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## **EMPLOYER BRANDING IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY: ON THE EXAMPLE OF RYANAIR**

**Abstract.** If a company is aimed to improve its position in the market, develop and growth, company should work with its employer brand. Positive and strong HR brand has many advantages: professional workers aimed at overall success of company, staff turnover rate is low, highly effective work of employee and team, achievement of goals and selection of highly qualified staff, strong corporate culture [5]. In this article, the author analyzes the problems of the employer brand in Ryanair, which may adversely affect the company's image in the future. Being the most profitable low-cost airline in Europe [6], Ryanair faces many problems in the structure of the company, which can lead to loss of attractiveness for both current employees and potential employees who are looking for work. Based on works of other researchers, author investigates issues such as autocratic-approach of management, staff turnover, stress and lack of motivation among employees. By analyzing through different variables, it is obvious that issues are tightly related to each other and by changing some aspects of management system, company has an opportunity to increase its employer brand image for current and potential employees.

**Keywords:** Employer branding, Staff turnover, Organizational behavior, Lack of Motivation, Reward system.

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**Аннотация.** Если компания нацелена на улучшение своей позиции на рынке, развитие и рост прибыли, компания должна работать со своим брендом работодателя. Позитивный и сильный HR-бренд имеет много преимуществ: профессиональные работники нацелены на общий успех компании, низкая текучесть кадров, высокоэффективная работа сотрудника и команды, достижение целей и подбор высококвалифицированного персонала, сильная корпоративная культура и т.д. [5]. В этой статье автор анализирует проблемы бренда работодателя в компании Ryanair, которые могут негативно повлиять на имидж компании в будущем. Будучи самой прибыльной лоукост авиакомпанией в Европе [6], Ryanair сталкивается со многими проблемами в структуре компании, что может привести к потере привлекательности как для нынешних сотрудников, так и для потенциальных сотрудников в будущем. Основываясь на работах других исследователей, автор изучает такие проблемы, как автократический подход к управлению, текучесть кадров, стресс и отсутствие мотивации среди сотрудников. Анализируя различные

переменные, становится очевидным, что проблемы тесно связаны друг с другом и изменив некоторые аспекты системы управления, компания получает возможность повысить имидж бренда своего работодателя для нынешних и потенциальных сотрудников.

**Ключевые слова:** Бренд работодателя, Текучесть кадров, Организационное поведение, Отсутствие мотивации, Система вознаграждения.

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**Аңдатпа.** Егер компания өзінің нарықтық жағдайын жақсартуға, дамуға және кірісті арттыру мақсаттарын көдеген болса, компания өзінің жұмыс беруші бренді күшейтуі қажет. Позитивті және жүйеленген HR брендінің көптеген артықшылықтары бар: кәсіби қызметкерлер компанияның жалпы табысына бағытталған, кадр ағыны көрсеткішінің төмен деңгейі, қызметкер мен ұжымның жоғары эффективтілігі, мақсаттарға жетуге және жоғары білікті кадрларды таңдауға мүмкіндік, күшті корпоративті мәдениеттің қалыптасуы және т.б. [5]. Бұл мақалада автор Ruanaig-де жұмыс беруші брендінің болашақта компания имиджіне теріс әсер етуі мүмкін проблемаларын талдайды. Ruanaig Еуропадағы ең тиімді лоукост авиакомпания болып табылады [6], алайда компанияның құрылымында адам басқару саласы бойынша көптеген проблемалар бар, атаулы проблемалар болашақ жұмысшылар үшін де, әлеуетті қызметкерлер үшін де тартымдылықты жоғалтуға әкелуі мүмкін. Автор басқа зерттеушілердің жұмыстарына сүйене отырып, басқаруға автократиялық тәсіл, кадрлардың ағыны, жұмысшылар арасындағы стресс және мотивацияның болмауы сияқты проблемаларды зерттейді. Әр түрлі ауыспалыларды талдай отырып, мәселелердің бір-бірімен тығыз байланысты екендігі және менеджмент жүйесінің кейбір аспектілерін өзгерте отырып, компания қазіргі және әлеуетті қызметкерлер үшін жұмыс берушінің бренд имиджін жоғарылатуға мүмкіндігін автор осы мақалада талдайды.

