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THE MEANS OF REDUCING THE DIVERGENCE BETWEEN THE SUBIMAGES OF A FIRM AS AN EMPLOYER

Introduction

All modern enterprises functioning on the market occupy various roles. These result from the nature of activity conducted (e.g., the role of a producer or a middleman), the position held in a marketing channel (e.g., the role of supplier or receiver), the fact of employing, in a particular organization, certain number of employees (the role of an employer), etc. The latter of the aforementioned is characterized by the greatest degree, of subjectivism, as one and the same enterprise is viewed differently by various groups of addressees of personal actions (figure 1).

Figure 1 The diversity of categories of addressees of actions in the scope of personal marketing.

External receivers

Indirect:

- ex-workers,
- ex-candidates,
- people who have not had any contact with a firm yet

Direct:

- members of families of employees,
- employees' friends and acquaintances

Internal receivers

- employees carrying out their tasks in a registered office of a firm,
- employees carrying out their tasks outside a registered office of a firm
- middle and low rank managerial personnel,
- executive workers

Source: own compilation

The kinds of images of a firm as an employer

Depending on by whom and in what circumstances a particular organization is evaluated, three main kinds of images of an employer may be mentioned:

- 1) current image which reflects an image of a firm created by employees as internal receivers as well as an image of a firm created by participants in its environment as external receivers,
- 2) target real image which a firm would like to achieve in a relatively short time, and its

creation is possible because it takes the way in which an employer has been hitherto and is currently perceived by internal and external receivers as well as material, financial, information, and most of all intellectual resources (particularly human and relational) which a particular organization has currently at its disposal into account,

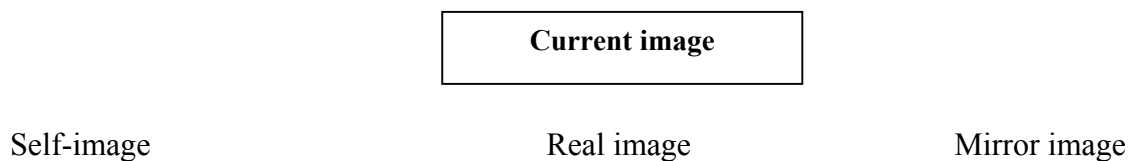
- 3) ideal image which could be achieved by a firm if it had always acted in accordance with personal marketing assumptions and had not made any mistakes in the scope of personal policy, which is rather hardly possible in reality.

Three images distinguished with regard to the subject criterion make up the way in which a particular organization (as an employer) is currently perceived. The following are meant here (figure 2):

- 1) self-image, i.e. one's own image reflecting the way an employer perceives himself or herself,
- 2) real image also described as current which refers to how external subjects (e.g., potential employees) really perceive an employer,
- 3) mirror image reflecting the image of an employer shaped among workers employed by him or her.

In practice, many firms are perceived the way which definitely differs not only from ideal image but also from target real one. Moreover, even the aforementioned kinds of image referring to a current way of perceiving a particular firm are very often extremely different, and these differences are particularly noticeable between self-image and the two remaining kinds of employer's image. As a consequence, there is an image gap which widens along with the distance between these images.

Figure 2 Elements of a current image of an employer.



Source: own compilation

One of the main reasons why there is no image coherence and the fact that many employers are perceived in a negative way is a divergence between the importance of various personal actions declared by them and the actual realization of these actions as well as the fact that no actions, that are key elements of personal marketing, are taken¹ (table 1).

The fact which should also be emphasized is that a complete filling of this gap is practically unrealistic. One can only strive to decrease it. However, this requires an enterprise to meet a few conditions among which the following may be mentioned (most of all):

- 1) a necessity for the management of an enterprise to understand that there is an image gap,
- 2) a necessity for the management of an enterprise to understand that an improvement in a current image of it as an employer is necessary,
- 3) a necessity for the management of an enterprise to understand a profound influence of its image as an employer on other partial images and on the overall image of a firm, and in this sense on the possibilities of its further development.

