ISCTE ⊛ Business School
Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION INTO EMPLOYER
BRANDING AND VOLUNTARY EMPLOYEE TURNOVER:
A CASE STUDY AT A SME, IN THE HEALTH AND LIFE
SCIENCES SECTOR

Cátia Sofia de Pinho

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"The life of the individual has meaning only insofar as it aids in making the life of every living thing nobler and more beautiful. Life is sacred, that is to say, it is the supreme value, to which all other values are subordinate."

— Albert Einstein

ABSTRACT

The labour market is currently facing a War for Talent, where retaining the workforce and attracting new talent is becoming increasingly harder for the most part of the companies. The Employer Branding approach is increasingly emerging as an effective tool to win this War for Talent.

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify the organizational antecedents contributing to the increase of Voluntary Employee Turnover and how they are influencing the weakening of the Employer Brand of the company under analysis.

Through a qualitative study, applied in a SME in the Health and Life Sciences sector, the researcher collected information from interviews, where participants were invited to share their employment experiences and insights about company under analysis. Using also organizational archive sources, the researcher developed a conceptual framework, organized by four dimensions (Interest, Social, Economic and Development Value), underlining the main predictors of Voluntary Employee Turnover, as its consequent implications in a weakened Employer Brand.

Analysis of the findings demonstrate the most relevant dimensions contributing to increase employees' willingness to leave the company are Economic, Development and Interest Value, all of them with different but considerable organizational implications.

These results highlight the importance of addressing in advance the unattractive employment experiences lived by employees, in order to fulfil the expectations agreed in the Psychological Contract between employer-employee, contributing to strengthen the Employer Brand of the company, as well as retaining the workforce and avoiding situations of Voluntary Employee Turnover. To conclude this study, the researcher will discuss limitations of this study, providing recommendations for future research, as well as contributions and suggestions for the company.

RESUMO

Atualmente, o mercado de trabalho está a enfrentar uma Guerra por Talento, uma vez que a retenção dos colaboradores e atração de talento está-se a tornar cada vez mais difícil para a maior parte das empresas. A abordagem do 'Employer Branding' tem vindo a emergir substancialmente, como uma ferramenta efetiva para ganhar esta Guerra por Talento.

O objetivo desta dissertação é identificar os antecedentes organizacionais que contribuem para o aumento do 'turnover' voluntário dos colaboradores e de que forma estes estão a influenciar o enfraquecimento da 'Employer Brand' da empresa em análise.

Através de um estudo qualitativo, aplicado numa PME no setor da Saúde e Ciências de Vida, o investigador recolheu informação através de entrevistas, onde os participantes foram convidados a partilhar as suas experiências de trabalho e as suas perceções sobre a empresa. Recorrendo também a arquivos organizacionais, o investigador desenvolveu um quadro conceptual, organizado em 4 dimensões (Interesse, Social, Económica e Desenvolvimento), salientando os principais responsáveis pelo 'turnover' voluntário dos colaboradores, bem como as suas consequentes implicações no enfraquecimento da 'Employer Brand'.

A análise dos resultados demonstra que as dimensões que mais contribuem para o aumento da intenção dos colaboradores em abandonar a empresa são: Económica, Desenvolvimento e Interesse, todas estas com diferentes mas consideráveis implicações organizacionais. Estes resultados destacam a importância de analisar atempadamente as experiências de trabalho menos agradáveis vivenciadas pelos colaboradores, de forma a cumprir com as expetativas acordadas no Contrato Psicológico entre empregador e colaborador, contribuindo para o fortalecimento da 'Employer Brand' da empresa, bem como a retenção dos colaboradores, minimizando situações de 'turnover' voluntário.

Para concluir este estudo, o investigador irá discutir as suas limitações, apresentando recomendações para futuras investigações, bem como contribuições e sugestões para a empresa em análise.

INDEX

INDEX OF TABLES

INDEX OF FIGURES

I – INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the recruitment field is being revolutionized, through an intense collaboration and alignment between Human Resources and Marketing area, resulting in the arise of the Employer Branding concept. Human Resources is no longer seen as an isolated and only administrative area, playing a vital role on the attraction and recruitment field and consequently in organizational strategic process and value creation (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen, 2011).

The potential of Employer Branding is being increasingly and widely valued by companies. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: 501), "EB represents a firm's effort to promote, both within and outside the firm, a clear view of what makes it different and desirable as an employer". Employer Branding acts as an information and communication tool, aligning the expectations on both sides, employees and employer, with the aim of creating the best employment experience (Moroko and Uncles, 2008)

The labor market is currently facing some challenges, since the most part of companies are competing for Talent. In fact, we are in "an increasingly knowledge-based economy where skilled employees are often in short supply" (Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy and Berthon, 2002, as cited in Backhaus and Tikko, 2004: 502). This War for Talent creates an intense competition among companies, who are under pressure to be effective and differentiated, in order to retain their workforce and be able to attract the best talent.

Furthermore, employees from the most recent generations as Generation Y and Millennials have different values and expectations comparing to previous generations. For example, the aspiration of a 'job for life' is no longer a priority, since they are more motivated by challenging and flexible jobs, where work life-balance dimension is crucial. All this leads to a great challenge for companies, since these generations are more focused on individual values, demonstrating lower levels of organizational commitment and more willingness to easily leave their organizations.

As a matter of fact, the relationship between employee and employer can be seen as a Psychological Contract, where there is an exchange of expectations and reciprocal obligations between the both sides, in order to create a sustained and long-term engagement. This relationship is usually mediated by instrumental (job security, pay structure, task demands, and promotion opportunities) and symbolic (self-esteem, recognition, membership…) attributes.

When the Psychological Contract is not accurate, situations of wrong perceptions and unfulfilled expectations may appear. This is harmful to the sustainability of the relationship between both parties, weakening the degree of organizational identification and commitment, as well as job satisfaction. At the last level, it results on the violation or breach on the Psychological Contract, increasing intentions of employees to leave the company and consequently leading to situations of Voluntary Turnover.

In spite of several studies conducted on the Employee Turnover field, results about the main reasons why employees voluntarily leave organizations are not fully evident and consistent. As a matter of fact, the considerable progress and emergence of new models and theories is extending the scope of this concept, however creating lack of theoretical consensus and focus on the research significance (Holtom, Mitchell, and Eberly, 2008).

On the other hand, the Employer Branding is a recent phenomenon that can be interestingly explored alongside with the Voluntary Employee Turnover, as an approach to enhance organizational attractiveness and Employee Retention.

This context is paving the way for the conduction of new and significant empirical studies, exploring the Voluntary Employee Turnover antecedents, as well as how the Employer Branding approach can play an important role on this field.

1.1. Research objetive

Regarding the importance of Employer Branding to win the War for Talent, the main purpose of this dissertation is to explore how the violation of the Psychological Contract between employer and employee and consequent weakening of the Employer Brand can influence the Voluntary Employee Turnover.

The researcher will explore this phenomenon through a qualitative study, using the Case Study approach, mostly through semi-structured interviews, in order to explore employees' individual experiences and feelings at Company X.

Thereby, to reach this research objective, the following research questions will be addressed during the conduction of the study:

- How do individual employment experiences influence the weakening of the Employer Branding?
- What will be the implications of a weakened Employer Branding?

1.2. The significance of the study

This study intends to be a theoretical and practical contribution to the existing literature. In fact, the most part of the studies have merely a quantitative scope, focusing in the Employee Retention, although without a linkage between Employer Branding and Employee Turnover.

This study intends to narrow this situation, enhancing the importance of exploring in-depth antecedents and outcomes of Voluntary Employee Turnover and Employer Branding, and consequently how they are related and influencing each other.

Moreover, results of the research conducted at Company X will be a valuable tool to frame the retention problem that the company is facing, addressing the main reasons responsible by the voluntary leave of a considerable number of employees. The experience lived in the first person by the research, as well as testimonies of participants will culminate in the presentation of some contributions and suggestions, as an intervention proposal to guide and support Top Management, Superiors and Human Resources department from Company X, in order to be more effective retaining their talent.

1.3. Dissertation Structure

This study is organized by the following chapters:

- Literature Review, exploring separately, through a theoretical approach, the historical evolution, main theories and models, antecedents and consequents of Employer Branding and Employee Turnover, finalizing this chapter presenting how both concepts are related;

- Methodology, describing in detail the research strategy applied, and how the data was collected and analyzed, providing information about the sample, as well as institutional details about Company X. Additionally, issues of goodness and trustworthiness are presented, highlighting the role of the researcher and ethical procedures;

- Results, presenting an extensive description of the main findings being collected during the process of data analysis, organized by categories and subcategories, concluding with a conceptual framework summarizing all the information;

- Discussion, analyzing in-depth the results in order to respond to the research questions initially raised;

- Conclusion, presenting limitations for the study, recommendations for future research and contributions and suggestions for Company X.

II – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Employer Branding

2.1.1. Historical Evolution

The concept of Employer Branding is becoming more popular and increasingly used by companies as an approach between Human Resources Management and Brand Management areas, as well as a strategic tool to enhance talent attraction, engagement and retention.

According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), in the past there was some resistance to introduce Marketing and Branding concepts and practices into the Human Resources field, mainly caused of the lack of top-level support, few resources and time to invest in the Employer Branding strategy. This situation was more evident mainly in companies where the Human Resources structure was slightly developed and incompatible with the Employer Branding philosophy (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). As discussed by Mosley (2007), earlier Human Resource roles were only focused on administrative issues and communication support, instead of promoting a more strategic role, encouraging the implementation of practices to strengthen employer-employee relations and communicating the brand promise.

Recently, Aggerholm *et al.* (2011: 111) defended the Human Resources field is crossing the boundaries of an isolated department, that works independently from the company overall strategy, facing now a shift from an administrative perspective to a strategic one, focusing its attentions on "social-psychological aspects such as relations, attitudes, interactions, negotiations, identities and self-images". Therefore, the Human Resources philosophy is no longer a one-way strategy, from company to employees, but a shared strategy, where both parts nurture a relation based on trust and commitment, trying to meet mutual expectations (Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011)

Years and years of research could expose the advantages of bringing the Marketing Management philosophy and its concepts to the Human Resources Management. In fact, in the branding field, the focus is on creating a value proposition to the customers, making a product or service attractive, whereas in the employment field the aim is to create a value proposition to current and potential employees, offering them a unique employment experience (Moroko and Uncles, 2008). As argued by Kucherov and Zavyalova (2012: 89), "the employment experience is seen as a product and employees are seen as consumers of this product", namely internal customers of the company. Therefore, if both areas were treated

together they would lead to enormous synergies, not only adding value to the Corporate Brand but also revolutionizing the employment field.

According to Barrow and Mosley (2005: xvi), the main role of the Employer Brand is "to provide a coherent framework for management to simplify and focus on priorities, increase productivity and improve recruitment, retention and commitment". Therefore, Employer Branding arises to the companies as a tool to enabling the attraction and retention processes, by highlighting them as attractive employers in the market, enhancing their possibilities of recruiting the best talents on the market and also engaging prospective candidates and their current workforce.

2.1.2. Definitions, Theories and Approaches about Employer Branding
Origin of the Employer Branding

Employer Branding is becoming popular among several companies, mainly through managers who apply it instinctively, since academic research and empirical studies are very limited on this field (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The limited theoretical foundations about this issue rely mainly in the lack of structure in some organizations, the diversity of areas involved and also the different perspectives that arise from the Human Resources and Marketing fields (Christiaans, 2013, as cited in Edwards, 2010). In fact, this considerable recent concept was initially discussed among Marketing academics and just then Human Resources academics recognized its importance and the potential of analyzing jointly synergies (Edwards, 2010). Employer Branding was introduced for the first time in 1990 by Simon Barrow, and after a research process of six years, him and Tim Ambler published the article 'Employer Brand'. After that, the interest for the Employer Brand discipline raised rapidly (Barrow and Mosley, 2005).

The methodology used by Ambler and Barrow was a qualitative research where participants were invited to express their perceptions about Employer Branding, based on their daily practices. They identified the importance and interest of Employer Branding, although as an inaccurate and vague concept, since "language was an issue" (1996: 14). Inside organizations, this new concept had a low priority and relevance, due to the previous mentioned resistance in introducing the Marketing philosophy to the Human Resources field, since Marketing was perceived as an artificial and manipulative area (Barrow and Mosley, 2005).

Ambler and Barrow were influenced by the concept of a strong brand from the 'father' of the modern branding, David Aaker (1991, 1996) moving from a "static inside-out notion of

the Employer Branding" (Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011: 108). In fact, "Employer Branding Propositions (EVP) are defined by brand strategists on the basis of brand identity, conceptualised as stable and enduring core characteristics, or the brand DNA" (Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011: 108).

Definition of Employer Branding

According to their research, Ambler and Barrow (1996: 8) defined Employer Branding as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company". These three kind of benefits were based on the Internal Marketing Benefits defended by Foreman and Money (1995, as cited in Ambler and Barrow, 1996), which include the following variables: functional benefits (employee development, opportunities for professional growth, training, work experience and content of work); economic benefits (material or monetary rewards as salary, rewards, benefits, bonuses and work schedule); and psychological benefits (aspirations, sense of belonging, direction and purpose, recognition, prestige of the company, job satisfaction, job security, interpersonal relations and company's name/brand value).

Kucherov and Zavyalova's research (2012) suggests a fourth element: organizational attributes related to the perception of the company in the external panorama by different stakeholders, encompassing dimensions as company's history, reputation, management style, leadership and internationalization. Therefore, these three initial attributes can be seen as internal attributes of the Employer Brand, meanwhile the organizational attributes are considered as external attributes.

According to the Employer Branding conceptual framework from Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Employer Branding creates two assets: brand loyalty and brand associations. The first one, brand loyalty, acts internally, being influenced by organizational identity (attitudinal element) and organizational culture (behavioral element), both enhancing the employees' loyalty and retention to the company and consequently contributing to a higher productivity. On the other hand, brand associations are linked externally, with potential employees, since they create an employer image on their minds based on their perceptions about brand attitudes and quality and also based on organizational attributes, affecting the organizational attractiveness (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).
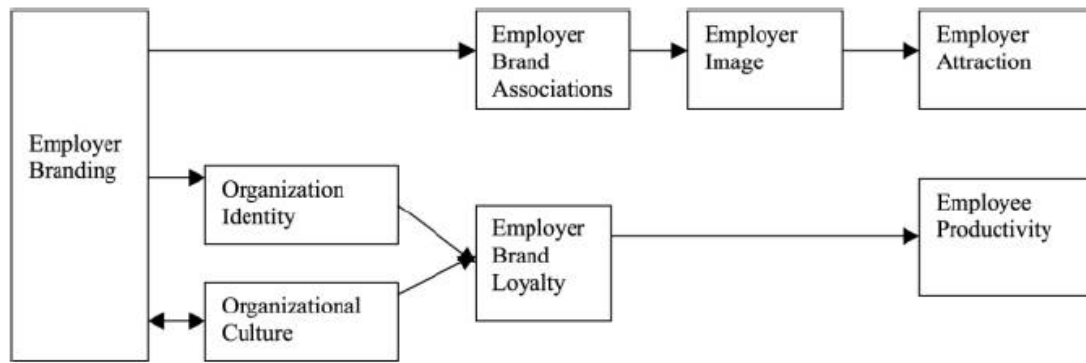
Figure 1 - Employer Branding conceptual framework
Source: Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: 505)

Lievens and Highhouse (2003, as cited in Ito, Brotheridge and McFarland, 2013) defined these organizational attributes as instrumental or symbolic. The instrumental attributes are related with tangible and objective benefits, namely what the brand does to their employees, including Human Resources Management systems and policies, such as job security, pay structure, compensation, benefits, task requirements and demands, training and development and promotion opportunities. On the other hand, the symbolic attributes encompass intangible and subjective benefits, related with what the brand implies (its status), such as corporate values or brand personality traits, as honesty, self-esteem and competence, and also membership, cooperation and prestige, being "an efficient way to distinguish a brand from its competitors" (Sung and Kim, 2010: 640).