**Түйін сөздер:** Жұмыс беруші бренді, Кадр ағыны, Ұжымдық іс-әрекет, Мотивацияның төмен деңгейі, Марапаттау жүйесі.

### *Introduction*

The employer brand concept has been quickly developing over the past 20 years. It is becoming increasingly difficult to create competition on the market and stand out against the backdrop of the same goods and services. In this situation, only the company staff remains the bearer of the unique corporate knowledge inherent in only one company and distinguishing it from the others [1].

In a competitive and dynamic market, the preservation, motivation and development of employees and focusing on the impact that the people managing the organization are important for companies, as well as on improving products and other external marketing strategies. The product brand is a critical source of sustainable competitive advantage [2] and employees are an integral part of the company's efforts to create powerful brands by creating value in the minds of consumers [3].

The concept of “employer brand” was introduced into the business dictionary by T. Ambler and S. Barrow. In the same article they published, historically the first definition of an employer brand was presented as “a set of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by company management and identified with the company by the employee” [4].

Ambler and Barrow fragmentarily mention that functional benefits are development and useful actions associated with a particular position; economic benefits - material or monetary compensation; psychological benefits are a sense of purpose, belonging and recognition. In their opinion, a combination of these factors, which make it possible to distinguish an organization as an employer in the labor market from competitors, forms the employer's brand.

If company is aimed to improve its position in market, develop and growth, company should work with its employer brand. Positive and strong HR brand has many advantages: professional workers aimed at overall success of company, staff turnover rate is low, highly effective work of employee and team, achievement of goals and selection of highly qualified staff, strong corporate culture [5].

In this article, the author analyzes the problems of the employer brand in Ryanair, which may adversely affect the company's image in the future. Being the most profitable low-cost airline in Europe [6], Ryanair faces many problems in the structure of the company, which can lead to loss of attractiveness for both current employees and potential employees who are looking for work.

#### *Research Problem*

In this work, the author considers Ryanair, as this company has been noticed several times in cases where the rights of workers have been violated. The problem of attracting, efficiently using and retaining qualified personnel is becoming one of the leading conditions for maintaining the competitiveness of companies [7]. In this case, Ryanair faces problems in employee motivation, staff turnover and an unauthorized approach to management. All these factors can adversely affect the brand of the company as an employer and lose its competitiveness [8]. McGregor simply argues that the responsibility for creating a workspace where people can recognize and develop human characteristics rests with leadership (1957). The main objective of management is to organize the conditions and methods so that people can best achieve their goals, directing their efforts to achieve the goals of the organization [9]. In this regard, it is

important to find out the correlation of the main problems that the company faces and give recommendations based on theories.

#### *Significance of Research*

When there is intense competition among employers for the most experienced and qualified employees in the labor market, the concept of an employer brand is gaining more popularity.

Whereas product branding represents attractiveness of product to customers, corporate branding considers attractiveness of an organization to variety of external audience, employer branding represents current and potential employees as brand targets [10].

This topic is relevant in relation to Ryanair, due to the fact that the company neglects some points of human resources management and thereby spoils its image as a place to work for current and potential employees [11].

#### *Novelty*

There are many articles that define the concept of an employer's brand and what it consists of, but there are very few works on the example of one company as a brand. This work differs from other works that it identifies the main issues of the company regarding the employer brand and makes qualitative analyzes through these issues.

Author uses different variables (dependent, independent, moderating) in order to investigate their relationship and find the best solutions for issues.

#### *Research Purpose*

The goal of this work is the analysis of the company's employer brand, by identifying the main issues and by finding their relations.

#### *Research Questions*

In the present work, author makes an effort to find answers to the following questions: "What are the main issues Ryanair has related to employee and how they affect to employer brand?", "How the issues related to each other?" and "Which recommendations can be given to solve issues?".

#### *Literature review and Theoretical (Conceptual) Framework*

For the first time, the term "employer brand" was implemented by Simon Barrow and Tim Ambler. The authors were proposed to understand the brand of the employer as a set of functional, psychological and economic benefits provided by the employer to their employees (Barrow & Ambler, 1996). This definition corresponds to the level of understanding of the employer's brand, among most practitioners and does not contradict the point of view of academic research in the field of human resources management [11].

The definition of value proposition of employer through labor stimulation as an impact on the motivational structure of the employee's personality through directed managerial influence is relevant, in order to obtain a certain result, which is the employee's ability to accumulate and effectively

use the existing labor potential in accordance with the goals and values of the organization [11].

