)

◯ I was searching for a job after the beginning of 2020 (2020 and later)

◯ I was searching for a job over a period from 2019 (or before) until 2021 (job search might still be ongoing)

5. Please choose:

◯ I am currently unemployed (unemployment started in the last 12 months).

◯ I am currently unemployed (unemployment started more than 1 year ago)

◯ I´ve just started an employment (or self-employment) at a new company (start in the last 12 months).

◯ I am currently employed (or self-employed) and have been working for this company for more than 1 year.

◯ I am currently employed (or self-employed) and have been working for this company for more than 3 years.

Next

B.Sc. Evelyne Panzenböck – 2021

6. My commute to work takes about (by car or public transport):

○ Less than 30 minutes
○ Between 30 and 60 minutes
○ More than 60 minutes

7. I am currently employed and work

○ Full-time (35 – 40 h / week)
○ Part-time (below 35 h / week)

8. Please choose the pay-level according to your current yearly gross income:

They pay-level shall correspond according to a full-time employment (35 – 40h/week). If you were unemployed during the last two years, please choose the last corresponding pay-level from your last employment.

○ level 1: < €20,000,
○ level 2: < €30,000,
○ level 3: < €40,000,
○ level 4: > €40,000

Next

B.Sc. Evelyne Panzenböck – 2021

Thank you for completing the first part of this online survey. Now I am inviting you to the next part, where I would like to present different scenarios and ask about your opinion and preferences.

This part will focus on corporate offers, experiences during the pandemic and changes in your personal expectations towards employers.

Next

B.Sc. Evelyne Panzenböck – 2021

9. Having a look at current job advertisements, which corporate offers do attract you the most?

Please choose which offer is more attractive to you.

The closer the point to the answer, the more attractive the item.

Please ignore any numerical values, as they may only serve for the data analysis.

Work from home	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Open office with many co-working spaces, coffee corner, etc.
Lunch subsidy with 5€/day (valid for different restaurants and food delivery)	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Office canteen with free lunch
Public transport subsidy (full free access to the city´s main public transportation)	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Corporate car
4-day-workweek (full-time with fixed working hours, e.g. from 08:00 – 18:00)	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Flexible working hours (i.e. no fixed working hours, full-time)
Office gym with full free access incl. wellness area	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Online fitness offer (free app, free training videos) full free access
Yearly Employee events with limited participation number (e.g. summer hiking weekend, volleyball tournament, marathons, etc.)	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Regular online catch-ups, networking events, best-practice sharings with the whole workforce (including colleagues from other locations)

Next

B.Sc. Evelyne Panzenböck – 2021

10. Which corporate offers are the least attractive to you?

Multiple choice possible (min. 1 answer)

- ☐ Work from home
- ☐ Lunch subsidy 5€ / day
- ☐ Office Canteen with full free access
- ☐ Public transport subsidy
- ☐ Company car
- ☐ 4-day workweek
- ☐ Flexible working hours (no "Gleitzeit/Kernzeit")
- ☐ Open office with many co-working spaces, coffee corners, etc.
- ☐ Company gym
- ☐ Online fitness offer with full free access
- ☐ Yearly employee events on site
- ☐ Online networking opportunities

Next

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47% completed

11. Today I would value an employer that:

Please rate 3 of the most important attributes according to your individual opinion. The rating starts with the highest value 1 (= most important attribute).

Please keep in mind the current working situation, changes in our way of living and working (according to your individual situation).

has very high ratings on online "rate your employer" websites	has a well-known brand, i.e. internationally known company	has the image of being a family-friendly employer (e.g. no extensive working hours, less overtime)
offers high salary packages	offers home-office opportunities	has a well-situated office in the city center
has the image of a very fun and dynamic atmosphere at work (e.g. like at a young start-up with a small number of young employees)	offers a stable working environment (e.g. a traditional company that is well situated in the market operating already for many years)	offers a dynamic environment that offers quick career development according to performance (up-or-out system)

1
2
3

Next

53% completed

12. The Brand identity of an employer is related to the image the company has to the outside. Please rate the following questions accordingly:

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
The brand identity and image of my employer is very important to me.	○	○	○	○	○
I tend to associate myself with the corporate brand (i.e. if my employer´s brand is known for the attributes "performance-driven", "teamwork", "passionate" I associate myself to these attributes too)	○	○	○	○	○
My employer is an important part of my self-concept and my social identity .	○	○	○	○	○
When searching for a job, I also consider the image of the company.	○	○	○	○	○

Next

13. Company A, B and C are three different employers, offering different benefits and development opportunities. Please choose the company you feel the most attracted to:

○ Company A: International corporation with locations worldwide. Employees receive a vast number of benefits and development opportunities. The employer is known for supporting a fast career development and offering high salary packages incl. performance bonus programs. The workload is very high with an average of 60 hours per week of working time. According to an online "rate your employer" website, the management of this company is mainly focused on the company performance. Employees feel under pressure to perform well. On average the employees do not stay longer than 3 years at this company.

○ Company B: Medium sized enterprise with 150 employees, mainly operating in Austria and Germany. The employer is known for a very good working atmosphere, with multiple on site employee events throughout the year. Corporate offers and benefits are limited, however, the salary packages are higher than the market average. According to an online "rate your employer" website, overtime is rare but there is no home office possibility as the management did not agree to have employees working from home.