Employer Branding and the Person-Organization Fit

According to Cable and Turban (2003, as cited in Edwards, 2010), prospective employees' perceptions are affected by the degree of familiarity and the level of corporate reputation. The degree of familiarity or affinity is considered by some authors as organizational identification, "the degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes to define the organization" (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994: 239). When these organizational attributes are similar and aligned with their own values, beliefs, needs and personality, there will be a match, also known as a Person-Organization fit. As argued by Edwards (2010, as cited in Ito *et al.*, 2013: 736), Employer Branding can be used by potential and current employees to "assess the fit between instrumental and symbolic attributes and their own values". Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argued the more the sense of identification and organizational attachment with the company,

the better the feeling of membership. This will influence positively the attractiveness of the company, the applicants' intentions to apply, the process of job decision-making, and consequently, in a medium-long term perspective, their permanence in the company (Cable and Judge, 1996, as cited in Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Employer Branding and Corporate Reputation

Concerning the corporate reputation, it is defined as the "set of characteristics which are socially constructed for an organization, based on the organization's previous actions and future prospects" (Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen, 2013: 474). The company reputation is strongly influenced by the image of the organization as an employer. As defended by Rampl (2014: 1489), "organizational reputation is also one part of Employer Brand associations and can also have an effect on Employer Brand attractiveness".

From an organizational perspective, this can be evident since companies with a stronger brand identity are preferred by candidates (Cable and Turban, 2001, as cited in Franca and Pahor, 2012). Thus, a good reputation associated with a positive organizational image are good predictors in the attraction field, influencing the quantity and quality of candidates (Cable and Turban, 2003). From a candidate's perspective, there is a strong sense of pride and 'work morale' if he would be able to work for a company that is recognised for its prestige, awareness and quality as an employer (Wilden, Gudergan and Lings, 2010). For example, authors as Edwards (2010), Cable and Turban (2003) and Sivertzen *et al.* (2013) found that a high and favorable organizational reputation has a positive linkage with the intentions to apply for, a job from prospective applicants.

Therefore, if the degree of affinity and the level of corporate reputation are positively recognized by applicants, their perception about the company will be positive, and consequently they will be attracted and see it as an employer of choice. As argued by some authors as Cable and Judge (1996) and Gomes and Neves (2011, as cited in Saini, Rai and Chaudhary, 2014), the more powerful the Person-Organization fit is, the higher will be the level of Employer Attractiveness by prospective applicants and consequently the higher will be their intention to apply to the company, what will enhance the Employer Brand (Berthon, Ewing and Hah, 2005).

2.1.3. Process of Employer Branding

According to Backaus and Tikoo (2004), the Employer Branding process consists of three steps: the Employer Value Proposition (EVP), the External Marketing and the Internal Marketing.

The first one relies on the creation of a solid Employer Value Proposition, that comprises a "unique set of attributes and benefits that will motivate target candidates to join a company and current employees to stay" (Botha, Bussin and De Swardt, 2011: 3). The EVP shows what current and potential employees can expect from the company, by supporting and clarifying all the package of functional and emotional benefits the company is willing to provide, concerning its culture, values, employment image and other issues (Edwards, 2010). As discussed by Mosley (2007), this value proposition should ensure that the benefits provided by the employer are aligned with current and prospective employees' expectations. Thus, the EVP must be broadly communicated through Human Resources and Marketing channels (Kunerth and Mosley, 2011), in order to avoid unrealistic beliefs or assumptions in the future, compromising the employer-employee relation. When this Value Proposition is developed, it should be spread among two channels: External Marketing and Internal Marketing.

The second step, the External Marketing (or Branding), is focused on the external side, on the Employer Attractiveness dimension, that can be defined as "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization" (Berthon *et al.*, 2005: 156). Therefore, the External Marketing strategy aims to communicate its value proposition and promoting the organizational image as a desirable employer to work for, in order to attract and create a close relation among prospective applicants (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

As defended by some researchers as Oladipo, Iyamabo, and Otubanjo (2013: 61), "Employer Branding is not just concerned with attracting employees but also in retaining and motivating them". So, regarding the third step, the Internal Marketing (or Branding), all the efforts are focused internally, on the retention field, as a restatement of the value proposition previously shared with the attraction target. The main goal is to "develop a workforce that is committed to the set of values and organizational goals established by the firm" (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004: 503), offering a unique and exciting employment experience to current and prospective employees and creating a distinctive and inimitable workforce.

According to Berthon *et al.* (2005: 152), Internal Marketing is defined as "the task of successfully hiring, training and motivating able employees to serve the customer well" and delivering to them the brand promise (Foster, Punjaisri, and Cheng, 2010). In fact, employees

can easily affect and shape positively or negatively the perceptions that other stakeholders have about the company, through their attitudes and behaviours, in a "process of emotional contagion" as argued by Davies, Chung, da Silva and Roper (2004: 125). The Institute for Employment Studies (1999, as cited in Barrow and Mosley, 2005) found a strong correlation among employer commitment, customer satisfaction and sales. Ind (1998: 324) went further, defending that "employees have the potential to make or break the corporate brand".

Mosley (2007) made the salient point that a satisfied and committed workforce might be more willing to offer a positive and satisfactory experience to the customer, through their capacity of "building and sustaining long-term brand-customer relationships" (Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011: 109).

2.1.4. Strategic Role of Employer Brand

The corporate brand is formed by several sub-brands. Companies, mainly the customer-oriented companies (for example service firms), where the client interaction and experience is crucial and done by front-line staff, must be aware of the influence and the important role that their workforce plays in the brand image (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2003, as cited in Knox and Freeman, 2006). This belief is shared by Aggerholm *et al.* (2011), who defended that the attractiveness and financial performance of the companies rely not only in the finance field, but also in their capability of recognizing their current workforce and potential candidates as key stakeholders and nurturing strong relationships with them. These three authors went beyond their research and re-conceptualized the Employer Branding concept, based on the notions of sustainable organizations, creation of value and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). So, Employer Branding can be described as a "strategic branding processes which creates, negotiates and enacts sustainable relationships between an organization and its potential and existing employees under the influence of the varying corporate contexts with the purpose of co-creating sustainable values for the individual, organization and society as a whole" (Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011: 113). Taylor and Van Every (2000, as cited in Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011) stated organizations are not static and isolated entities, they act in a dynamic and complex environment, negotiated not only by the own company, but also by all the stakeholders responsible for the business running. These stakeholders are, for example: investors, suppliers, local community, consumers, as well as current employees and potential applicants. Therefore, the company should be focused on the process of creating sustainable relations and nurturing a favourable organizational image and

reputation among these different stakeholders, through the Corporate Brand (Van Riel, 2001, as cited in Christiaans, 2013).

This multiplicity of stakeholders hampers the task of the companies when managing the several brands, since all these brands should be aligned and treated similarly, through a common and consistent strategy, with the main purpose of creating loyalty, commitment and trust among customers, namely the internal ones: the employees. In fact, the corporate image can be easily affected by an incoherent message or by a wrong perception transmitted by one of these brands. In some cases, the same stakeholders act in different organizational sides: for example, a person can be, at the same time, a customer of a company's product and services and a potential employee of this organization.

2.1.5. Employer Branding as a Competitive Advantage

The Employer Branding approach provided by Aggerholm *et al.* (2011) has a wider and more dynamic perspective, representing an evolution comparing to the one present by Ambler and Barrow (1996). Employer Branding is considered as a competitive advantage to the companies, due to the integration of components of the corporate strategy, such as the vision, mission and strategic goals and also by considering other stakeholders, besides the company and the employees, in the value creation process (Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011).

Regarding the concept of competitive advantage, Jay Barney (1991, as cited in Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004), explored the link between the firm resources and the existence of a sustained competitive advantage. If a company has valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and non-substitutable resources (VRIO framework), it has a sustainable competitive advantage on the market against the competitors. There are several types of resources to support the organizations' activity; however, in this research only three types of resources were relevant to be considered: physical capital, organizational capital and human capital. Focusing on the Human Capital Resources, which include know-how, skills, attitudes, experiences, training, relationships and others (Barney, 1991) a company has a sustainable competitive advantage when its workforce is valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and non-substitutable. Approaching this theory to the Employer Branding, the creation of a strong and unique employer identity labels the company as a desirable employer, recognising it as an employer of choice, which enables the attraction of the best talents in the market and the reinforcement of the engagement and retention of its distinctive workforce (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). In fact, as defended by Ritson (2002, as cited in Berthon *et al.*, 2005), companies with a strong and

successful Employer Brand have serious advantages comparing to others: a strong organizational culture (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) and solid relations among employees. All this improves the workforce satisfaction and retention, originating lower sickness-absence and turnover rates and less costs on replacing the workforce (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). Consequently, it emerges the perception of a successful and desirable company to work for, leading to quick, 'low-cost' and effective Recruitment and Selection processes, with lower salaries on similar positions comparing to other companies with weaker Employer Brands.

According to Barrow and Mosley (2005), employees' loyalty and commitment to the organization emerge from a strong employer-employee relation, can have an indirect impact on the increase of consumer satisfaction and lead to higher levels of customer retention (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Consequently, this will provide greater financial results, in indicators such as sales, shareholder profit and share value. So, by highlighting employees' potential, knowledge and skills, as a source of sustainable and long-term competitive advantage, the Employer Branding philosophy emerges as a key differentiator of a company against its competitors and consequently as a powerful tool to win the War for Talent.

2.1.6. Employer Attractiveness

Employer Attractiveness can be considered as one of Employer Branding components, since attractive employers tend to have a strong Employer Brand. According to Berthon *et al.* (2005: 156), Employer Attractiveness is defined as "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization".

These authors developed a scale for measuring the employer attractiveness, the 5-Factor Model of Employer Attractiveness (also known as EmpAt scale). This is an important tool for companies, to strengthen their retention levels because it allows them to be aware about their employer image and also about the importance and impact of the Employer Attractiveness dimensions, The EmpAt scale is based on three dimensions: Functional, Psychological, and Economical benefits (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). This scale reflects an effort to integrate new dimensions, to improve the ones earlier presented by Ambler and Barrow (1996), and is formed by 25 items that assess the organizational attractiveness, aggregated in five categories: Developmental, Application, Interest, Social, and Economic Value.

The Functional Benefits presents two dimensions: the Development and Application value. The Development Value comprises attributes as recognition, self-worth and

confidence, and career-enhancing experience. The Application Value includes opportunity to implement own knowledge, and acceptance and belonging.

Associated with the Psychological Benefits, there are the Interest and the Social Value. The Interest Value involves an exciting and challenging work environment, innovative work practices and procedures, as well as innovative and high-quality products and services. On the other hand, the Social Value incorporates a fun and happy work environment, a supportive team atmosphere, and good relationships with colleagues and superiors.

Finally, the Economic Benefits are represented by the Economic Value, with attributes as an attractive above-average salary, a compensation package, job security, and promotion opportunities (Berthon *et al.*, 2005).

2.1.7. Relationship between Employer Brand and Psychological Contract

It is possible to perceive a connection between the Employer Branding philosophy and the Psychological Contract theory, since both terms emphasize a strong and long-term employer-employee relationship, based on engagement, trust, commitment, and in the fulfilment of mutual expectations. The Employer Branding approach and the Psychological Contract theory are linked to each other, because the dissemination of a consistent and clear Employer Branding message contributes to clarify the perceptions of the employees or potential applicants about the company, avoiding wrong expectations and giving a basis to the creation of the Psychological Contract (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Edwards (2010) supported this viewpoint, arguing that there is a significant and direct relationship between Psychological Contracts and Employer Branding. The communication of the Employer Branding message creates an exchange of expectations about the obligations between the organization and the employee, which are the basis of the Psychological Contract foundation. If the expectations are accomplished, both sides are satisfied and live a unique employment experience. Moroko and Uncles (2008) went further, arguing that Employer Branding is a form of a Psychological Contract, between the employer and the employee.

The Psychological Contract concept was initially presented by Denise Rousseau, who defined it as the "individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party" (Rousseau, 1989: 123). According to the author, contracts can display two forms: transactional and relational contracts. Nowadays, the most common and traditional employment contracts between employer-employee are transactional, based on a written or oral format, according to the

labour law, where there is a clear and explicit agreement or promise between both parties: the employer offers compensation and in exchange the employee offers his or her performance or contribution (Rousseau, 1990). So, these transactional contracts, which explore exclusively an economic and monetary relation between both parties, are characterized by their specific time frame, since this relation lasts only during the period established on the contract. On the other hand, Psychological Contracts can be considered as representing relational contracts. These contracts, with an unwritten and subjective basis, go further than the common ones, focusing on an open-ended employer-employee relationship, namely in a reciprocal obligation, between employee's loyalty, effort and flexibility to the company, in exchange of job security, training and development by the employer (Hendry and Jenkins, 1997, as cited in Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Therefore, employer-employee relations which are not only based on monetary exchanges, but also based on intrinsic, socio-emotional and non-economic exchanges, as trust, commitment and loyalty, are promoting the transition of an employment contract into a Psychological Contract (Rousseau, 1990).

The Functional and Economic Benefits comprised in the Employer Branding approach are commonly present in transactional contracts, being similar from company to company. However, Psychological Benefits, which encompass a set of specific and intangible attributes of a company as sense of belonging, corporate prestige, commitment and loyalty, involve more than an explicit and transactional contract (Rousseau, 1989). As a matter of fact, they create distinctive employer-employee agreements in the market, acting as the main differentiator from one company to another, since these intangible and differentiated aspects or characteristics are hard to imitate by the competitors (De Chernatony and Harris, 2000, as cited in Mosley, 2007). Organizations that offer a realistic and accurate Psychological Contract are more able to create a strong and unique Employer Brand, enhancing their attractiveness among employees (Edwards, 2010). In fact, the framework presented below, created by Moroko and Uncles (2008), highlights the Psychological Contract accuracy and the organizational attractiveness as the main drivers influencing the success of the Employer Brand.
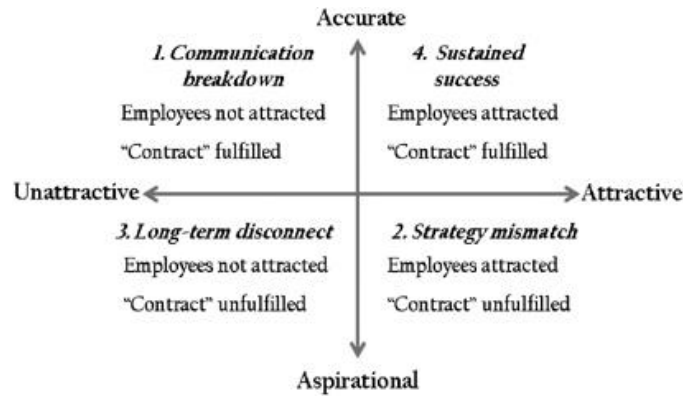
Figure 2 - Managerial Implications of Employer Brand Success Characteristics
Source: Moroko and Uncles (2008: 169)

The attractiveness driver, encompassing dimensions as the Employer Branding awareness, differentiation, and relevance, characterize the Employer Brand as attractive or unattractive, according to the degree to which the brand is known and differentiated in the market, influencing the Employer Attractiveness and employee attraction. The accuracy incorporates dimensions as the consistency between the Employer Branding and the employment experience, company values and culture. This driver can describe a Psychological Contract as accurate, where all the information necessary to establish a long-term and consistent relationship between employer-employee and consequently the fulfillment of the agreement between both parties is provided, or as aspirational, based on wrong perceptions that probably will lead to the violation of the contract.

Therefore, a successful Employer Brand is characterized as attractive and accurate, contributing to maintain employees attracted and the Psychological Contract between employer and employee fulfilled, consequently contributing to a sustained success. On the other hand, an unsuccessful Employer Brand is described as unattractive and aspirational, since employees are not attracted and the Psychological Contract is not being fulfilled between both parties, leading to a situation of long-term disconnection.

2.1.8. Final Remarks

As previously highlighted, Human Resources and Marketing roles are usually treated as single concepts. However, the connection between each area and the Employer Branding approach is evident. The Employer Branding defines itself as appealing to these two fields: the application of branding foundations and Marketing principles into the employment field (Lievens, Van Hoye, and Anseel, 2007, as cited in Kucherov and Zavyalova, 2012) and the "considerable synergy between the process of nurturing brands on the one hand and Human

Resources on the other" (Ambler and Barrow, 1996: 1). As discussed by Punjaisri, Evanschitzky and Wilson (2009, as cited in Foster *et al.*, 2010: 403), "the coordination of Human Resources and Marketing is key to successfully implementing internal branding, and engendering positive outcomes such as employees' brand identification, brand commitment, brand loyalty and brand-supporting behaviours".

Although synergies between Human Resources and Marketing seem to be more than evident in this context, the concept of Employer Branding is still facing some limitations, as the ones Ambler and Barrow identified on their research.

The first one was previously presented on this chapter as the "artificial and manipulative" (Ambler and Barrow, 1996: 21) perception about Marketing field, creating a disbelief about the potentialities of Employer Branding as the key to attract, engage and retain effectively the workforce.