¹ This is shown by the results of questionnaire survey carried out among presidents, vice-presidents and members of managerial personnel of production firms situated in Lubelskie province. Altogether, 167 people have been examined. The results of the research have been discussed in detail in Baróg, A. (2006) *Personal marketing as a tool of creating the image of a firm*, Difin Warsaw.

Table 1. The importance declared and personal actions actually carried out (on a scale from 0 to 5 points), where 0 – completely unimportant, 1 – hardly important, 2 – slightly important, 3 - important, 4 - very important, 5 – crucial.

Kind of personal action	Importance of particular action declared by management personnel	Actions actually carried out in an enterprise
Planning the human resources	5	0
Recruiting employees	5	5
Acquainting new employee with work	5	5
Monitoring in the form of complex programmes	0	3
Training	4	4
Salaries or wages	3	3
Determining the career path	0	3
Promotion	5	4
Monitored dismissals	0	5
Communication with employees	4	3
Identifying the expectations of employees and the level of their satisfaction	3	0
Communication with external labor market	4	0
Contacts with external institutions (e.g., higher education institutions)	4	4
Actions taken to the advantage of a local community	0	0
The monitoring of personal plans that have been carried out	5	0

Source: own compilation based on the results of questionnaire survey that has been conducted.

What is more, evening out firm's knowledge of employees' expectations and aspirations to development determines the effectiveness of actions aimed at bridging the image gap, actions that are taken in the scope of shaping the target image of a firm as an employer. Therefore, it may be stated that the lack of image coherence is a direct consequence of the knowledge gap, i.e. between what an employer really knows about employees and what he or she should know about them in order to fully satisfy their professional and personal aspirations.

Reducing the knowledge gap requires taking actions such as:

- 1) identifying current needs and potential employees,
- 2) monitoring any changes that occur in the scope of employees' preferences that have been identified,
- 3) identifying the degree to which these changes grow in number, rate, and directions in which these changes occur,
- 4) looking for the reasons why these changes occur.

Obtaining information in the abovementioned spheres is a basis for carrying out the actions which have to precede the right repair actions connected with the creation of coherent image. The following may be included into these:

- 1) the analysis of attitudes and expectations of current employees as internal purchasers,
- 2) the analysis of current image of a firm as an employer that people currently employed

- in an enterprise are aware of,
- 3) the analysis of current image of a firm as an employer that external purchasers, i.e. potential employees are aware of.

Carrying out the analysis is obviously easier with regard to current employees, whereas analyzing the way an enterprise as an employer is perceived by potential workers is more difficult. This results from the fact that the contacts of the latter with a firm are very rare or there are no contacts at all. However, this does not imply that identifying the external image of a firm as an employer may be skipped as this is one of subimages of a firm.

The analysis of attitudes and expectations of current employees

Attitudes and expectations as well as external purchasers behavior resulting from these can be analyzed by means of the set of indicators proposed by the author that are shown in table 1. These were devised on the basis of the results of primary empirical research conducted among the employees of Polish production enterprises representing the group of small and medium-sized firms². As for the research, the method of a direct questionnaire survey was used. This involved 567 persons who held a managerial post (lower rank) and executive workers.

Table 2 Indicators allowing for carrying out the analysis of feelings, expectations, and attitudes of employees

The name of an indicator	The formula of an indicator	The value of an indicator (in %)
Absolute dissatisfaction indicator	The number of employees extremely dissatisfied with working in a particular firm/The number of all the employees under examination	3,76
Relative dissatisfaction indicator	(The number of employees dissatisfied only to some extent + The number of dissatisfied employees)/The number of all the employees under examination	12,79
The total indicator of dissatisfaction	(The number of employees very dissatisfied with working in a particular firm + The number of employees dissatisfied only to some extent + The number of dissatisfied employees)/The number of all the employees under examination	16,55
Absolute satisfaction indicator	The number of employees very satisfied with working in a particular firm/The number of all the employees under examination	12,78
Relative satisfaction indicator	(The number of employees rather satisfied + The number of employees satisfied only to some extent)/The number of all the employees under examination	65,41
The total indicator of satisfaction	(The number of employees very satisfied with working in a particular firm + The number of employees satisfied only to some extent + The number of employees rather satisfied)/The number of all the employees under examination	78,19
Absolute satisfaction indicator	The number of employees feeling great satisfaction from their jobs/The number of all the employees under examination	8,33
Relative satisfaction	The number of employees felling at most average satisfaction	71,97