All employees of the company as its representatives' influence and shape the perception of the company as an employer [12]. Reputation consists not only of a successful product brand and social responsibility, but also of how the company is represented in the outside world by its employees, and this is far from only in situations related to business. Here, the authors emphasize the need to develop a comprehensive marketing plan that would integrate any direction of the company's positioning, strengthening its holistic positive image. The staff of the company should be aware of its basic marketing strategy, even if specific employees by their functionality have nothing to do with this field of activity [10].

Ryanair is one of the most profitable low-cost airlines in Europe [6], but poor customer service and a reputation as an employer [14] can negatively affect the status of the company and future income.

The main issues related to organizational behavior are *stress, lack of motivation, staff turnover and autocratic-approach of management* [8].

#### *Stress and lack of motivation*

According to Bamber, Ryanair does not stimulate its employees properly and provides poor working conditions, which is why employees have low morale. Motivation is the process of achieving a balance between the goals of the company and the employee to fully meet the needs of both [7].

The consequences of these negative phenomena are reflected not only in employees and work in general, but also the quality of customer service is weakening, this applies to both local staff and cabin crew [15]. It depends on many factors: working conditions, management style, communication, a high degree of responsibility for the work performed, opportunities for creative and business growth, if we call the factors differently, the conditions which were created by managements. This group of factors suggests that each person can work motivated when the employee sees the goal and considers its achievement possible. The absence of motivation factors can lead to job dissatisfaction, but their presence brings satisfaction and motivates employees to work more productively.

Due to the lack of motivation at work, communication and the desire to help each other among employees are lost. This weak communication between employees also affects customers who cannot receive the service at a sufficient level [15].

According to Herzberg's theory of two factors, in the workplace there are factors that cause job satisfaction and there are a number of factors that cause job dissatisfaction. As a result of the experiments, Herzberg concluded that there are two main categories of factors for obtaining a degree of satisfaction from the work performed: factors that remain at work, and factors that motivate others to

work. The formula obtained by Herzberg is as follows: the working environment and working conditions plus motivating factors are equal to the state of satisfaction. The working environment and working conditions minus motivating factors are equal to zero effect.

This means that Ryanair lacks motivating factors such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, career opportunities, and the company's administrative policy. The company needs to pay attention to the non-motivating factors that exist in the company, such as poor working conditions, autocratic governance, lack of communication between employees and a lot of working time [8].

#### *Autocratic-approach of Management*

Managing human resources in a company is tough because the company uses fines and penalties for mistakes instead of motivating employees [8].

Autocratic style implies strict leadership - orders, instructions requiring strict adherence by the group. Adhering to this, the leader determines all types of activities of the group, prescribes all methods and actions [17]. This style is characterized by a clear statement of the goals of the activity, an energetic form to give orders, intolerance to everything that contradicts the opinion of the leader. The group members of such a leader are constantly in a state of uncertainty about their future actions, they only know their personal tasks [18].

In a company, in particular, relations between participants are minimized by the leader, so that they are carried out only through his mediation or during his observation. The manager, if necessary, is subordinate to the group regardless of their opinion [14].

According to McGregor's X-Y theory, there are two types of workers. In X theory, management assumes that workers will not be able to work initially. Because of this, workers must be carefully monitored, for which comprehensive management systems are being developed. Theoretically, Y employees can be ambitious, have internal incentives, take on more responsibility, provide self-control and self-government. It is believed that workers enjoy their work related to both mental and physical labor [9].

Ryanair management, instead of focusing strictly on cost reduction, should give employees freedom as there is a chance to increase productivity without being stuck in the rules [19]. According to Y theory, with freedom, workers have a desire to be creative and progressive in production, if possible.

At Ryanair, each employee deals only with their own tasks, it minimizes communication and employees are tightly controlled by managers, while other low-cost airlines such as Southwest have an extended communication between employees, task sharing. and strong positive relationships between management and employees [15].

According to Develin, communication is a powerful tool for solving about 90% of problems between employees and departments [20]. In this regard,

the Irish low cost airline has shown less efficiency and conflicts between departments [8].

According to Branham (2005), company executives should look for ways to attract potential employees and retain existing ones, as well as search for new potential customers by retaining existing ones. By doing this, companies are improving their employer image.

#### *Staff turnover*

It is believed that the most important asset of any business is people. The development of technology has led to the fact that for the most part companies compete mainly due to highly qualified specialists. The future of modern companies, in principle, depends on the willingness of staff to continuous innovation [21].