○ Company C: This medium sized enterprise with 300 employees operating in the whole DACH (Germany, Austria & Switzerland) region is one of the best rated employers on an online "rate your employer" website. Employees are given full flexibility in managing their working time and location of work. The headquarter in Germany offers working spaces for 60% of the employees with an open office and desk sharing. Besides two on site employee events (Christmas party and summer retreat), the company offers online-only networking opportunities. The salary packages are rated to be average.

[Next]

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14. Please rate the following questions regarding different attributes of an employer

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a high salary package.	○	○	○	○	○
The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a very good work-life-balance.	○	○	○	○	○
The most important attribute at my current or potential employer is a stable work environment.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that I value different attributes about my employer compared to before the pandemic (e.g. remote working, less face-to-face interaction, different way of working, etc).	○	○	○	○	○

[Next]

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15. Before the pandemic I was looking for a job at a company with ...

Please focus on what were very important attributes for you before the pandemic when searching for a job.

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
very high ratings on online "rate your employer" websites	○	○	○	○	○
a very good working atmosphere that offers many employee events and also afterwork networking	●	●	●	●	●
a well-known brand, i.e. internationally known company	○	○	○	○	○
the image of being a family-friendly employer (e.g. no extensive working hours, less overtime)	●	●	●	●	●
high salary packages	○	○	○	○	○
home-office opportunities	●	●	●	●	●
a well-situated office in the city center	○	○	○	○	○
the image of a fun and dynamic atmosphere at work (e.g. like at a young start-up with a small number of young employees)	●	●	●	●	●
a stable working environment (e.g. a traditional company that is well situated in the market operating already for many years)	○	○	○	○	○
a dynamic environment that offers quick career development according to performance (up-or-out system)	●	●	●	●	●

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16. How did your expectations towards your employer change during the last two years? (i.e. you value now different attributes about your employer than two years ago)

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I feel that my expectations have changed towards my potential employer.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that I value different attributes now about my potential employer.	○	○	○	○	○
When looking for a job now, I would focus on different attributes of a potential employer.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my expectations towards my employer have changed due to my changed life circumstances.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my expectations towards my employer have changed due to my previous experiences at work.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that the pandemic had an impact on what I value about an employer.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that due to the pandemic I experienced a shift in my expectations towards my current and any potential employer.	○	○	○	○	○

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17. Work-Life-Balance describes the division of time spent for work related activities and leisure activities. Please rate the following statements accordingly:

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I feel that my Work-Life-Balance has changed over the last 12 months.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel very satisfied about my current Work-Life-Balance.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my Work-Life-Balance has improved over the last 12 months.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that the COVID-19 pandemic had an effect (in general) on my Work-Life-Balance.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that the COVID-19 pandemic has improved my Work-Life-Balance (i.e. a more satisfying / higher Work-Life-Balance)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my Work-Life-Balance is positively correlated with my performance at work (i.e. the higher the Work-Life-Balance, the higher also the performance or vice versa).	○	○	○	○	○

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18. Please rate the following statements according to your individual perception.

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I feel that my performance at work was higher during the pandemic than before (e.g. better results, higher efficiency, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my workday was more efficient during the pandemic (e.g. quicker processes, quicker realization of projects, shorter meetings with more outcome, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my performance at work was negatively impacted (= lower performance) by the pandemic and its implications on my daily work (e.g. less face-to-face interactions, online-only communication, less breaks, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my employer supported me in remaining productive and motivated during the pandemic.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that I had more support from my superior and colleagues during the pandemic than before (e.g. in solving problems, mental support, sharing experiences, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○

Next

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

In case you have any questions related to this survey or the Master thesis, please contact me, Evelyne Panzenböck, via email: a01451229@unet.univie.ac.at

Your answers were transmitted anonymously, you may close the browser window or tab now.

Keyword Index:

Baby Boomer	Generation born between 1946 and 1964 (Klaus & Schneider, 2016)
COVID-19	*"COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. WHO first learned of this new virus on 31 December 2019, following a report of a cluster of cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, People's Republic of China."* (WHO, 2021)
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EB	Employer Branding
EmpAt	Employer Attractiveness (scale), often referred to in the theoretical context of the Employer Attractiveness scale by Berthon & Hah (2005)
Employer Branding Dimensions	Seven dimensions that influence the Employer Brand and are being perceived by employees and partially by candidates as an influential aspect on the organization´s image. (Ambler & Barrow, 1996)
EVP	Employer Value Proposition
Flexible working	Flexible Working reflects different work arrangements in terms of location and schedule. The location flexibility can cover telecommuting, hybrid work arrangements and snowbird programs. Schedule flexibility can cover flextime, compressed workweek, shift work, part-time schedules and job-sharing. (SHRM, 2017 - present)
Generation X	Generation born between 1965 – 1980 (Klaus & Schneider, 2016)
Generation Y	Generation born between 1981 and 1996 (Klaus & Schneider, 2016)
Generation Z	Generation born in 1997 or later (Klaus & Schneider, 2016)
New normal	*"A new normal is a state to which an economy, society, etc. settles following a crisis, when this differs from the situation that prevailed prior to the start of the crisis."* (Alan & Topcu, 2022)
Pandemic	*"A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease, such as a new influenza virus or the coronavirus that causes COVID-19."* *(healthdirect.gov.au, 2022) (*healthdirect.gov.au, 2022)

Remote working	*"Remote work (also known as work from home [WFH] or telecommuting) is a type of flexible working arrangement that allows an employee to work from remote location outside of corporate offices."* (Gartner, 2022)
USP	Unique Selling Proposition

List of figures and tables:

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