Secondly, most part of companies pretend a rapid and effective Employer Branding strategy in a short term. The truth is that a clear Employer Branding strategy needs to address the overall organizational issues, mobilizing synergies from all departmental areas to ensure its success. This could be a great investment on time and resources until it works properly and produces effective results. As argued by Chhabra and Sharma (2014: 55), "unless employer's value propositions are communicated in the right way to the right audience, time and money invested would not yield the desired results".

Finally, Martin, Gollan and Grigg (2011: 3629) recognized there are "disconnected dialogues" and lack of cooperation and alignment between the Human Resources function and the Line Management. The key to the success of the Employer Branding strategy inside the company is the support from the Top Management and the existence of a strong Human Resources structure. As argued by the Employer Branding founders: "(…) Human Resources is too important to be left to the Human Resources function alone – Line Management also take direct responsibility." (Ambler and Barrow, 1996: 3). The Employer Brand approach cannot be merely left under the initiators of this process, namely the Human Resources and Marketing fields, since it must be transversal and aligned with all the company strategy and also widely defended and supported among the employees. Without this support, the Employer Branding has weak hypothesis to survive, being described as "nothing more than a Human Resources project, that burns cash and creates employee cynicism" (Botha *et al.*, 2011: 4) or as "build a house on poor foundations" (Ambler and Barrow, 1996: 22).

2.2. Employee Turnover

Nowadays, the labour market is getting more sophisticated and complex, facing a demanding and challenging environment, experiencing some shifts that could change completely the way employees and employers behave. The term 'War for Talent', arose in the end of the past century by The McKinsey Quarterly, highlighting the "difficulty of recruiting and retaining capable people" (Barrow and Mosley, 2005: 13). In fact, the recruitment field has become an international crusade for companies (as cited in Sokro, 2012), since they are under pressure to be effective not only in the management of top talents to higher positions, but also in the attraction of people with the "right mix of qualities to successfully perform a wide variety of roles" in different functions and areas of the organization (Barrow and Mosley, 2005: 104). Duarte, Gomes and Neves (2014: 253) went further on their research about the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility in potential employees, considering the War for Talent is shifting for a War for Sustainability, where multiple organizational stakeholders play an important role, contributing to improve the attractiveness of the company, mainly among current employees and prospective applicants.

Thereby, it is important to address some factors that could explain this current War for Talent. First, the past financial crisis has caused growth recession and some companies had to downsize and restructure their workforce, which caused a slowdown in the labour market. Afterwards, the recent global economic recovery, combined with the technological advancement (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014) and introduction of new industry sectors promoted an increase in the Voluntary Turnover (Cascio, 2014). This absence of boundaries in the labour market has created new opportunities for employees and increased their "willingness to change jobs more often" (Rampl and Kenning, 2014: 219).

Second and associated to this previous aspect, the aspiration of a lifetime employment, that was a pattern in the past century, is currently outdated. Employees, mainly from the most recent generations, as Generation Y and the Millennials, value attributes totally different from the ones appreciated by the Baby Boomers or Generation X (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014). New generations of employees do not pretend to 'live to work' as the past generations. Instead, they are more motivated by meaningful and flexible jobs, where they can have a strong work-life balance component, rather than by large monetary rewards and status (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen and Schoonderbeek, 2013, as cited in Wallace, Lings, Cameron and Sheldon, 2014). According to Wayne and Casper (2012: 123), they "work to live", so they are fully interested in taking all advantages of this globalization era, embracing the

diversity and experiencing new challenges in different companies and geographies. New generations are more focused on their individual values and not so concerned about an ethical and committed attitude towards the company, as the earlier generations, what becomes one of the biggest challenges for companies in the attraction and retention field (Sengupta, Bamel and Singh, 2015).

Finally, concerning demographic factors, actually it is observed a clear decline on the birth rates and the retirement of employees from baby boomers' generation (Collins and Stevens, 2002, as cited in Van Hoye and Saks, 2011). Consequently, in the recent future there will be experienced a decrease of the active population and a short supply within the young workforce. According to Franca and Pahor (2012) and Moroko and Uncles (2008), in 2050, for the same number of active employees, the inactive employees' ratio will almost duplicate, comparing to 2000. This situation can lead to a strong impact in the financial sustainability of companies, since it predicts a decrease in productivity rates around 30% (Taylor, 2005, as cited in Moroko and Uncles, 2008).

Therefore, joined together all these factors, talent retention and attraction is now becoming progressively a harder and more challenging topic for companies than some years ago, and it is seriously affecting the organizational performance. In this knowledge-based economy, all attentions are focused on skilled, talented and value-adding employees, who are in a shorter number (Ewing *et al.*, 2002, as cited in Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004), since "true talent is scarce" (Elving *et al.*, 2013: 356). Thus, the current labour market is now highly competitive and dynamic (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014), with "multiple candidates that compete for the same position and several companies competing for the same candidate" (Franca and Pahor, 2012: 79).

In this context, companies are undertaking some strategies to be successful in this quest, since they realised there is "no choice but to participate in the War for Talent" (Van Hoye and Saks, 2011: 312). In fact, companies that are able to retain their skilled and unique workforce have a competitive advantage in the market, differentiating themselves from competitors. They are using their most powerful 'weapon' to survive and being victorious: the quality of their workforce (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014).

2.2.1. Definitions, Theories and Approaches about Employee Turnover

Origin of the Employee Turnover

During decades, most part of the organizations have focused their attention on understanding one of the most important factors that affect widely their performance and sustainability: the Employee Turnover.

This concept was firstly introduced in the 1950's, presenting different stages over the past decades, as well as diverse theoretical models to explain the Employee Turnover process. March and Simon were the founders of the scientific turnover research, introducing in their book 'Organizations' (1958) - a theory highlighting the relevance of balancing the organization and the employee relation. Mobley (1977, as cited in Holtom *et al.*, 2008) explored this research topic through a more extensive process, being one of the first researchers who found potential moderators of the turnover decision, such as job satisfaction, employee values, withdrawal cognitions, job-search behaviours, need for immediate gratification, and impulsivity. Some years later, Price and Mueller (1981, 1986) improved the current research, exploring causes of job satisfaction and considering the organizational commitment as a mediator between antecedents of job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The Satisfaction-to-commitment Mediation Model reflects the relevance of employees' commitment towards the company, highlighting its stability and strength when comparing to the indirect influence of the job satisfaction, regarding employees´ withdraw intentions (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982, as cited in Moynihan, Boswell and Boudreau, 2000). Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia and Griffith (1992) contributed to the turnover research providing an alternative model exploring two different paths, concerning employees' intention to leave the organization: the evaluation of the expected advantage of quitting, and also the job search and consequent comparison between different alternatives.

Over the years, researchers have made progresses in turnover research, introducing contextual variables. These studies can be divided in two dimensions: organizational-context variables (for example organizational culture, group cohesion, and reward systems) and individual–context variables (as interpersonal relationships, person-fit, justice, leadership). Researchers such as Ashford, Lee and Bobko (1989) suggested in their studies further attitudes and behaviours, such as stress, well-being, and job insecurity, besides the job satisfaction and job commitment applied in previous studies. During this period, Lee and Mitchell (1994) developed a new turnover theory, the 'Unfolding Model of Turnover', defended that "turnover decisions are not always the result of accumulated job dissatisfaction

and may sometimes occur without much deliberation at all" (as cited in Holtom *et al.*, 2008: 242). Models and theories previously highlighted represent a considerable progress and impact in the turnover research. An example of this might be the application of these traditional theories to the current turnover research. According to Holtom *et al.* (2008), despite the progress in turnover research, namely in the theoretical constructs and antecedents of turnover, "there is less theoretical consensus and still a relatively small amount of overall variance in turnover explained" (p. 243). In fact, the turnover research is becoming richer; however its scope is becoming much broader, hampering the study of this concept.

Definition of the Employee Turnover

The Employer Turnover is one of the organizational issues that captures most of the interest and attention of researchers, managers, and individuals, during the last years (Dalton, Todor and Krackhardt., 1982). However, this field needs further investigation in terms of literature research (Park and Shaw, 2013), since questions about antecedents and causes of turnover among employees are not usually widely addressed, as stated by Maertz, Boyar and Pearson (2012: 7): "few models have truly strived for comprehensiveness in understanding why people quit their job". According to Price (1977: 15), Employee Turnover is defined as "the ratio of the employees of an organisation who left in a particular period of time with the average number of employees in that organisation during the same period of time".

After this, it is important to distinguish two different concepts incorporated in the turnover: the voluntary and the involuntary turnover. The difference between these two concepts relies on the initiator of the process: the employee or the employer.

In the involuntary turnover, the process is initiated by the employer, due to several motivations as a poor employee performance or an organizational restructuration (Price, 1977, as cited in Dalton *et al.*, 1982). The main consequences for the company and for the remaining workforce are overall positive, with an improved employee performance,
and consequently an increase in employee job involvement and commitment (Dwomoh, Kusi and Agyeman, 2013). As defended by McElroy, Morrow and Rude (2001: p. 1294) "the removal of poor performers should help to maintain and preserve performance-based norms among remaining employees".

In the Voluntary Turnover, the decision of leaving the company is taken by the employee, considering his turnover intention as a "conscious and deliberate willingness to leave the organization" (Tett and Meyer, 1993: 261). This situation can have different consequences and it should be analysed in two dimensions: the dysfunctional and the

functional turnover. The dysfunctional turnover has a negative and harmful impact to the organization, since employees who are leaving are hard to be replaced, due to their high performance and potential. The most part of these leaves are "surprising" and "unmanageable" (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins and Gupta, 1998, as cited in Park and Shaw, 2013: 270) to organizations, usually originating a decrease in the overall productivity and performance, affected by situations as an improper implementation and delay in ongoing programs or projects, and most of all, knowledge loss and lack of human resources allocation (Abbasi and Hollman (2000), as cited in Dalton *et al.*, 1982). As defended by Holtom *et al.* (2008: 236), "while turnover in general may be disruptive or harmful, not all turnover is bad". Therefore the functional turnover can be considered as a good turnover, producing a positive and beneficial impact in the organization (Dalton et al 1982, as cited in Park and Shaw, 2013). This situation occurs when employees considered as poor performers leave the organization voluntarily, improving the overall organization performance (Abelson and Baysinger, 1984, as cited in Holtom *et al.*, 2008).

The Voluntary Turnover also brings other challenges to the organization, namely in the employees' retention field, since employees who remain at the organization usually reflect about their professional situation, interpreting a voluntary leave as the existence of better employment opportunities in the market.

2.2.2. Factors Affecting Employee Retention

Employee Retention is defined in the literature as the "effort by an employer to keep desirable workers in order to meet the business objectives" (Frank, Finnegan and Taylor, 2004: 13). However, as previously highlighted, employees' retention is a challenge to the most part of organizations and the exponential turnover growth is an evidence for this. According to Maertz and Campion's studies (1998, as cited in Sinha and Sinha, 2012), the most part of the academic research in this field is focused on reasons why employees leave the company, rather than exploring their motivators to remain at the organization. These authors defended bidirectional studies, exploring retention process alongside with quitting processes, sharing the same belief as Das and Baruah (2013: 8): "the reasons people stay are not always the same as the reasons people leave".

Based on several studies conducted since 1972, the 'Causal Model of Turnover' of Price (2001) highlights several factors influencing employees' willingness to remain in the organization:

- Personal characteristics – variables as gender, tenure, marital status, and age have impact on turnover intentions. It was found a negative correlation between turnover and employees' age or tenure (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino, 1979, as cited in Cohen, 1999). This means younger employees or the ones with a lower tenure are easily attracted to new opportunities, due to a higher availability and disposition to embrace new challenges (Tanova and Holtom, 2008);

- Affectivity – it refers to interpersonal relationships among the employee and his/her superiors and peers, namely work group integration and cohesion, inspiring teamwork, social capital, and networking. Based on Price's research (2001), a positive affectivity increases job satisfaction, consequently decreases turnover;

- Organizational identification – it consists of employee's feelings such as affinity, affiliation, and membership towards the company. When there is a weak organizational identification, resulting in a low Person-Organization fit, turnover intentions increase significantly (Dutton *et al.*, 1994);

- Job content – it includes dimensions as job involvement, employee's empowerment, participative decision-making, autonomy, task diversity and flexibility, etc. If job content is challenging and attractive for employees, there will be a positive impact in job satisfaction, and consequently a negative influence on turnover intentions (Egan, Yang, and Bartlett, 2004);

- Job stress – according to Survey Research Center from University of Michigan (Price, 1977), there are 4 types of stress: resource inadequacy, role ambiguity, role conflict and workload, and all of them have a negative impact in job satisfaction, increasing turnover;

- Alternative opportunities – it refers to availability of new career opportunities in the market, being evaluated by employees according to their cost-benefit relation. So, if external opportunities are considerable attractive, with higher benefits, employees are more likely to quit their jobs;

- Kinship opportunity – it is defined as "the existence of obligations toward relatives living in the community" (Price, 2001: 603). If an employer has obligations or responsibilities towards his/her relatives, as being married or having children, consequently this kinship obligations increase his/her loyalty and commitment towards the current company, where situations of turnover are less predictable.

- Work environment and conditions – dimensions as work-life balance and policies and organizational stability, structure and culture have a positive impact on job satisfaction

and commitment towards the company, which contribute to retain employees (Egan *et al.*, 2004);

- Distributive justice – situations of equity and fairness at workplace, namely the recognition and rewarding of good performance and fair procedures increase job satisfaction and commitment, consequently decreasing turnover intentions;

- Pay – according to Campion (1991, as cited in Tang, Kim and Tang, 2000), reward and compensation systems are the most important factor influencing Voluntary Turnover. When the economic conditions are favorable, it has a positive impact in job satisfaction, reducing employees search behavior for other opportunities, and consequently contributing to retain employees at the company.

- Promotional chances – when employees feel their potential and performance recognized, through opportunities of mobility inside the organization, there is a positive impact in job satisfaction and commitment towards the organization, contributing to reduce employees' intentions to leave the company (Egan *et al.*, 2004).

All these micro level variables joined together can have a positive or negative relationship with two macro factors: job satisfaction and organizational commitment. According to Trevor (2001), there is an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. Therefore, when employees are satisfied, their intentions to stay at the company are higher, contributing to decreasing the turnover rates (Mobley *et al.*, 1979). On the other hand, when employees are dissatisfied about their jobs, they are more predisposed to leave the company, especially the ones who have a positive affective disposition towards their lives, being more able to actively change their job situation (Judge, 1993, as cited in Tang *et al.*, 2000).

Regarding the organizational commitment, this is composed by three dimensions: affective (identification and involvement towards the organization), continuance (benefits and recognition from job seniority) and normative commitment (sense of moral obligation to remain at the organization) (Tett and Meyer, 1993). Several studies from authors as Trevor (2001), based on March and Simon model (1958), have explored the relationship among job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention, developing predictive models highlighting these factors as the most relevant antecedents of Voluntary Turnover. When job satisfaction and organizational commitment are negatively affected by the previously highlighted micro factors, employees' search behaviour increases, since their intentions to remain at the organization are lower, contributing to increase the Voluntary Turnover.

Maertz and Griffeth (2004, as cited in Maertz *et al.*, 2012) developed 'The 8 Forces Framework', attempting to synthetize and clarify the antecedents for Employee Turnover intentions, divided in 8 general categories: affective, contractual, calculative, alternative, behavioural, normative, moral, and constituent forces. Further research from Maertz *et al.* (2012) extended the study of this framework, highlighting other mediators affecting some of these 8 forces, as the organizational identification, work satisfaction, pay satisfaction and locational forces. Research from Das and Baruah (2013) shown there is not enough consistency in the findings of previous studies. With the main purpose of investigate specific factors that can explain Employee Turnover, they developed 'The Employee Retention & Job Satisfaction Model' (2013), highlighting the following factors: compensation; reward and recognition; promotion and opportunity for growth; participation in decision-making; work-life balance; work environment; training and development; leadership; job security. These factors have a direct and strong relation with job satisfaction and, by its turn with Employee Retention.

In fact, as argued by Kevin, Joan and Adrian (2004, as cited in Das and Baruah, 2013), Employee Turnover cannot be explained through a standard and general framework, since each company acts in a specific context, which determines the use of a wide set of factors to explain this situation. Thereby, additional research is encouraged, especially for exploring the interaction between environmental factors and employees' attitudes, regarding job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Egan *et al.*, 2004).