² The results of the aforementioned research have been presented in Baruk, A. (2006), *Personal marketing as a tool for firm's image creation*, Difin. Warsaw.

indicator	from their jobs/The number of all the employees under examination	
The total indicator of satisfaction	(The number of employees feeling great satisfaction from their jobs + The number of employees feeling at most average satisfaction from their jobs)/The number of all the employees under examination	80,30
The indicator of the degree to which a particular job is stressful	The number of employees evaluating the job carried out by them as very stressful/The number of all the employees under examination	67,32
The indicator of job that curbs development	The number of employees evaluating the job carried out by them as curbing their personal development /The number of all the employees under examination	54,12
Unimportance indicator	The number of employees evaluating interpersonal relations as unimportant/The number of all the employees under examination	33,33
Competition indicator	(The number of employees evaluating interpersonal relations as a silent competition + The number of employees evaluating interpersonal relations as open competition)/The number of all the employees under examination	34,07

Source: own compilation

For, feelings and behaviors of employees on the internal market, which an enterprise is, influence not only the shaping (in the consciousness of employees) of a certain image, but also play a major role in creating certain image of an employer on external labor market among potential employees. Their identification and analysis is necessary so that a firm could take dynamic actions aiming at arousing positive attitudes and participation as giving up such actions may have a destabilizing effect on the functioning of a firm as an tenderer of products addressed to participants in the marketing environment of a firm.

The analysis of results of perceiving a firm as an employer

On the basis of data shown in table 2, it may be stated that a considerable number of employees evaluated social environment of labor negatively. Almost every fifth respondent was dissatisfied with working in a particular firm, whereas only 8,33% people were fully satisfied with fulfilling professional tasks. However, according to 1/3 of the respondents, these were carried out in the atmosphere of unhealthy competition. Mutual competition had contributed to the fact that almost 70% felt very great stress, while more than a half of the respondents believed they worked in the conditions that did not allow for professional development.

An important consequence of negative feelings of employees is for instance a value of recommendation indicator (table 3 shows indicators proposed by the author which allow for analyzing the effects of perceiving the firm by employees). The result of the research that has been conducted show that only 10,29% of the respondents recommended working in firms in which they had been employed very much. More than a half of the respondents expressed not so great encouragement to those who wanted to take up job there (55,88%), whereas more than 1/3 of employees advised against taking it up, and 5,15% strongly advised against taking such a step.

The research conducted has shown that the value of recommendation indicator depends most of all on the following factors:

- 1) the level of satisfaction from working in a particular firm,
- 2) the level of satisfaction from work carried out,

- 3) the level and form of loyalty,
- 4) the evaluation of management style,
- 5) the kind of needs satisfied and the degree to which these are satisfied,
- 6) the evaluation of the fact whether promotions and rewards are granted fairly,
- 7) the feeling of stability or its lack,
- 8) perceived level of independence in making decisions,
- 9) the feeling of integration with other workers,
- 10) evaluating the job as creative, stressful, etc.

Table 3. Indicators allowing for carrying out the analysis of the results of perceiving the firm as an employer by current employees