Realistic job previews reduce employee turnover by making expectations more precise and accurate [23], increase trust and honesty [24], and reduce the ambiguity of roles [26]. In condition that the employer's brand message is absolutely positive, neglecting any real, negative organizational information, the firm cannot reap positive results that could otherwise be achieved because it will lead to staff turnover [25].

Staff turnover is mainly due to dissatisfaction with management and their attitude, inadequate career and professional development, training, poor working conditions, poor competitive remuneration system and low wages [27].

There are basic theories of the impact of employee turnover on productivity. The first is the theory of FSHC (firm specific human capital) proposed by Becker in 1975. If the company reduces training costs, then in the future training costs will be even more due to staff turnover. An employee who has not received an adequate level of training will certainly make mistakes due to lack of knowledge; these errors can result in financial consequences for the company and a drop in productivity [30]. In the case of Ryanair, where there is a high turnover rate, the likelihood of a decrease in productivity is very high [8].

According to the theory of expectations, the presence of an active need is not the only and necessary condition for motivating a person to achieve a specific goal. To be motivated, people must be well rewarded and the value of reward is very positive. If the remuneration system is not satisfactory for employees and ineffective, this will lead to discontent among employees and staff turnover [28].

Ryanair's reward system for pilots and cabin crew consists of their salary and the sum of their other indicators, such as the sale of magazines, drinks and food on board an airplane. Such a system is not motivating and not effective for employees to make efforts [14].

Ryanair's staff turnover rate is high. Creaton (2004) writes that the company needs to support one of the Pareto principle supporters, which states: "20% of the effort gives 80% of the result, and the remaining 80% of the effort

gives only 20% of the result.” Having correctly chosen the minimum of the most important actions, the company can quickly get a significant part of the planned full result, while further improvements are ineffective and may be unjustified.

As it was written above, the main problem in the organization is the key managers, whose work and vision can motivate other employees and increase work efficiency. Staff turnover also depends on their performance because senior employees who manage organizational reputation and take care of their dependents [8].

According to the analysis conducted by D. Kuchеров, when the staff turnover is low, the company has the advantage of improving the image and reputation of the employer's brand [9].

According to statistics, Ryanair's turnover in 2018 is 11.5% (Statista), which is an extremely high rate in the aviation industry.

### *Methodology*

#### *About Ryanair*

The story of Ryanair began in 1985 with the creation of Guinness Peat Aviation by the Ryan family (whose surname became the brand of the largest low cost airline in the world) and the Irish businessman Layem Lonergan, the owner of the travel company Club Travel.

Ryanair serves over 1600 destinations between 180 airports in 28 European countries and Morocco, making more than 1600 flights per day. According to annual report of 2018 of company, the number of employees increased from 12438 people in 2017 to 13803 including management, pilots, flight attendants, ground staff and administration. If analyze issues above related to Employer brand through different variables, there are clear connections between them and it is easier to find solutions and give recommendations (Figure 1).

*Autocratic-control approach* of management in this case is *Independent variable* as it can be changed positively by managers, as McGregor simply argues that it is a responsibility of management to make workspace, where people can recognize and develop human characteristics for themselves (1957). The essential task of management is to organize conditions and methods so people can achieve their aims in a best way by directing their own efforts toward organizational objectives [9].

*Staff turnover* is *Dependent variable*, as it depends on factors: reward system: salary, chance of promotion, recognition and approval of work results [27]. There are main theories on affecting staff turnover to productivity. The first one is firm specific human capital theory provided by Becker in 1975. If the company reduces training costs, then in the future there will be even more expenses for trainings due to staff turnover. An employee who has not received an adequate level of training will certainly make mistakes due to lack of knowledge, these mistakes can turn into financial consequences for the company



and falling of productivity level [23]. In case of Ryanair, where there is high level of staff turnover, the chance of decreasing productivity is very high [8].

*Stress and lack of motivation* can be *Moderating variable* as it has strong contingent effect on relationship of *Autocratic-control approach* and *staff turnover* and also *Dependent variable* as it depends on many factors: working conditions, management style, communication, a high degree of responsibility for the work being done, opportunities for creative and business growth, if call differently on factors, which managers create. This group of factors suggests that each individual can work motivated when employee sees the goal and considers its achievement possible. The absence of factors of motivation can be lead to dissatisfaction with work, but their presence brings satisfaction and motivates employees to more productive work.