2.2.3. Consequences of Employee Turnover

Employers, who are not effective in retaining their employees, usually assist to higher turnover rates, having a serious, costly, and disruptive impact on the organization. According Mustamil, Yazdi, Syeh and Ali, 2014), turnover has a strong impact in the organizational panorama regarding three perspectives: cost-based, Human Capital and Social Capital.

In a cost-based perspective, some research contributions identified some consequences of Employee Turnover, namely increased direct and indirect costs. Real and direct costs of Voluntary Turnover can be visible in the replacement of voluntary leaves, through recruitment, selection, temporary staffing, induction, training and development, and resources and time management. As argued by Das and Baruah (2013: 9), "hiring new employees are far difficult as well as costlier than to keep the current employees in the organization". According to Tanwar and Prasad (2016: 1875), turnover is "one of the largest costs in different types of organisations, yet it's also one of the most unknown costs. There are also

indirect costs that are hard to measure, however with a strong impact in the organization, as customer service continuity, product/service quality and pressure in the remaining workforce (Holtom *et al.*, 2008). It was found a negative linear relationship between the employee individual performance and turnover (Jackofsky, 1984, as cited in Trevor, Gerhart, and Boudreau, 1997), since the voluntary leave of employees can contribute to organizational performance decrements, namely breaks in productivity and effectiveness. Furthermore, considerable turnover rates create a negative reputation internally and also externally, deteriorating the organizational image as employer of choice (Mowday, 1984)

Regarding the Human Capital, Voluntary Turnover has serious consequences on the knowledge loss, especially when considering high skilled and valuable employees, as well as Top Management positions. These employees represent several years of experience, accumulated know-how and a considerable investment in training and development. This kind of leaves results usually on a difficult and long process of replacement in the market, affecting the organizational performance (Park and Shaw, 2013 and Holtom *et al.*, 2008). However, as previously observed, not all turnover is harmful to the companies. In the case of functional turnover, when poor performers leave the company, this can impact positively the organization, as previously pointed out.

Finally, the Social Capital, introduced by Bourdieu (1986), is defined as the "possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group" (p. 21). This perspective points out the individual pressure associated with the next job opportunity (Newton and Keenan, 1990, as cited in Holtom *et al.*, 2008), and turnover increase among employees who remain at the organization, as a "turnover contagion" (Holtom *et al.*, 2008: 262). Krackhardt and Porter's research (1986) argued the snowball effect of turnover, since "turnover itself causes more turnover" (p. 50), because employees who remain at the organization usually reflect about their permanence, triggering a job search behaviour. Additionally, these leaves can also affect interpersonal relationships, namely work group cohesion, consequently damaging the organizational performance (Holtom *et al.*, 2008).

2.2.4. Relationship between Employee Turnover and Psychological Contract

The Psychological Contract can be seen as a retention tool, since it establishes a close relationship between the individual and the other party based on a mutual and reciprocal agreement that, when fulfilled, is seen as a motivator to the continuation of the promise

previously made, as well as to engage and encourage the employee to remain in the company in a long-term perspective (Das and Baruah, 2013).

According to Rousseau (1990), there is a positive relation between the expected permanence of the employee in the company and relational obligations and contract compliance with the employer, even in situations such as periods of financial crisis or external job opportunities (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014). The presence of Psychological Contracts, as relational contracts, can improve the retention rates if used as a tool for differentiation in relation to its competitors (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). As referred by Rousseau (1989) and initially introduced by Mowday *et al.* (1982), the concept of individual's commitment to the organization is linked with the Psychological Contract theory. This commitment relies in three important weights: the acceptance of the company's values, the effort to self-exceed for the company and the willingness to stay in the company.

Regarding 'The Managerial Implications of Employer Brand Success Characteristics' framework developed by Moroko and Uncles (2008), when the employees do not feel attracted and engaged with the company and when the Psychological Contract is not being fulfilled between both parties, it leads to a situation of long-term disconnection. Rousseau (1989) defended that the unfulfillment of the contractual conditions initially agreed may cause not only unmet or unrealistic expectations, but also a permanent and irreparable damage in the relationship between both parties. The disrespect by the employer about promises previously agreed has serious implications in employee trust, satisfaction, sense of belonging to the company, performance and turnover. As Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) referred, there is a positive correlation among these variables and the violation or breach of the Psychological Contract, seen as "employee's belief that the organization reneged on its obligations" (p. 507) or "they [companies] were selling a promise they could never deliver" (Moroko and Uncles, 2008: 166). Research conducted by Edwards (2010) presented the same conclusions: companies that presented initially an employment experience overrated and totally detached from reality are creating unrealistic expectations among their employees, contributing to increase their intentions to leave the company in a near future. The break of the bound between employer-employee, through the violation of the Psychological Contract, can be one of several reasons why employees leave organizations.

2.3. Relationship between Employer Branding and Employee Turnover

Previously, concepts of Employer Branding and Employee Turnover were presented separately; nevertheless they cannot be analyzed in a disassociated perspective. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996: 23), "firms which follow an implicit Employer Brand model have a higher retention rate, particularly among their highly skilled people. In addition, these companies are able to attract the best candidates more easily in the first place, as reflected in the attitudes and career choices of potential and existing employees".

Nowadays, all attentions are focused on the Employer Branding approach. In the current War for Talent, where attracting and retaining talent is becoming harder, "employers now believe that the success of the organization lies in its people" (Oladipo *et al.*, 2013: 55). This approach is undoubtedly the best vehicle to differentiate a company from others, creating a competitive advantage and investing on its attractiveness as an employer of choice. Companies with a strong Employer Branding strategy are able to offer a positive employment experience to their employees, contributing to enhance their organizational identification, commitment, and satisfaction.

As observed, Employer Branding aims to create a long-term relation with employees, attracting, engaging, and retaining them (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016: 188). In fact, as argued by Ahmad and Dauda (2016), Employer Branding can be considered as a retention method itself, since it strengthens the Employee Retention, and consequently reduces Voluntary Turnover (Barrow and Mosley, 2005).

III - METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Strategy

Quantitative versus Qualitative Research

Commonly, Quantitative and Qualitative research are differentiated as "research with numbers versus research with no numbers" or as "quantification versus interpretation" (Lee, 1999: 5-6). However, under an academic approach, some authors defended a wider perspective, with more notorious differences.

Creswell (1994, as cited in Lee, 1999) argued that both kinds of research are based on different realities. While quantitative research has an objective and theory-testing purpose, the qualitative research presents a subjective and theory-creation perspective.

Second, researchers adopt different positions according with the type of research: in quantitative studies, they are constrained to maintain an independent and impartial position, acting with an unbiased, formal, and impersonal perspective, while in qualitative studies they are invited to interact and give their contribution, performing under a slight biased, informal, and personal approach.

Third, both approaches use distinctive research processes. Quantitative studies usually apply deductive, cause-effect relation, generalized and context-free approaches, while qualitative studies use inductive, multivariate, and context-specific approaches.

In order to reach the research propose, a qualitative research approach was chosen to conduct this study, because it is more focused on "understanding organizational processes and less on predicting outcomes" (Lee, 1999: 7). It means that the focus of this study is not on quantifying the data obtained, but on interpreting it, to reach useful findings. As defended by Albert Einstein (in Patton, 2002: 12), "not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted".

The Case Study Approach

Qualitative Research Methods can adopt different types or approaches. Lee (1999) stated four different types: Grounded Theory, Focus Group, Case Study Research, and Conversational interviews. Creswell (2007) defended five different approaches: Narrative Research, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study. Due to the explanatory and descriptive nature of the study, the Case study method was adopted, in order to understand "how and why organizational phenomena occur" (Lee, 1999: 58).   Some

researchers suggested several and different approaches for the Case Study concept. Berg and Lune (2012: 325) suggested that Case Study method intends to "investigate an event or a set of related events with the specific aim of describing and explaining these phenomena". Bogdan and Biklen (2003: 54) considered it as "a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event". Berg and Lune's subsequent research (2012), influenced by other authors as Creswell (2007) and Yin (2009), proposed a wider definition for the Case Study concept, as "an approach capable of examining simple or complex phenomenon, with units of analysis varying from single individuals to large corporations and businesses to world-changing events; it entails using a variety of lines of action in its data-gathering segments and can meaningfully make use of and contribute to the application of theory" (p. 325). According to Yin (2009: 4), the Case Study method is used in situations where the researcher has a limited control, focusing on an "extensive and in-depth description" of contemporary events or phenomena that are occurring in a real-life context.

Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) identified three advantages of using Case Studies: the accessibility, the possibility of seeing through the researcher eyes and the decreased defensiveness. Regarding the accessibility, this approach leads the researcher to directly experience and explore a unique reality, which most people cannot have the opportunity to observe. Second, through the Case Study, the reader has the opportunity of observing and interpreting a specific reality, through the eyes of the researcher who experienced that. Additionally, Case Studies provide vicarious experience, since they are not such intrusive and uncomfortable for participants and readers, as the direct experience of the phenomena.

Stake (1995, 2000, as cited in Creswell, 2007) defended that there are three type of Case Studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies, relating to the size and intent of the case analysis. The actual Case Study is an intrinsic one, providing a description of a particular and unusual situation previously observed. The researcher's intention is not testing theory or applying the findings to other audiences or larger populations, but rather analyzing and understanding a particular reality. In this specific case, theoretical explanations obtained about the case can offer a background for further research about the issue, as well as to be generalized to different audiences.

Cassel and Symon's research (1994) shows that the steps in a Qualitative Study are not usually self-evident. Therefore, Case Study methods do not follow a clear and defined set of rules (Lee, 1999). However, Yin's research (2009) identified some major components of

Case Study Research design, that will be respected in the conduction of this study: study's research questions; study's propositions or theoretical framework; identification of units of analysis; logic linkage between the data and the propositions or theory; and criteria for interpretation and evaluating the findings.

3.2. Institutional Details

Regarding the context of this study, the researcher had the invaluable opportunity of observing and experiencing the organizational context of a specific company, interacting with some participants, who provided key and meaningful insights for conducting this research.

The company analysed in this dissertation is a Portuguese Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), belonging to the Health and Life Sciences sector. The company will be identified as Company X, due to a common agreement to not disclosure its identity or other confidential information. The Health and Life Sciences sector is a market niche with a small number of companies competing among them, namely small, national, and traditional companies, against large, multinational, and renowned companies. Concerning the intensive knowledge and expertise needed to be successful in this area and the resulting shortage of talented and qualified employees, all these companies are competing intensively in this War for Talent to get the best talents. However, this war can be considered as inglorious for the small companies, due to the dimension of the multinational companies in several levels. Company X is acting in the Portuguese market for more than 20 years, with over 100 employees and around 50 employees based in other geographical locations. For this study, only the Portugal based employees will be considered.

The company is divided in Operational (core business) and Support areas (as Finance, Human Resources, Marketing, and Communication departments), with a significant prevalence of the first ones, with 73% of the employees belonging to the Business Unit area. The workforce is mostly young, with an average age of 34 years and mainly composed by women (78% of the total workforce). As a result of the required expertise in this area, the majority of employees has a Bachelor degree. The average length of tenure (seniority) of the employees is 4,5 years. The turnover rate registered in 2015 was 20,2% and in 2016 was 24%. This evolution reflects one of the main challenges of the company: retaining talent. This situation is not recent, since the turnover always affected the company. Nevertheless,

nowadays it presents serious implications, due to the increased number of employees leaving the company, affecting its the stability.

3.3. Data Generation

When performing a Qualitative Research, and despite the type of method being used (in this specific context, the Case Study), there are four different techniques that can be applied to collect data: participation and observation, interviewing, document construction and analysis, and presentation of audiovisual data (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, as cited in Lee, 1999). Yin's research (2009) went further and defended that Case Study data can be collected from six different sources: direct observation, participant-observation, interviews, documents, archival records, and physical artifacts.

In this study, the emphasis was placed on the interview technique, through semi-structured interviews with current employees and Recruitment and Selection companies. However, data were also generated by other sources and used to obtain preliminary insights to develop further research. Hence, data also came from archive sources, such as the organizational climate and satisfaction survey and the exit questionnaire, both applied in the company.

This combination of different sources is also known as 'multiple sources of evidence' or 'triangulation', being this last one defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 443) as "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation".

This procedure ensures more quality, reliability, and comprehensiveness to the collected data, since there is a "full and deep examination of the case" (Berg and Lune, 2012: 325), confronting and corroborating the information from different sources. Marshall and Rossman (1995) argued that each source has its own strengths and weaknesses, so the application of a combination of sources can help the researcher to see the phenomena through different perspectives, avoiding possible misinterpretations and vulnerabilities, and consequently increasing the validity of the study.

3.4. Interview Participants

This study is focused on understanding the organizational context experienced by the participants. Their perspectives and points of view about it are the most valuable and meaningful source of information for the conduction of this study.

As a result, data was collected primarily through the conduction of interviews, relying on the following participants: current employees and Recruitment and Selection companies.

Current Employees

Regarding the central topic of this dissertation, Employer Branding is not a one-way strategy, from company to employees, but a shared strategy, as previously highlighted. Therefore, it is pivotal to inquire current employees, in order to construct an informative picture of the experience and feelings they acquire in their working life, and consequently possible associations between Employer Branding perceptions and Voluntary Employee Turnover at Company X.

Among the current employees, fourteen (14) employees have been involved in this study. They were ten (10) female and four (4) male, with an average age of 33 years and half of them with a Master Degree. Twelve (12) respondents belong to the operational areas; two (2) participants have managerial positions, which means they have a leading role, being accountable for managing a group of employees. On average, the length of tenure is four years in Company X.

The following table provides a characterization of the participants:

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Seniority
P1	Male	26	Single	1
P2	Female	56	Single	16
P3	Male	34	Single	8
P4	Male	32	Married	4
P5	Male	32	Married	5
P6	Female	26	Single	7 months
P7	Female	38	Married (with children)	1
P8	Female	26	Single	3
P9	Female	32	Married	2
P10	Female	30	Married	1
P11	Female	27	Married	5
P12	Female	33	Married	2
P13	Female	29	Married (with children)	6 months
P14	Female	40	Married (with children)	7

Table 1 – Characterization of Interview Participants - Current Employees

Source: Developed by the author

The participants were selected by the researcher according to their openness and availability to provide interesting and relevant insights about their employment experience with Company X. There was a special attention to select a heterogeneous group of participants, with different age and seniority ranges, chosen from different departments and hierarchical levels within the organization, in order to not bias the conclusions, maximizing the diversity and richness of the gathered information.

All the invited employees accepted to participate in this study, being individually invited by email or in person to participate voluntarily in this study.

Recruitment and Selection Companies

Ito *et al.* (2013) explored whether branding attributes are the same for attraction and retention, concluding that what captivates current employees can be different from what captivates potential ones. Maxwell and Knox (2009: 4) defended the same position, arguing that "current and potential employees tend to perceive an organization's Employer Brand in different ways (…) the two groups tend to value different attributes".

In order to extend and deepen the analysis, some Recruitment and Selection companies that work along with Company X in the support of its recruitment needs were involved in this study. These companies are a valuable source to collect information about the Health and Life Sciences market, as well as about the perceptions and expectations of potential candidates regarding the company.

A total of four consultants from Recruitment and Selection companies that collaborate with Company X were invited by email to participate in this study. Only two responded positively to this request, demonstrating openness to schedule a meeting. For questions of confidentiality, the identity of the two companies, as well as its consultants, will not be disclosed. Both companies signed a confidentiality agreement. Company X was informed about the contacts with these external entities, however their identity will not be shared with the company.

3.5. The Nature of Individual Interviews

As discussed by Patton (2002), the main advantage of interviewing is the possibility of reach some information that is not directly observed, as behaviors, feelings, and thoughts, through interviewees' eyes and stories. Yin (2009) defended that the targeted and insightful perspective of interviews is a major point, since they are directly focused on the topics under study, providing causal inferences and evidences.

Interviews with Current Employees

Data from current employees were collected through a semi-structured and focused one-to-one interview. 14 semi-structured interviews were undertaken, between the 1st of June and 8th of July 2016, each one with a duration around 30 minutes. They took place at different locations, as the meeting rooms of the company or coffee shops near the company headquarters, according to the preference of the interviewees.

Initially, all participants had a small debriefing about the study purpose and its academic scope and an overview about the topics to be addressed as well. All interviews were audio recorded with the previous consent of the respondents. They were informed these recordings will not be disclosed and their identity or any kind of confidential information will not be revealed at any time. Previously, permission was granted from the company to inquire respondents, on the condition that their identity would remain confidential within the company.