The name of an indicator	The formula of an indicator	The value of an indicator (in %)
The indicator of co-deciding	The number of employees confirming they have an influence on the future of a firm/The number of all the employees under examination	43,70
The indicator of full identification with a firm	The number of employees fully identifying themselves with the objectives of a firm/The number of all the employees under examination	39,10
The indicator of partial identification with the objectives of a firm	The number of employees partly identifying themselves with the objectives of a firm/The number of all the employees under examination	51,13
The total indicator of the identification with the objectives of a firm	(The number of employees fully identifying themselves with the objectives of a firm + The number of employees partly identifying themselves with the objectives of a firm)/The number of all the employees under examination	90,23
Development indicator	The number of employees who fell they are developing/The number of all the employees under examination	9,56
Stability indicator	The number of employees who have a sense of stability/The number of all the employees under examination	46,32
Unfair rewarding indicator	The number of employees evaluating promotions, rewards, etc. as unfair/The number of all the employees under examination	62,70
Absolute recommendation indicator	The number of employees who recommend working in a particular firm very much/The number of all the employees under examination	10,29
Relative recommendation indicator	The number of employees who recommended working in a particular firm only to come extent/The number of all the employees under examination	55,88
The total indicator of recommendation	(The number of employees who recommend working in a particular firm very much+ The number of employees who recommend working in a particular firm only to come extent)/The number of all the employees under examination	66,17
Absolute antirecommendation indicator	The number of employees who strongly advised against working in a particular firm/The number of all the employees under examination	5,15
Relative antirecommendation indicator	The number of employees advising against working in a particular firm/The number of all the employees under examination	28,68
The total indicator of	(The number of employees who strongly advised against working	33,83

antirecommendation	in a particular firm + The number of employees advising against working in a particular firm)/The number of all the employees under examination	
Absolute loyalty indicator	The number of employees who would not change job regardless of the conditions offered in a new firm/The number of all the employees under examination	18,05
Relative loyalty indicator	The number of employees who would change job only if a new firm would offer better financial and non-financial conditions/The number of all the employees under examination	22,56
The total indicator of loyalty	(The number of employees who would not change job regardless of the conditions offered in a new firm + The number of employees who would change job only if a new firm would offer better financial and non-financial conditions)/The number of all the employees under examination	40,61
The indicator of absolute readiness to leave a firm	The number of employees willing to change job without any hesitation/The number of all the employees under examination	7,52
The indicator of relative readiness to leave a firm	The number of employees willing to change job if better financial and non-financial conditions were offered to them/The number of all the employees under examination	51,88
The total indicator of the readiness to leave a firm	(The number of employees willing to change a job without any hesitation + The number of employees willing to change job if better financial and non-financial conditions were offered to them)/The number of all the employees under examination	59,40

Source: own compilation.

Thus, it should not be a surprise that a considerable number of the respondents advised against taking up a job in a firm in which they had been employed, as the analysis of determinants of recommendation power which had been identified showed that the role of employees was underestimated and their professional expectations were not met. Only 9,52% of the respondents felt they were developing, and their involvement in the fulfillment of firm's objectives was very often effectively curbed by unfair, as not based on factual reasons, granting the rewards or promotions. A slight loyalty toward employers with whom employees did not identified themselves and in many cases did not want to connect their future with was a consequence of such a situation. In this sense, they contributed not only to the creation of a negative external image, but even to strengthening the negative opinions about firms in which they had worked.

Conclusion

Summing up the above deliberations, one should bear in mind that current employees act as ambassadors of the image of a firm as an employer. That is why a high value of antirecommendation indicator, that has been identified during the research, should alarm employers (this concerns not only enterprises under examination but also many other subjects). This is important because their opinions on a firm as an employer, that are directly passed to participants in its marketing environment who are potential members of an organization, are more reliable than official declarations of an enterprise.

Even if a firm takes image actions aimed at creating the positive image, these will not be effective if they are not confirmed by information transmitted by current employees. Any divergence may only make an image gap widen. Furthermore, the fact that current employees create negative image of a firm as an employer in its environment also influences the way it is

perceived in other dimensions, for instance as a producer, which may have an effect on the overall image of the entire enterprise and products that are manufactured by it in a long-term perspective.

That is why every enterprise as an employer should not only devise and consistently implement image strategy but most of all has to prepare for such actions in a proper way. This requires bridging the knowledge gap concerning employees through systematic identifying and analyzing their feelings, attitudes, and expectations as well as current image of a firm as an employer stored in their minds. It is a necessary condition for making effective modification of the aforementioned image so that it could be in accordance with a target real image. In conclusion, it ought to be stressed that this should not be a one-time action but a constant activity which allows for making comparisons between feelings and expectations of employees during various periods as well as the image of an employer which has been created and stored in their minds.

REFERENCES:

1. Baruk, A.. (2006) Personal marketing as a tool for creating the image of a firm, Difin. Warszawa.