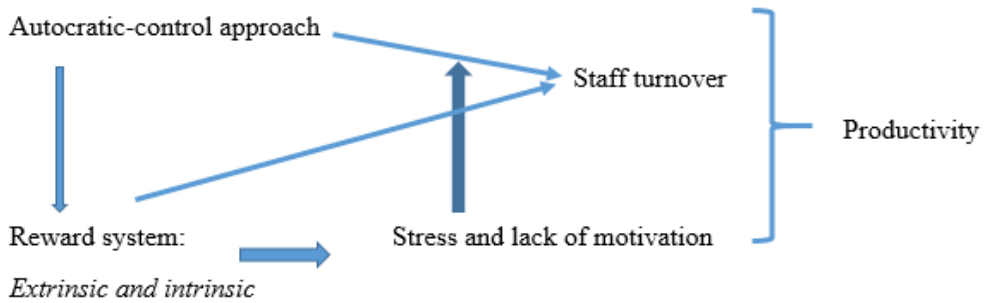


Figure1. The main issues of Ryanair related to Employer branding through variables

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), employer branding offers to differentiate the characteristics of a company as an employer from its competitors, and the company should try to find a suitable way to create a unique personality and become an attractive employer for its most valuable present and future. staff. All of the above factors (management, motivation, remuneration system, productivity, etc.) are closely related to the brand image of the employer, and a study conducted by Victoria Bella and Ioannis Chaniotakis in 2015 among American companies shows that these factors are key components of branding. the employer. In general, to create a preferred employer brand, it is necessary to be active rather than reactive, and the inclusion of its main components in the organization's DNA is very important for each company.

#### *Recommendations*

#### *Theory Z*

The main mistake at Ryanair is not to give due attention and freedom to its main value: employees.

According to the theory of Z by William Ouchi (1981), the key task of managers is to create an environment in which employees can solve problems

on their own. For this, managers should provide an opportunity to move information from the bottom up, organize joint discussions with employees of the situations that have arisen and the solutions they have proposed.

It's important for Ryanair to understand that one of the key areas of responsibility for managers is the well-being of employees, as their stability and safety have a positive effect on their productivity.

The central idea of this theory, recommended by Ryanair, the concept of trust and interaction, is focused on long-term relationships with both employees and partners of the company, which is an integral component of the success of any enterprise.

#### *Reward Management*

The main goal of the reward system is to increase employee productivity and motivation (Fay, 2001). By increasing these factors, a company can improve its overall productivity (Ying, 2011). Researchers divide reward systems into two categories: external and internal rewards.

External rewards include productivity-related wage increases, team rewards, security benefits, etc. [30]. Internal remuneration is not a monetary reward, but the enrichment of responsibility for work and empowerment [31], the management of good employee relations [32], and the provision of training and education / growth opportunities [33].

It is important for Ryanair to review its remuneration system, both external and internal, since paying interest on magazines and food sold is ineffective to make efforts and be motivated.

#### *ERG theory*

At first glance, Alderfer's theory may seem like a prototype of Maslow's theory, but there are differences between them. According to the Maslow pyramid, the movement from one needs to another can occur only from the bottom up: for example, if the needs of the lower level are satisfied, then need to proceed to meet the needs of the higher level, etc. However, Alderfer insists in his theory that movement can be carried out in both directions - both down and up. Upward movement occurs when the needs of the lower level are not satisfied, and a downward movement occurs when the needs of the higher stage are not satisfied.

According to this theory, people (in this case, workers) have a constant desire to grow and develop. If a person satisfies this need, then he/she is motivated and the productivity of this employee is growing. If a person falls into an environment where there is no chance of growth, then he/she is looking for other better places.

Based on the foregoing, it can be recommended to Ryanair to treat their employees more loyally and provide career opportunities.

#### *Conclusion*

Ryanair, the most profitable low-cost carrier in Europe, neglects some points of human resources management and thereby spoils its image as an employer. There are many articles that pointed out company's rigid relation to its employees and the main issues related to human resource management (autocratic- approach management, staff turnover, stress and lack of motivation), which can be negatively affect to company's reputation as "a place to work" for current and potential employees. By investigating works of other researches regarding to employer brand, it became obvious that employees are the most important value of any firms and by giving them freedom, improving reward system and developing the level of communication between employees themselves and with managers, companies can get an advantage to increase productivity and image as an employer. Author also uses theories related to human resource management to give recommendations as solutions of given issues above.

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