Interviews were conducted as an informal conversation, with a semi-structured and focused perspective. The semi-structured interviews can be considered as a middle term between structured and unstructured interviews. This type of interviews has general topics and targeted questions to address, however the researcher has freedom and flexibility to follow a different path, according to the flow of the conversation (Lee, 1999). Berg and Lune's research (2012) named this type of interviews as semi-standardized interviews, defending features previously presented by Lee and identifying other ones as the absence of a specific sequence and wording for questions and the possibility of clarifications from the interviewer. Despite the conversational and open approach, these interviews are considered as focused interviews, since there is a preparation from the interviewer, not only to address some specific and predetermined issues, as well to respect the duration of the interview, that usually lasts for a short period, for example one hour. This exploratory perspective, as a guided conversation, aims to deepen the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, creating an open, comfortable, and informal environment.

Interviews were conducted in Portuguese language by the researcher responsible for this dissertation. The first part of the interview included some questions about employees' past experience in other companies and a comparison between the past experience and the current one. In the second part, they were invited to focus only on their current experience at Company X, highlighting the most positive or less positive aspects. Finally, two questions, one about Employer Branding and other about overall satisfaction were addressed, to identify

employees' perceptions and suggestions about them. The script with the questions addressed is presented in Annex 1.

Interviews with Recruitment and Selection Companies

The researcher also collected some data among consultants from Recruitment and Selection companies. Two interviews were conducted on 4th and 7th of July 2016, with a duration of about 30 minutes. Interviews took place at coffee shops near the workplace of both participants, regarding their preferences.

Initially, there was a small debriefing about the study purpose and its academic scope, and an overview about the topics to be addressed as well. These interviews were no audio recorded, regarding the non-disclosure agreement assigned by both parties. During the interview, the researcher was taking some notes about the information provided by the interviewees.

These semi-structured and focused interviews, in a more conversational and informal perspective, had the purpose of retrieving some feedback about the market and the external recruitment, namely the external image of Company X as a recruiter. The first part of the interview had a broader perspective, exploring the context of the company's sector, and comparing the company with its competitors. In the second part, questions were focused on Company X, mainly candidate's perceptions about the company. Both interviews were conducted in Portuguese. The script with the questions addressed is presented in Annex 2.

3.6. The Nature of the Archive Sources

Besides interviews, some organizational archival sources were analysed, namely the organizational climate and satisfaction survey and the exit questionnaire. Yin's research (2009) identified some advantages in archival sources comparing to other sources, such as its stability, unobtrusiveness, accuracy, and wide coverage. The relevance in analysing these data relies on the possibility of confronting these results with the ones generated by interviews, to ensure consistency between perceptions and experiences addressed by other respondents about the company.

Organizational Climate and Satisfaction Survey

According to Ito *et al.* (2013), employee's surveys provide interesting and extensive information about employees' perceptions towards their organization, being highly

recommended to analyse the current organizational situation, and if necessary diagnosing possible deviations and adjusting some practices.

At Company X, the organizational climate and satisfaction survey was conducted among current employees, on February 2016. There were returned 122 valid questionnaires, with a response rate of 87%. It addressed employees' overall agreement and satisfaction, towards organizational dynamics, internal processes, Human Resources Management, and organisational culture. Results were subsequently shared with the employees, on March 2016, through a report prepared by the Human Resources Department, the entity responsible for the development of the survey, as well for managing all the process.

This survey, along with its results, has a private access, since it was prepared only for the internal audience. However, the company allowed the researcher to use this documentation in the actual study.

Exit Questionnaire

Barrow and Mosley's research (2005: 106) defended that "conducting research among current employees will clearly provide only a partial view of a target group's needs and aspirations, as it will be biased towards those who were positively disposed towards the organization". According to Barrow and Mosley (2005), leaver's opinions can be a valuable resource to address some eventual issues regarding engagement and retention issues. These are the main reasons why other sources of information were included in the actual study. In spite of the richness of current employees' sample, it is also important to have the contribution of past employees, exploring the reasons why they felt motivated to leave the company.

Therefore, during this study, it was possible to analyze company documents about 30 ex-employees, corresponding to employees' leaves occurred between 9th of January 2015 and 25th May 2016. 83% of the ex-employees were female and the average age was 32 years. 90% of them belonged to operational areas and 40% of them worked in the company for more than 3 years. These documents consist on a questionnaire filled in by ex-employees when they left the company, usually in the end of their last day, addressing their experience at the company. Filling the document was no mandatory, as well as the disclosure of the personal identification. Initially, these questionnaires were provided in paper, but since May 2016 they are completed online, in Portuguese. The survey template is presented in Annex 3.

3.7. Interpretation of the Empirical Material

The Qualitative Data analysis can be done through three steps: sorting, organizing and indexing the data (Mason, 1996, as cited in Lee, 1999). According to Lee (1999: 97), this process "does not take place in a series of mechanical steps (…) it should be a creative act". As a result, in this study the information was examined through the content analysis, defined as a "careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes and biases, and meanings" (Berg and Lune, 2012: 349).

The main goal of the content analysis is decomposing the data into variables and consequently reducing and simplifying the amount of information gathered, for an easier interpretation of the findings (Berg and Lune, 2012). However, the content analysis cannot be seen in a reductionist perspective, "rather, it is a passport to listening to the words of the text and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words" (Berg and Lune, 2012: 355).

Interviews

Interviews were the first empirical material analysed. The recorded interviews with current employees were fully transcribed. In this study the traditional system of listening to the recordings and typing them word by word was used to provide quality and consistency from the original recordings to the transcribed interviews. The annotations made during the interviews with Recruitment and Selection companies were rewritten in an online file and few improvements were introduced to provide accuracy to the insights expressed by informants. In the end of this process of getting a written document, the researcher obtained a document with 99 pages with verbatim transcriptions from all the current employees and Recruitment and Selection companies interviewed. After that, the information was organized through margin notes and codes, to be easily 'read'. Then, the researcher created other document, where similar or common codes were aggregated together.

Exit Questionnaires

After the analysis of interviews, the researcher focused her attention on the exit questionnaires. As the older questionnaires were answered in paper, while the most recent were already replied online, in order to simplify the analysis, the ones in paper were transferred to an online format. When all information was in the same format, data were extracted to an excel file for future analysis. Similarly to interviews, the data derived from the

questionnaires was coded and then, aggregated by codes, along with the ones obtained in the interviews.

The Process of Data Analysis

After the creation of a new document where the information from interviews and exit questionnaires is organized by common codes, the researcher created general categories to group these codes, that were thereafter decomposed in several subcategories. This process is similar to the one used by Glasser and Berg (1980, as cited in Berg and Lune, 2012), since they conducted interviews, performed their transcription analysis with the introduction of some major topics or themes, each one divided into several minor topics or subthemes. It is important to underline that items without a clear meaning or without relationship with the goals of the research were eliminated. Additionally, items that could identify the respondents were also removed to protect their anonymity.

Concerning the analysis and presentation of the findings, Creswell (2007) highlighted different data analysis strategies, including a more traditional strategy. He suggests the display of the findings, which are organized by categories or themes, in a more organized and structured way, through tables, charts, diagrams, or figures, using for example the Wolcott's 'Tree Diagram' (1994). In the present study, the presentation of the findings also follows a 'tree diagram', where the branches on top represent the most abstract and general categories, and the ones on the bottom represent the least abstract and generalized subcategories.

ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRIBUTES						
Interest Value		Social Value		Economic Value	Development Value	
Organizational Image and Values	Work Content	Work Environment	Relationship with Superiors	Remuneration	Work Recognition	Career Development and Progression

Table 2 - Organizational Attributes' Tree Diagram
Source: Developed by the author, based on Berthon *et al.*'s research (2005)

The general or major categories were obtained from the 5-Factor Model of Employer Attractiveness, from Berthon, Ewing and Hah's research (2005). The minor categories or subcategories associated with these dimensions derived mostly from the Employee Retention factors presented in 'The Employee Retention & Job Satisfaction Model' from Das and Baruah (2013). They are: organizational image and values; work content; work environment;

relationship with superiors; remuneration; work recognition; and career development and progression.

Presentation of Findings

In order to provide more reliability and reality to the findings, it will be used some segments of informants' narratives. The identification of participants will remain anonymous, so the statements of current employees will be coded as 'Participant 1', 'Participant 2', (…), 'Participant 14', in some cases simplified as 'P1', 'P2', (…), 'P14'. Statements from consultants from Recruitment and Selection companies will be coded as 'Recruitment and Selection company 1' and 'Recruitment and Selection company 2', being simplified as 'R&S1' and 'R&S2'. Findings will be also supported and contextualized according to the existing literature and academic research on the field.

3.8. Goodness and Trustworthiness

Threats to Validity

Usually, some validity and reliability tests are applied in order to ensure the quality of the research design, such as the internal validity, the external validity, and reliability tests. However, the nature of these tests is more concerned with a quantitative approach (Amankwaa, 2016). Therefore, they cannot be extensively applied to the actual research.

The internal validity is related with the reliability of the collected data, and it is ensured since the information derives from a study applied in a real company. Using valid testimonies gathered from current employees, ex-employees, and Recruitment and Selection companies, researcher's expectation and conviction is that all participants provided credible and realistic information, what preserves and legitimates the internal validity.

Nevertheless, regarding the external validity, meaning "the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized" (Yin, 2009: 40), empirical results obtained from single case studies usually do not offer support and security to be generalized to larger populations or universes. As argued by Lee (1999: 8), "qualitative research is heavily grounded within the local context in which the phenomena of interest occur". The main goal of this study is to understand the phenomena occurring at Company X, rather than their generalization, namely the application of the findings to other realities or the creation of further research and theory. The information provided came from a specific and particular reality, experienced inside Company X. Consequently, it can be critical and questionable to replicate or extrapolate the

results to the sector or to other companies. However, as defended by Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 439), "researchers do not avoid generalization – they cannot". All methods and strategies used, as well as some conclusions and contributions given according to the acquired findings, can act as a valuable incentive, guideline or knowledge transfer from the researcher to readers. In any case, they should make their own interpretations, being aware about the uniqueness and complexity of the case, when trying to apply it to their own reality or context. As a result, the external validity is not completely observed in this specific study.

Finally, the reliability is ensured when "the operations of a study - such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated, with the same results" (Yin, 2005: 40). This means if another researcher does the same study, he will reach the same findings and conclusions. This study is conducted by only one researcher. However, if other researchers collaborate in this study, mainly in the interview phase, there is the confidence that the results obtained will be slightly different. In fact, the data obtained from the organizational archives would remain the same, nevertheless data from the interviews could be significantly different, relating to the level of trust and the openness climate between interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, the reliability is not verified in the current study.

As observed, the external validity and reliability tests can not be applicable to a Qualitative approach, as the one explored in this research. Nevertheless, as argued by Amankwaa, (2016: 121), "all research must have truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality, in order to be considered worthwhile". Consequently, Guba and Lincoln (1985) presented in their research some criteria to ensure trustworthiness, rigor, and transparency to the qualitative research. These criteria are the credibility, the transferability, the dependability, and the confirmability, each one associated to a set of respective procedures.

During the conduction of this study, some of these criteria, as well as their procedures, were used to ensure trustworthiness and goodness to the research, being thereafter described in-depth.

Credibility

The credibility is "the degree to which the results and conclusions are believable" (Odom and Shuster, 1986: 73). This criterion ensures the "truth value" (Guba and Lincoln, 1985: 79) to the research. Some of the procedures used to ensure the credibility and truthfulness of the phenomena under analysis are: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checking.

a) Prolonged Engagement

These procedure is not only related to the engagement of the researcher with the study, but also with all the encompassing context, namely with the participants of the study. This specific study is described by a long term and intensive involvement of the researcher on the field, namely at Company X, to create a trustful relationship between interviewer and interviewee. The presence of the researcher at Company X for an extended period of time provided openness and confidence to the participants, since the researcher was not seen as an 'outsider' or as a threat (Guba, 1981), but as a temporary employee or a mediator.

In fact, there is a truly belief that the deep cooperation of respondents was achieved mainly through the engagement of the researcher, clarifying possible bias or wrong perceptions and enabling a complete and rich understanding of the phenomena under analysis (Maxwell, 2005).

b) Persistent Observation

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985: in Billups, 2014: 304) "if prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth", therefore this procedure was applied along with the prolonged engagement. The researcher seized the opportunity of experiencing the organizational context of Company X, and observed carefully some details, such as participants during interviews, the daily work of employees, some leisure moments, etc. A persistent and continuous observation from the researcher provides an "understanding of participants' world view and effects of the researcher's presence during fieldwork are minimized" (Anney, 2014: 277), providing a more insightful and plausible interpretation of the phenomena, enhancing the credibility of the study.

c) Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing "provides inquirers the opportunity to test their growing insights and to expose themselves to searching questions" (Guba, 1981: 85). This means that research may highlight the importance of having other professionals providing useful feedback during the research process, however with a neutral and distanced position. According to Cassel and Simon (2004: 330), "the combination of closeness and distance is essential to good research". In this specific study, the researcher discussed the research process and findings with her Supervisor and a member of Company X. The support and feedback from these two professionals offered guidance during the research process, being crucial to clarify some conclusions or to address new topics, in order to avoid possible bias or incongruities.

d) Triangulation

The triangulation is defined as "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 443). Concerning Denzin´s research (1989: 307, as cited in Patton, 2002), the use of triangulation method enhances the consistency and credibility of the findings, "by combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and data sources, [researchers] can hope to overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-methods, single-observer, and single-theory studies" (p. 555). In fact, the triangulation procedure can be achieved through different approaches: methods triangulation (using different methods to collect data, i.e. interviews, focus groups, participant); sources triangulation (using different sources to collect data, i.e. multiple participants and researchers, different time periods); theory triangulation (using different perspectives to interpret the collected data); and analyst triangulation (using multiple analysts to discuss the findings) (Patton, 1999, as cited in Amankwaa, 2016).

During the conduction of this study, the researcher applied multiple triangulation approaches, as the following:

- Methods triangulation, since data was collected through different techniques, as interviews and archive sources, namely the organizational climate and satisfaction survey and exit questionnaires;

- Sources triangulation, involving different participants in the study: current employees, ex-employees, and consultants from Recruitment and Selection companies;

- Analyst triangulation, reviewing the findings with the Supervisor of this dissertation and a member of Company X.

The application of these different sources of data collection enabled the researcher to explore and examine the phenomena through different perspectives, comparing the data obtained from different sources. Consequently, it was possible to corroborate findings, reducing possible ambiguities, and to strengthen the richness and comprehensiveness of results (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, as cited in Amankwaa, 2016).

e) Member Checking

This procedure relies on the principle that "data and interpretations are continuously tested as they are derived from members of various audiences and groups from which data are solicited" (Guba, 1981: 85). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989: 239), member checking is "the single most critical technique for establishing credibility". Cassel and Simon (2004) shared this belief, stating that "checking the findings with the case study participants can be a

valuable part of the analysis and can enhance validity. As a researcher, you bear responsibility for the interpretation of the findings, but participants should be able to agree with the verifiable facts you present" (p. 330).

In this study the researcher conducted interviews, in particular the ones with current employees, audiotaping and later transcribing the data. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to obtain validation of the transcripts with each interviewee, in order to verify if the gathered information is accurate and authentic, eliminating possible bias.

Transferability

Guba and Lincoln (1985: 306) defined the transferability "by describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people". However, as previously presented, the aim of Qualitative research is not to generalise the findings, but to understand the occurred phenomena, generating findings that can be applied by the readers for their own purpose (Billups, 2014).

The thick description is one of the procedures used to ensure transferability and applicability of the findings. This procedure relies on "providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015: 259). Regarding Amankwaa's research (2016), researchers should provide an extensive description about, for example, the location and atmosphere of the site under analysis, participants' attitudes, and researcher feelings. In the conduction of this study, the researcher was aware about the importance of disclosing a wide and detailed picture of the phenomena, through a full and in-depth description of the Health and Life Sciences sector, the organizational context of Company X, the participants involved in this study, as well as the researcher's perceptions.

The aim of this thick description is not only to allow readers to easily understand the findings, but also to contextualize and support them to evaluate the extent to which the results obtained can be applicable or transferable to their own context. These findings can act as a valuable knowledge transfer or as an incentive for action from researcher to readers. Nevertheless, these results were gathered from a specific context, at Company X, so readers must have critical view and responsibility when making their own interpretations or when trying to transfer conclusions to their own reality.

Dependability

The dependability is "the degree to which the results of a study can be replicated with a similar group of participants" (Odom & Shuster, 1986: 73). There are some procedures used to ensure the dependability and consistency of findings, as the audit trail. This procedure consists in "a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings" (Amankwaa, 2016: 122).

Guba and Lincoln (1985) presented some examples of these research steps: data reduction, through theoretical notes, condensed notes and quantitative summaries; data reconstruction, using categories, integration and definition of concepts and connections to the existing literature; and intentions and disposition materials, presenting the goals and expectations for the research, the motivations of the researcher, and some personal and reflexive notes.

In order to perform an audit trial, the researcher must provide a detailed and rigorous description of all research steps, preparing the future examination from an external entity, where the accuracy, authenticity, and congruence of the data are evaluated, and their capability to support the study findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). The external audit plays an important role in the audit trail process, "examining the purpose, methods, and findings of a study to determine whether the findings and interpretations of one researcher can be supported by another" (Billups, 2014: 11).

In this specific Case Study, the researcher did some efforts to present in detail all the research process, namely how the data was collected, processed, and analysed, as well as the research outcomes, namely the findings and conclusions. Therefore, an extensive and detailed description of the data analysis procedures and methods used was provided, as well as the integration of concepts and connections to the existing literature.

The conduction of the study was also supported by documentation, as the interviews' guide applied among current employees and among Recruitment and Selection companies, as well the exit questionnaire applied to ex-employees. Finally, the researcher shared some personal reflections and motivations, in order to explain some decisions, contextualizing the findings.

Confirmability

Odom and Shuster (1986: 73) defined the confirmability as "the degree to which the conclusions drawn from a study were accurately interpreted from the data" and not a product of the researcher's mind (Anney, 2007). Some examples of procedures to validate the confirmability are the triangulation and the audit trail.

a) <u>Triangulation</u>

The application of multiple sources of data enhances the confirmability of the findings, since there is the opportunity of verifying and corroborating them using multiple and different methods, sources, theories, and analysts (Patton, 1999). As previously verified, the triangulation is evident in the conduction of this study, since the researcher resorted to different techniques (methods triangulation); multiple participants (sources triangulation) and different analysts (analyst triangulation), in order to confirm and corroborate the findings.

b) <u>Audit Trail</u>

According to Anney (2007: 279), "confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers". Therefore, during the research process, the investigator sought to describe in detail all the research steps, using concept's integration, connections to the literature, support documentation, as well as personal reflexions, in order to facilitate the audit trail process to the external audit team.

3.9. The Role of the Researcher

The researcher has an important role in the conduction of all the research process, mainly in qualitative studies. The researcher has the invaluable opportunity of directly experiencing and exploring a specific phenomenon, and sharing it through his eyes with the readers. According to Amankwaa (2016: 122), the researcher can be compared to a storyteller: "the investigator in essence is telling a story with enough detail that the consumer/reader obtains a vivid picture of the events of the research". Therefore, the researcher, as a knowledge producer, has the responsibility to clarify and overcome possible bias, through reflexivity and detailed interpretations, in order to maximize the rigor and richness of the findings. In fact, the success of the study and the consequent quality of the findings rely predominantly on the direct contribution of the researcher.

According to Patton (2002), the credibility of the study begins by the credibility of the researcher, since he is the central thread of all the research process. Yin (1998) highlighted five skills that researchers must have in order to conduct good case studies: inquiring mind, observation and sensing, adaptability and flexibility, understanding of the issues, and unbiased interpretation of data. In this specific Case Study, the largest amount of data derived mostly from the conduction of interviews with current employees and Recruitment and Selection companies. Patton (2002: 341) made the salient point that "the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" and his "art

of hearing" the interviewee (Patton, 2002: 341). Regarding this, the researcher made use of a close relation and interaction with participants to create a trustworthy, sharing and open environment with interviewees, providing them openness and confidence to share their experiences. During this interviewing process, the role of the interviewer was "to listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond. Hence, in this conversation, the participant does most of the talking" (Charmaz, 2006: 25). Therefore, the researcher plays a supporting role, since the major focus is on the leading performers, namely the respondents, and on supporting the creation of a positive and pleasant experience to them (Lee,1999).

Ethical Procedures

It is not possible to address the role of the researcher without introducing the importance of ethical issues, especially in qualitative research. Regarding Khan (2014: 298), "ethical issues are important for both quantitative and qualitative research, but ethical considerations are more important in qualitative research, as qualitative research approaches often intrudes in participant's lives".

In this specific study, as mentioned, the primary method of data collection were interviews, involving more intrusiveness, since the researcher was crossing the boundaries and entering in the personal sphere of the participants (Patton, 2002). The researcher made use of ethical procedures to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants involved in this study.

First, there is a common agreement and a respective Non-Disclosure Agreement between the researcher and Company X, ensuring that any kind of information that identifies the organization or other confidential details would be disclosed. The researcher also demonstrates commitment to make a proper use of the documentation provided by the organization. Regarding the participants, namely the current employees, their participation was voluntary, and at any moment they could refuse or withdraw answer to questions they did not feel comfortable to. At the begging of the interview, all of them were informed about some characteristics of the research, namely the purpose of the study and an overview of the questions to be addressed, as well some confidentiality issues. The researcher asked the participants' consent to audio tape the interviews, request that was accepted by all of them. The recordings of the interviews were exclusively used for transcription purpose, with an exclusive access only to the researcher. At any moment, the name of the participants or other information liable to identify them would not be revealed.

IV – RESULTS

In this chapter, it will be presented an extensive description of the main research findings collected from different sources: semi-structured interviews with current employees and Recruitment and Selection companies, and archive sources, as the organizational climate and satisfaction survey and exit questionnaires to ex-employees. All these findings were examined, decomposed and simplified through a content analysis, in order to identify common themes and explore possible patterns.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the insights and experiences of the research participants towards Company X, exploring their perceptions about what retains employees in the organization, as well as what motivates them to leave the organization and how it can influence the Employer Brand of the company.

Results from these insights and experiences will be presented in four different sections, further broken down into subcategories, based on the Organizational Attributes' Tree Diagram identified in the Methodology as the framework for this study.

To conclude this chapter, the researcher will present a conceptual framework summarizing all the findings.

4.1. Interest Value

4.1.1. Organizational Image and Values

a) Internal and External Image

In the organizational climate and satisfaction survey, employees were asked to evaluate their level of satisfaction (from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied), regarding several items, namely the external image of the company. Concerning this, 79% of the respondents expressed to be extremely or moderately satisfied towards the external image of the company. The quality of the service provided also contributes to this positive image, with 83% of the participants expressing satisfaction towards the service provided to clients, considering that customers' needs are a top priority for the company, as well as to them. In interviews, participants also referred the good image the company has in the market, describing Company X as *"renowned"* (P12), *"stable"* and *"trustworthy"* (P14), recognising it as a school and a reference, in terms of knowledge and quality of service among clients.

When the researcher asked interviewees about their perceptions of the external image transmitted by the company, namely if they considered there was any kind of mismatch

between the internal and external image, results collected expressed a slightly difference between internal and external image. Despite the quality of the service provided and the considerable international growth of the company, *"(...) we continue to be small, the expansion was outside but inside nothing happens"* (P2). Participant 5 shared a similar point of view, defending the focus is on transmitting an unrealistic perspective outside: "(…) *we should transmit an image of perfect functioning. (...) the image outside has to be the more polished as possible".* Participant 6 also shared this point of view: *"I see the image of the company being sold as tailored and high quality and this is not what we deliver".*

Regarding this alignment between the internal and external image, some respondents defended the Company is creating unrealistic expectations and wrong perceptions, comparing to the image transmitted to them on their first days: *"I do not think both images are equal. When I first met the company, the image transmitted was a good and attractive company to work. People were very demanding, but this level of demand was rewarded. However, the reality as an employee is not so linear as the one that was presented to me. In this point of view, it was a little disappointing, since I think the difference between these two perspectives, the real image and the one transmitted, is huge*" (P1).

Participant 10 highlighted the serious and formal position of the company: *"We transmit completely the image of a very serious and formal company. And I think we are not properly so serious and so formal as they want to transmit (...) this is not our image. Seriousness is not synonymous with quality".*

b) Organizational Goals, Values, and Communication

The organizational survey addressed the level of agreement of employees in many perspectives, as company's goals and values. When questioned about their level of satisfaction regarding the strategic orientation of the company, 57% of the respondents expressed to be satisfied, with a similar number of respondents (52%) referring to be "familiar with and understand the organizations' strategic goals", as well as recognising they are clear and well communicated.

Regarding the internal communication, results reveal that 56% of the respondents agree with the statement "We are very well informed about all important activities and accomplishments of the company worldwide". On the other hand, there is a lack of information about company's overall performance, with 50% of the respondents strongly disagreeing about "This company often shares with us information on its economic and financial situation". In the interviews conducted by the researcher, there was verified some

dissatisfaction about the internal communication. For example, Participant 5, when asked about less enjoyable experiences lived at Company X, referred *"There are fundamental questions as the internal communication, the issue of no taboos, no differentiated people, the communication to be clear, to be quiet, to be uniform. Recently, some employees' leaves were communicated, other ones not"*. The same point of view was shared by Participant 8: *"In terms of internal communication, I think there is noticeable a flaw. Usually the information arrives by non-official channels, and sometimes out of time. (...) Sometimes, if the information does not arrive at the same time for everybody, it can create some imbalance"*.

Participant 11 highlighted not only the importance of internal communication, as well as the external communication: *"The communication is not the same internally and externally. And we continue to sin internally by not sharing frequently the results, either the good ones, or the bad ones (...), we are still very closed, even inter-department. Our communication should be a little improved, (...) we should know more about what is going on, not only in the end of the year. It is important to increase the transparency, the periodicity, and type of communication between people. (...) Sometimes we need to look inside and know how we are and not only think on the external image, we have to work on Marketing"*.

c) <u>Organizational Reputation</u>

Interviews conducted with Recruitment and Selection companies mentioned some interesting points about the external reputation of Company X. When questioned about comparing Company X with other similar companies, the interviewee from the Recruitment and Selection company 2 referred it is a small and more familiar company, with a traditional, less "*sophisticated*" and *"bossy"* management, typical in national companies where the power and decision is concentrated on the owners of the company. According to him, national companies are stigmatized and have a less favourable reputation not so much by their size, but by being a Portuguese company.

There was also refereed that the company had a strong mark in the market, however some years ago the image became poorer, regarding the low competitive wages and the massive leave of employees to competing companies. According to the interviewee from the Recruitment and Selection company 1, when a job proposal is presented to the applicants, the salary package weights 70% and the past reputation 30%.

Nonetheless, it was defended by both interviewees that Company X has some attributes creating a positive and favourable reputation: it is recognised as a school, where

employees have opportunity to start their careers, mainly for the ones who left the company and are already in multinational companies. The company also benefits from a young and dynamic environment, where career progression is easier and more flexible, due to the small dimension of the company and to the young workforce.

From an employee perspective, participants were invited to express their satisfaction about the decision they made, when decided to embrace their current job in Company X. Most of them expressed satisfaction, especially the ones who found there their first job opportunity and also the possibility of growing in a professional level. Nonetheless, some participants expressed some doubts regarding the context they already have about the company. Participant 13 mentioned: *"Now, my only doubt would be, with this knowledge about the company and about it works, if I would accept to work here or if I would prefer to work in other company, I do not know"*.

4.1.2. Work Content

a) <u>Job Satisfaction and Commitment</u>

In the organizational climate and satisfaction survey, when asked to described their current level of organizational commitment, 77% of the respondents expressed a positive overall commitment. This is also supported by their willingness to stay in the company, since more than 60% of respondents plan to stay in the company for the next 2-3 years and 28% plan to stay for more than 5 years.

Regarding the work content, 74% of the employees agree that "My work is challenging, stimulating and rewarding", also expressing to be committed to perform their work with quality.

During the interviews, the researcher asked participants if they appreciated to work in Company X, obtaining an overall positive feedback, as the following: *"What I mostly value is appreciating what I do, and here, at the end of the day, I feel good about what I have done"* (P8), *"This motivates me a lot and encourages me to come to work every day"* (P5).

When asked about what they like the most and what daily motivates them to work at Company X, the great part of the participants highlighted the *"autonomy"* (P2), *"flexibility"* (P12), as well as the possibility of performing diverse and exciting projects. Other ones referred the strong impact and significance of their work to the society: *"What makes me waking up in the morning and motivates me to perform a good work is providing the right*

support to the patient" (P6) and *"This motivates us, realizing our importance, a small importance in a process that is much bigger"* (P14).

Nevertheless, some testimonies revealed a considerable demotivation and dissatisfaction towards their work, expressing: *"I really like some of the things that I do, but I do not like so much other things. I like to work here but it is not a full 'yes'. I would like to do something that brings me satisfaction, but it is hard to have that warranty, so I do not take risks"* (P3).

Other respondents mentioned that employees perform a great effort and commitment in their daily work, usually with some sacrifice in terms of workload and tight deadlines. This effort is not taken into account by their superiors, since there is a weak organization and management in the activities, creating some instability in the projects being conducted. For example, Participant 7 shared : *"I am in a more complicated stage by overwork and by some struggles, by having the perception that the goals I wanted to reach are not being achieved and this also demotivates me. And sometimes, I also look into some decisions and I do not agree with them, or I do not understand them. And this demotivates me. I like being here, but not so much as I liked six months ago".*

Other participant expressed some stagnation in her assigned functions: *"My problem is that currently I achieved a stage where all the functions that I perform, I do them without any problem. I feel a kind of boring because there are not new functions that I can perform. I am that kind of people who always want new challenges, so I feel myself stagnating, I fell I am not learning, I feel I am not motivated. I feel I am not doing what I could do for the company, because this opportunity is not being given to me, this is the reason I am not liking to be here"* (P13).

When asked about what motivate them to stay in the company, some participants mentioned the stability in their jobs as the main reason. For example, Participant 3 shared that his long length of tenure in the company provides him enough security to set aside the opportunity of exploring outside a job opportunity: *"This is not what I wanted to do. In the different areas that I worked here I never felt entirely satisfied. Since I became a permanent employee in the company, I never took the risk of investing on what I would like to do, because I know it would be a very unsafe jump, with any kind of warranties. (…) What keeps me here is not having warranties of success in other place. I honestly think I would have several difficulties in finding an alternative, a good job outside".*

Other participant shared a similar point of view: *"What motivated me to stay at Company X and accepting this challenge was the job security. In the area I would like to*

explore, job security does not exist, there are short contracts, little work seasons. So, in my life there came a time when I had to choose between fulfilling myself professionally or having a safe scale to my personal life, mainly provided by the security at Company X" (P5).

b) <u>Workload and Work Demands</u>

In the Exit Questionnaire, employees leaving the company were invited to evaluate their satisfaction concerning some aspects. 31% of the questionnaire respondents expressed to be dissatisfied with the workload, and 17% of them pointed it out as the main motivator why they left the company.

The climate survey also addressed the workload that employees are exposed to, questioning them if "The amount of work I am asked to do is reasonable", where more than 40% of the respondents expressed disagreement. Situations of absence of work-life balance were also pointed out, since almost 50% of respondents did not agree with "My job does not cause unreasonable amounts of stress in my life"

During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect if they had already considered looking for a new professional experience outside and what motivated them to it. Many of them recognised this situation, pointed out the tight deadlines, the extended work schedules and the intense job demands as the main motivators. All these motivators, in addition with the lack of human resources, are reducing the time and capacity to support employees, as defended by Participant 7:*"I feel there is much work, we are everywhere but we do not have human capacity to contribute as we should. There is capacity but there are no people. (…) One of the things that I feel here is sometimes people are very overloaded and usually they receive other stuff to do. You have already a lot of work to do but then you have to give an extra"*. Other interviewee identified an intense pace of work with an extended work schedule: *"The work is not planned for the number of people we have here. Nobody can work from 9AM to 6PM and comply with their work, it is unrealistic"* (P9). This situation is also supported by the organizational survey, where 28% of respondents disagree about "The pace of the work in this organization enables me to do a good job".

The high turnover being registered also hampers the workload situation, since not all employees' leaves are being replaced, or at least at proper time, what creates extended tasks for current employees. Participant 12 mentioned this situation: "*What bothers me the most is people leaving, but the replacement is not linear, I think this also demotivates people. In my area, some people left, nobody came for the area, there are no people being hired. There is*

only reallocation of tasks, and it means something for us who remained at the company. There are no bonus, there are no salary increases but there is reallocation of tasks and people leave".

Results from climate survey mentioned 55% of respondents positively agree about "Information and knowledge are shared openly within this organization". However, in interviews, some participants defended that the excessive demands are harming the knowledge transfer and support to colleagues who had recently joined the organization: *"Many people are being left behind and they have quite often to find their own way. No one can truly support the other, as we are all overloaded. So, admissions are very little supported: or the person make out by himself or he is a kind of lost there. As much as everybody has a great willingness, the lack of time is the number one, it is not possible to help all"* (P10).

Additionally, a crucial issue was addressed: the know-how loss, that is becoming more prominent due to the turnover increase. During the testimony of Participant 12 about the main reasons why people leave the company, she shared her concern: *"This is know-how that leaves, this is knowledge that is lost. They do not have idea about the know-how that is lost every time a person leaves, mainly at higher positions, these people have a cumulated know-how for more than 10 years. This is really serious and I am not seeing anything being done to change this".*

In spite of the importance in satisfying clients' needs, from employees' and from Company X's side, the extensive workload, mostly originated by the voluntary leave of employees, is creating serious outcomes. The quality of the work provided to clients and consequently their satisfaction is being affected, as mentioned: *"The image we transmit externally is about a flawless work and we cannot deliver it. And I feel that several clients realise this. Clearly we cannot deliver what is promised, not by lack of competency, but when you have so much stuff to do a great work is not a priority, so you do just a good job"* (P6).

Additionally, the young and unexperienced workforce, originated by recent voluntary leaves, is having a strong impact among clients, creating a lack of security and solidity in the projects' running. According to Participant 4, *"We are having very junior teams and this is not well seen by clients, because we cannot retain the most senior people, who are able to transmit properly the work and have lots of years of experience. They are able to transmit things in an easy way to people who have recently joined the company".* Other participant also highlighted *"I also have contact with clients that are not so satisfied with our work. I think it depends largely on the person who is responsible by the work. And if you want me to be honest, it also depends a lot on this turnover. It means, people create an image of 'I will*

make a project with Company X, it will take 3 years. Will we have someone still there from the beginning, 3 years later?'" (P12).

c) <u>Work-life Balance and Well-being</u>

In the climate survey, 47% of participants agreed about "The environment in this organization supports a balance between work and personal life". Nonetheless, during the interviews, there were addressed situations of overwork and stress, experienced by employees, who usually work after hours, sometimes during weekends or holidays, affecting their well-being and the work-life balance.

When participants were asked if they had ever considered looking for a new professional challenge outside, some of them admitted it, referring the intense workload as one of the main motivators: "*Many of us do not enjoy what exists outside, because we work many hours. I was worried about things that other people did not worry here, I was taking home these worries, I was giving too much of me and I was not enjoying the work-life balance. (...) I was in an enormous tiredness peak. I was almost reaching a situation of burnout, I was on my limit. There were days that it was hard to me to come to work, I was so tired I did not want to come. (..) At that moment, I was considering leaving the organization*" (P11). Participant 12 also expressed the difficulty in managing her personal and professional life: "*There are moments that are really complicated, I have abdicated from my personal life. Even now, I was working on 2 holidays and this is something that completely displeases me. I do not mind working, I work, but if there is something that I appreciate are my friends and my family, I really like to spend my time with them*".

4.2. Social Value

4.2.1. Work Environment

a) <u>Workplace Climate</u>

Analysis of the findings revealed that participants consider the work environment as familiar and warming, being one of the most attractive attributes of the company. This is a result of the interpersonal relationships lived inside the company, characterized by *"camaraderie spirit"* and *"mutual support"* (P4). In fact, 93% of the respondents of the organizational climate and satisfaction survey expressed satisfaction with teamwork, being one of the strengths of the company. Participant 3 supported this, sharing that *"what I like the*

most here are the people, they are the greatest added value, in a personal and professional level".

However, the organizational climate survey expressed a contradictory perception, since 52% of the participants expressed dissatisfaction regarding the work environment, when invited to express their level of satisfaction, regarding many aspects. It is also important to highlight that when they were asked to compare the current situation with the company' situation one year before, 22% consider it is deteriorating.

Regarding these results, the researcher attempted to explore this situation, during the interviews. When questioned if there was anything they would like to bring from their previous job, some participants mentioned the work environment, since due to the high demands and workload they are exposed to, the workplace is becoming more serious and less relaxing. Participant 11 shared: *"Currently, the environment is a little bit different, these changes and small groups that a person get used to are also contributing to it. In some aspects, it is different for better, in others for worse because we are all with so much work that is hard to stop for a while to laugh, to relaxing moments. And I think sometimes we are more serious".* Other participant expressed a similar opinion, referring the more individualistic and superficial relationships between work groups: *"Since I came the company, the environment is getting worse. There were always groups of people, but not so notorious as now. We were more like a group, now there are small groups, there is a little more discrepancy among people and it also created these small groups"* (P10).

Questions as the onboarding process were also explored, with interviewees who have recently joined the organization being invited to share how was their initial adaptation to the new work environment. Few of them mentioned a good integration and welcoming by their colleagues, who demonstrated availability to support and share knowledge with them.

One the other hand, some participants expressed a more challenging onboarding process, because their colleagues did not express curiosity to welcome and support them, making more difficult their integration. According to Participant 7: *"Initially I was expecting a less formal company, and I felt the onboarding was not so easy, in contrast with other companies where I was before. As people already live in their groups, they do not feel that need of welcoming new employees, and it was more complicated to me. (…) here some people I was talking to were a kind of personal achievement. Here I felt it took a little harder, that informality was not so informal after all".*

b) Membership and Sense of Belonging

When asked about what they found in Company X that did not exist in their previous job experience, the main differences were related with the sense of belonging: *"in the other company I was a number in thousands, and here I am seen as a person"* (P2), and *"people are no numbers, they are recognized by their names"* (P14).

According to some testimonies from interviewees, in spite of the familiar environment lived inside Company X, some employees do not feel as part of the company, as expressed by Participant 7: "*Where I came from, we had several floors, but the regular meetings made us feel as a single company, feeling it as ours. Here sometimes I feel as part of a department, instead of part of a company"*. In fact, when asked about what they would like to bring from their previous job, some participants mentioned the warm and friendly environment from their previous companies.

In the exit questionnaires and interviews, participants had the opportunity of pointed out some suggestions to improve the company. Some of them mentioned the absence of team-buildings, team events or other kind of work-life balance initiatives, since they are considered as crucial to mitigate situations of stress and create a balance between personal and professional life. As supported by Participant 11 in her suggestions: *"At the beginning, it has hard to me because there were not so much events where we were all together"*. Participant 6 also added: "*I feel sometimes we have a work environment very individualistic and it does not need to be like that, and teambuilding events can make all the difference"*.

c) The Contagion and the Word of Mouth Effect

High turnover rates, with the exit of close colleagues, are also creating a wave of dissatisfaction and an insecurity climate. This situation was addressed during the interviews, when employees were invited to share if they had already considering to look for a new professional challenge: *"It is not easy you to feel people are leaving, here we already reached the limit of two employees leaving the company in the same day, and it is complicated to the ones who stay. You start reconsidering all a different scenario. (...) I realised that people when are unsatisfied create a wave of dissatisfaction around them, what motivates other people to be unsatisfied. What I mean is: sometimes when we enhance the bad things around us, it makes other people become uncomfortable and they want to leave"* (P12).

These kind of situations have a strong impact on employees, as observed in the testimonies of some participants. The researcher asked if they remembered any less enjoyable

56

situation they had experienced there and Participant 8 shared: "*The moments I remember with less happiness are the ones when some people of the team were leaving. When we have people from our team, people closer to us, we always have tendency to balance it with the heart, and two elements of a team undermine it a little bit and it is inevitable to feel things in that way*". Other participant described as well the exit of a colleague: "*I think this person was like a pillar here and her leave undermined other employees. I think it was the most remarkable moment, because this person besides being an excellent professional, she had a human dimension*" (P4). As mentioned by Participant 10 "*this world is really small, so everything can be easily spread*". During interviews, when participants were asked about less enjoyable situations experienced at Company X, some of them revealed to usually share externally these working experiences: "*There were situations experienced by friends of mine and colleagues and they were sharing them with me. Some of these sharing moments are a little bit bad because we are darkening the idea we have about the company*" (P11). This same participant shared her first experience of 'word for mouth' effect, before being an employee of Company X: "*I speak with many people and even before I start working here, they said me to not do this. They had in their mind the image of workload and underpay. I had a person who worked here, who said me: 'Apply to any place, less to here'*"

4.2.2. Relationship with Superiors

a) <u>Contact with Superiors</u>

The majority of respondents from the organizational survey expressed a positive relationship with their superiors, with 64% of them expressing satisfaction with their superiors. Their relation is described as respectful in two-way, since more than 90% of them show respect for their leaders, also defending they are treated with respect by them.

During the interviews, these statements were supported by interviewees expressing a "*sharing*" and "*friendly*" (P11) relationship with their superiors, characterised by an "*informal and easy*" (P14) contact between both parties.

When the researcher was asking participants about what they found in Company X that did not exist in their previous job, some of them mentioned a difficult contact with their superiors. For example, Participant 11 expressed: "*The company where I was before had not such a huge hierarchy, so vertical. There we could speak more closely to people from management, they had a better understanding about how employees were and how the operational team was. (...) Here, in the most superior levels, it seems there is a little*

mismatch, between what we think here in the operational side and what the upper level thinks".

This remarkable vertical hierarchy, characterized by distance and less involvement between superiors and subordinates, could explain why only 34% of the survey respondents agreed about "Our Top Management is genuinely interested in employees' opinions and ideas". However, when asked if "My boss listens what I am saying", 86% agreed with this statement.

Regarding the interviews, participants were invited to share some suggestions to improve the overall organization. Participant 14 referred the importance of communication by the Top Management: *"I think it is really important an internal communication from administration to down, to people know quite well and face-to-face and if we already have administrators it is necessary a more frequent and more direct communication. It costs nothing, and they are a nice presence, they can say what is happening, what they are thinking, and this gives security for who is working. On the other hand, it also enables us to do our best for the company, if everybody knows where we are going".*

When the researcher asked interviewees to share less enjoyable situations experienced inside the organization, there were revealed some situations of incompatibility, and disrespectful and conflicting treatment by superiors with subordinates. Participant 3 shared a situation experienced by himself: *"I had a boss that sometimes is really disagreeable. I do not think this is the profile that fits in this company and I think he is the major problem I found here. I see this situation in general, and it is more harmful to other people, many of them had already left because of him. He is the responsible for many leaves, not in the business, but in the support areas. At the beginning when I was here, they are very stable. And then, many people left and in my opinion it was caused by this incompatibility".*

Other participant mentioned: *"It was a situation where I saw a person screaming with other. I have no idea about what, but seeing a person hierarchically superior screaming with other person at the front door of the company. I think a person is not coming to work to have someone screaming with her. It was certainly the most disagreeable situation I have ever assisted"* (P14).

Regarding all these situations described, a climate of leadership by fear was identified as well: *"The fact is you see situations like these and you think 'When is this going to happen to me?'. This is a factor, a factor that people should care about, mainly who is leading, mainly who is managing teams, they should realize the messages that are being sent, not only to the concerned person, but mainly to people around and the image that will be reflected"*

(P5). The organizational climate survey gave some insights that could support these findings, since 26% of respondents disagreed about "Everybody is treated fairly in this organization".

b) <u>Leadership Behaviours</u>

One of the issues addressed on the organizational survey was about leadership behaviours, where 76% of respondents agree that "Our Top Management demonstrated strong leadership skills". On the other hand, respondents demonstrated some dissatisfaction about leadership practices, with only 25% of participants agreeing on "My boss is always consistent when administering policies concerning employees".

During face-to-face interviews, there was noticed an absence of proper knowledge and training in people management field, among the Line Management team. When the researcher invited interviews to bring their suggestions to improve the company in general, Participant 6 referred: *"I think it is missing the Line Management function, I feel we have these kind of employees but they are not performing this function. (…) They are really good people in the technical field, but in the people management field it is missing this knowledge from them"*. Other participant also provided an interesting input about this topic: *"We do not have good leaders. People think as they are good professionals working in the area for many years, this makes them leaders, and this is not true. We need people who know how to manage people and leading by example, and we do not have it"* (P9).

4.3.   Economic Value

4.3.1. Remuneration

In the organizational climate and satisfaction survey, respondents were asked to evaluate their level of satisfaction, regarding several items. One of them, the salary package was negatively rated by 53% of the respondents, who showed their dissatisfaction towards it.

During interviews, the researcher inquired respondents about the main factors they consider responsible for the recent turnover undermining Company X. Their answers were nearly unanimous, since almost all participants mentioned the low competitive wages offered by the company as one of its most unattractive attributes, and consequently one of the major motivators why employees leave the company. In fact, analysis of exit questionnaires supported this, revealing that 60% of the employees who left the company, their leave was due to remuneration issues.

Regarding the interviews with Recruitment and Selection companies, the wages offered by Company X are far below from the ones offered by competitors. As argued by Participant 8, *"there are more solid structures than ours, for example multinational companies, I think it is inevitable these companies could offer better conditions to employees. Regarding people who left the company and places they were gone, they did not change the area or anything. So, the reason they left is not because they did not like what they were doing, but I think it is undoubtedly by pay issues"*.

Interviewees also mentioned their rewards do not express recognition or fairness towards the work performed, namely about extra hours, excessive workload, and positions performed: *"Supposedly when you work hard (that happens here most of the time), it is because you have a compensation. Here you work hard, even Saturdays and Sundays, and the compensation is zero, so people go away"* (P9). The same participant admitted that she had already considered looking for new job opportunities outside and the salary package was the main motivator: *"The part that most bothers me are financial conditions. You have to pay bills, you do everything right, you spend the most part of the day here and in the end you have to count your money, even for basic stuff in your daily routine. And that is the reason why sometimes you start looking for what the market is offering"*.

Interviews conducted also revealed some unpleasant situations observed by participants, as wage inequalities inside the organization, with different wages within the same position. Participant 11 shared: *"It happened to a colleague of mine, when she was talking with a person who had been admitted in the company recently, in a lower level than her, and my colleague find out this person was earning more than her. It reached this limit, and these situations left me sad about the company. (…)"*.

4.4. Development Value

4.4.1. Work Recognition

From the employees' side, it was evident they feel how important is the work they perform and how it influences the society. 92% of the respondents of the climate survey agreed on "I understand how my work directly contributes to the overall success of the organization". When asked if they feel recognised about their work achievements, 58% have a positive agreement from "The organization values my work and the professional contribution I make".

From the employer's side, some respondents expressed their efforts and contributions are usually appreciated and recognised by the company, through the attribution of more challenging projects: *"I feel I am having the opportunity to do a lot of things. I think this is the own company policy to invest in its own human assets, they increasingly pretend to stay with people who work here and make them happy, giving them challenging things"* (P11). Despite that, the researcher captured some disagreeable situations experienced by some employees, revealing a slight work recognition. As highlighted by Participant 10: *"Sometimes not everyone sees his work being recognised. I cannot complain about it, because I am very expressive. I think people who are not so much expressive here, they do not see their work being recognised, and they work the same. And it is hard to me observing many people working hard, and, not being recognised".*

Participant 7 consider the lack of recognition among employees as one of the main motivators of high turnover rates of the company. She expressed some insights about the importance of recognition among employees: *"There are people if they feel this recognition by the company, they will stay in the company, because they like and they feed good and motivated. But there is also the opposite, people who complained about the recognition, in other words the expectation of being recognised, of progressing in their career. This did not happen and it came the time they decided 'I am not being recognised here, maybe it is time to leave'".*

Other interesting point highlighted by interviewees is that work recognition is not equal for every employee. As identified by Participant 11, there is more evident the absence of work recognition among senior employees: *"We noticed that new people who joined the company recently are better treated than us, who are in the organization for longer. (...) To us this is a kind of a feeling 'Let's take care of them, to not make them run away'. Then, they [Company X] do not think about us who are here for long, they do not make anything for us (...) And sometimes it seems they forget who stayed here 'holding the boat', because in these tumultuous periods, when there is a huge turnover, someone needs to hold the company. And moreover, in these last years, with so much offer, if a person stays here is because she really likes to do her best for the company as if it was hers. And sometimes I think they do not remember about people who are here, this is the feeling I have and this made me less pleased about the company".*

Other interviewee expressed a situation of lack of recognition that happened to her, revealing an unequal treatment from the company, namely in contractual issues*: "There was a situation that was a source of discontent to me during some time: I have been here for several*

years and I have just got recently a permanent contract. Why? One of the things that shocked me was realizing that people, who were here for a shorter period, got a permanent contract more quickly than me. (...) If they want to stay with me, if they want me to continue here, why did not they give me a permanent contract earlier?" (P11).

4.4.2. Career Development and Progression

a) <u>Career Growth</u>

According to the interviewee from Recruitment and Selection Company 1, due to its size, Company X provides a more flexible and faster career progression, comparing to the larger companies in the market. In these companies, career progression takes more time, since a more larger number of employees corresponds to less opportunities of career growth. Participant 11 expressed the same belief: *"As we are a small company, I notice perhaps I had more opportunities of growing and show my valences rather than in a large company"*.

The organizational climate survey showed that 54% of respondents expressed a positive agreement about "I have adequate opportunities for professional growth in this organization". Interviewees supported this statement, referring that the challenges and opportunities offered by the company are retaining them, despite the several external job proposals being received: *"I was already planning to leave Company X to a new challenge, but I decided to not leave because they proposed me a new challenge and it stimulated me"* (P14) and *"There are not met yet all the conditions to leave. They gave me these opportunities, even without I asked for it. They allow me this change, this flexibility, and this made me stay here until now and not looking outside"* (P10). Additionally, the company is often recognised as the school of the industry, by offering to young and unexperienced employees the opportunity of starting their careers and gain experience: *"If they did not give me this opportunity, hardly I would be here"* (P9), *"Company X opened a door in my life"* (P12).

On the other hand, analysis of exit questionnaires revealed that 87% of the employees left the company motivated by a better career opportunity. During the interviews, the researcher explored this contradictory situation, founding situations of lack of transparency and a limited access to career development opportunities inside the organisation. Some interviewees expressed dissatisfaction and demotivation about the stagnation in their career progression: *"There are people who are here for years and they do not have more where to progress"* (P3).

Participants also mentioned the importance of having a well-defined and clear career plan, aligned with their career aspirations: *"There is necessary a more robust plan to each employee on a long-term and this is never discussed. Nowadays, we plan our lives based on what we do in our job and we want to be well succeed, so we need to know what is expected from us, what is planned from us"* (P6) and "*It is not clear to me which items I have to check to progress in my career"*(P12)

During the interview, participants were invited to share less enjoyable situations experienced by them in the organization. Most of the situations were related with inequalities in career policies, as the following: *"When I was hired, they [Company X] communicated me the only way to enter to my position here was through an internship. And then, I realised there were colleagues of mine being hired to the same position as me, but through an employment contract. This was the situation that affected me the most at the company, contributing to my dissatisfaction"* (P13). Participant 9 shared the same point of view: *"Some employees transit to higher positions, for example assistant positions to associate ones, and I do not understand why, because I cannot see any experience on them"*. This topic was addressed in the organizational survey through the sentence "The organization's policies for promotion and career development are always fair", where 40% of the respondents expressed a negative disagreement.

Participant 9 also expressed an unpleasant situation experience, where a colleague was downgraded: *"The last situation, very recent, was taking out the colleague from the reception and placing there other one, with a higher position, I think this cannot be done, it is unthinkable. This is the same they [Company X] turn to me, saying now I need to go to the reception. If you are hired to a certain function, it is not in the middle of the game they will change you, without giving you even an option. It is almost like an ultimatum, and I cannot agree with these kind of situations"* (P9). These testimonies can explain why only 34% of the employees assessed neutrally the internal justice, when asked to evaluate their level of satisfaction about it in the climate survey.

b) <u>Managing Expectations and Priorities</u>

The researcher invited participants to share if the turnover affecting the company had any impact on them, namely when reflecting about their career and considering new job opportunities outside. Participant 9 expressed an increasingly attention towards the market and new professional opportunities: *"It is interesting because I did not have this alert, and when this turnover appeared, I became more aware as 'If there are many people leaving, the*

market is moving, so there is a large offer'. That was when I started searching, looking for". Participant 8 expressed the same belief: *"This is a very dynamic market, and I think it is usual people to be aware and see the opportunities outside. If you ask me if I am aware, I will say yes. Nowadays, I think it is all part, even to be good professionals and feel good at our company, it is important to know what is going on".*

According with some informants, the market offers a wide range of job opportunities, increasingly boosted by passive job search from the employees, networking, and head-hunters. As argued by Participant 11: *"(...) It is funny how this sector is, because usually you are not looking for anything, but they find you. There is an enormous number of head-hunters, emails and LinkedIn messages about open vacancies. Sometimes you do not want to know about it, but they start talking to you, painting a scenario. (...) And there is no way to escape from some vacancies, they fall on your lap, you do not have to search for them. In this area, it happens a lot, sometimes you are not looking for anything but they come seeking for you".*

Expectations from Younger Employees

During interviews, the researcher collected insights about what motivates employees to leave the company, mainly younger employees. Participant 8 shared: *"I think nowadays, at our age, there is not that belief about a lifetime employment, going to work for a place and staying there all life, there is no longer this idea.(...) So, I guess it is usual nowadays, no one thinks in staying there forever".* Other participant shared the same point of view: *"Here, we have many first jobs and I think there are people who also need to see how is the world outside. I think this is also one of the factors why people leave"* (P11).

Company X is recognised as a school, due to the strong investment on the employees' development and skills. This recognition calls the attention of other competitors in the market, considering this company as a desirable place to look for new talents. Therefore, some employees see the company as an opportunity of acquiring experience, and then using it as a launch pad to join larger and multi-national companies in the future. Two participants shared their situations: *"When I started working here, honestly I was not expecting to stay here for a long time. It was supposed to be just until I found other job (...)candidates here gain experience and become valuable outside, easily finding alternatives"* (P3) and *"I am doing an investment in a professional level, because my salary does not compensate this, regarding the qualifications that I have. I know I can get jobs with higher wages, but we have to start somewhere"* (P13).

In fact, 41% of the organizational survey's respondents expressed disagreement about "We [Company X] work to attract, develop and retain people with significant technical background".

Expectations from Senior Employees

During the interviews, the researcher intended to find out the perceptions of the participants about the turnover faced in the company. They expressed this turnover is not only affecting junior employees, but also the most senior employees, mainly the ones who occupy leading positions, as defended by Participant 5: *"The turnover at Company X is not something new, but it is new in management levels. The huge turnover I notice now is mainly in leading positions, usually these people are the oldest ones at the company and I feel sorry to lose them".*

This situation was also mentioned by other participant: *"I have seen many people leaving and they had already been working here for many years and obviously this worries me a little bit. A person who is here for so many years, who was almost born with the company, why he leaves?"* (P4).

Regarding the main reasons that motivate these senior employees to leave the company, interviewed employees pointed out the career stagnation and need for change. Participant 5 shared: *"I think, after so many years at Company X, all these people need new challenges, even in a professional and personal level, it comes a time you think about it. And then, I believe there are other situations of dissatisfaction about absence of career progression, stagnation and similar issues"*. Other participant expressed a similar point of view: *"People want to live other realities, because despite everything Company X is an almost familiar or small company, and sometimes people reach the top of a hierarchical level here and maybe in other company they are able to have a broader vision and to access to other reality, even in the same hierarchical level"* (P14).

Expectations from Potential Candidates

Interviews with Recruitment and Selection companies provided interesting insights about what are the professional expectations of potential candidates, namely when looking for a new job challenge.

As shared by the interviewee from Recruitment and Selection company 2, in this market niche the control and the decision power is on candidates' side, since the job supply is

higher than the job demand. Therefore, candidates with more experience and with a consolidated career feel they have the power about their future on their hands, since they have job at any moment. In fact, these candidates are easily approached by other companies, being usually in different recruitment processes at the same time and also receiving counterproposals from their current companies, in order to retain them.

During interviews, interviewees from Recruitment and Selection companies shared that Company X is not being successful in attracting new talent. When questioned about the main reasons why candidates refuse job proposals, both interviewees expressed the company cannot cover the salary expectations and conditions imposed by candidates to join the organization. According to the interviewee from Recruitment and Selection company 2, more senior candidates have a less favourable image about the company, comparing to the junior ones, regarding the less competitive salary package, in addition to small career prospects. In fact, for candidates who have a solid career, most of them already working in multinational companies for many years, receiving a proposal from Company X is considered as a step back on their career, even if the conditions are similar to their current situation.

4.5. Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework is organized by 4 major categories, divided by 7 subcategories, which one with several variables. This framework represents a summarized list of all the points previously pointed out, divided by attractive and unattractive organizational attributes.

The attractive attributes represent the positive perceptions that participants have about the company, being considered as the reasons why current employees stay in Company X, and consequently predictors of Employee Retention. On the other hand, the unattractive attributes are associated with the unfavorable perceptions that participants have about company, acting as the motivators why ex-employees left the company and the current ones can be considering to leave.

ATTRACTIVE ATTRIBUTES	UNATTRACTIVE ATTRIBUTES
INTEREST VALUE	
Organizational Image and Values	
- Renowned, stable and trustworthy company - Good quality of service provided to clients - Reference in the market - International growth - High skilled, hardworking and committed workforce	- Serious and formal position - Misalignment between internal and external image - Unfavorable reputation in the market - Lack of information about organizational performance - Absence of a transparent and on-time internal communication
Work Content	
- Challenging and diverse projects - Impact and significance to the society - Autonomy and flexibility - Job satisfaction and commitment - Security and stability	- Excessive workload - Absence of work-life balance - Limited human resources and time to support new employees - Instability in projects delivered to clients - Job demotivation and stagnation
SOCIAL VALUE	
Work Environment	
- Familiar and warming environment - Good interpersonal relationships - Teamwork and camaraderie spirit - Sense of belonging	- Less relaxing and more serious work environment - Wave of dissatisfaction and 'contagion effect'
Relationship with Superiors	
- Sharing, friendly and respectful relationship - Informal and close contact	- Difficult, conflicting and incompatible relationship between superior-subordinate - Absence of leadership and people management skills
ECONOMIC VALUE	
Remuneration	
	- Low and unattractive salary package - More competitive and attractive remunerations in the market
DEVELOPMENT VALUE	
Work Recognition	

- Attribution of challenging opportunities	- Lack of recognition towards efforts and commitment
Career Development and Progression	
- Opportunity to start a career and gain experience - School of the industry - Strong focus on learning and growth - More flexible and easier career progression	- Dissatisfaction and demotivation about stagnation in career progression - Need for change and new professional challenges - Several and attractive career opportunities in the market

Table 3 - Organizational Attributes' Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by the author, based on Organizational Attributes' Tree Diagram and data

analysis process

<h1 style="text-align:center">V - DISCUSSION</h1>

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the findings obtained in the previous chapter, exploring in-depth the relationship between Employer Branding, Employee Retention and Voluntary Employee Turnover.

Thereafter, this discussion will be supported with the researcher responding to the following research questions, previously raised in the introduction:

How do individual employment experiences influence the weakening of the Employer Brand?

The relationship between employee and employer is mediated through the Employer Value Proposition, where the purpose of the employer is offering a unique and attractive employment experience, through a set of benefits offered to employees.

When organizational attributes are not aligned with employees' needs and expectations, individual employment experiences are affected, as well as the Employer Attractiveness and Employee Retention, consequently weakening the Employer Brand of the organization (Cable and Judge, 1996).

The 5-Factor Model of Employer Attractiveness (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). highlighted the main dimensions that contribute to employer attractiveness among current and potential employees. Based on this and supported by study findings, the researcher developed an Organizational Attributes' Conceptual Framework, where there were highlight the main dimensions that contribute to retain current employees and also the ones that motivate them to leave.

<u>Interest Value</u>

Findings express a contradictory perspective about the organizational image of Company X. Results from the organizational climate and satisfaction survey highlight an overall satisfaction towards the external image of the company. In interviews, the results are conflicting, since the researcher explored not only the external image, as well as the internal image of the company.

Thereby, there are interviewees expressing a positive perception about the external image, highlighting the efforts of the company to expand internationally and to provide a quality service to clients. For this group of participants, the company transmits an image of stability and trust, being a reference in the market. On the other hand, there are participants

expressing a less positive perception about organizational image, since the company focuses its efforts on the external side, transmitting a formal, serious and polished image, not aligned with the real image of the company. This conservative approach is defended by Recruitment and Selection companies as a characteristic of national companies, and not only an exclusive characteristic of Company X.

Interestingly, the most positive perceptions about Company X are from employees who are in the company for more years. Senior respondents, as Participant 2 and 14 have a better image of the organization, comparing to junior ones, as Participant 6, 7 and 10, who expressed some discontentment. This negligence about the internal image is creating unrealistic and wrong perceptions, as well as disappointment, since the initial expectations were not fulfilled, mainly for respondents who are in the company for less than one year, as Participant 13: "*If someone had informed me about some problems in this company, I would not accept to work here, maybe I would try other companies*".

Insights from interviews with Recruitment and Selection companies can explain this generational difference, since the image of the company became weakened some years ago, due to a massive leave of employees. Since this event, the company was forced to rebuilt itself, affecting its reputation and image in the market. Employees with a higher seniority knew the company since its 'golden period', and their several years of work represent commitment and a sense of membership towards the organization, even in the less favourable moments. The most part of the employees with a lower tenure did not meet the company when it was a reference in the market, so their perceptions about the company were already weakened.

Regarding the internal communication, findings from the climate survey expressed that respondents are satisfied with the general information provided by the company, however they would like to be more aware about specific topics as economical and financial situation, not often disclosed by the company. In interviews, results were consistent, since it was possible to address that communication is not clear and on-time, with participants expressing dissatisfaction for not being informed and evolved in important moments of the organization, as the leaves of employees. Some authors as Wallace, Lings, Cameron and Sheldon (2014) and Walker (2001) supported in their research that a good and strong communication is one of the most important factors to enhance the retention among current employees.

Additionally, from interviews and from climate survey, there was observed that the majority of the respondents consider that their work is stimulating and challenging, with a high impact and significance for the society, explaining why the most part of participants are

committed to work and are willing to stay in Company X in a medium-long term perspective. A deeper analysis demonstrates these results derive mostly from employees who are in the company for longer periods, as Participant 2 (16 years), Participant 5 (5 years) and Participant 14 (7 years). This is supported by Das and Baruah (2013) and Lievens (2007), who defended that factors such as performing a challenging and engaging work, and task demands and diversity are considered as predictors of employer attractiveness, enhancing the retention among current employees.

However, there were some testimonies revealing some demotivation, stagnation and lack of recognition about the work performed. The major complaints came from employees who are in the company for one year or less, what expressed that junior employees have a higher need for new challenges and evolution, feeling more stagnated faster than employees with a longer tenure. This situation is reinforced by Participant 3 and 4, who are in the company for 8 and 4 years, respectively, revealing that in spite of not appreciating their jobs, they preferred to stay in the company in a stable and secure position, instead of looking for a new challenge.   Findings regarding the workload dimension were consistent, since in the different sources, participants expressed dissatisfaction about the excessive working hours, that are compromising their personal life. Analysis of exit questionnaires and interviews exposed that the main dissatisfaction derives from female population, as Participant 7, 9, 10 and 13, being all married and some of them with children.

Research from Hyman and Summers (2004, as cited in Das and Baruah, 2013) identified the importance of work-life balance, emphasizing that when the professional life interfere with the personal sphere (e.g. working after hours or during the weekend), it can create a unhealthy balance between professional and personal life, increasing the levels of stress and emotional exhaustion of the employees. Insights from Participant 11 supported this statement, since her exposition to an intensive workload produced *"an enormous tiredness peak"*, almost reaching a situation of *"burnout"* and consequently contributing to her intention to leave the company. This is supported by Rampl (2014), who defended the concern of the company towards its employees, through initiatives as investment on work-family policies and a flexible work schedule is one of the attributes that more enhances employee's retention.

<u>Social Value</u>

Analysis of the findings expose an overall positive and familiar work environment, that can be considered as one of the main motivators why employees stay in Company X. For example, Participant 3 previously expressed dissatisfaction about his job, since in spite of being in the company for more than 8 years, he would prefer to be working in his field of academic education. However, he considered his colleagues as *"the greatest added value"* and what motivates him to stay in the company.

In fact, senior employees, as Participant 3, 2, 4 and 14, were the ones who more value the social dimension and have a more positive perception about it, also expressing a sense of belonging towards the organization. Their seniority lead them to create strong interpersonal relations, motivating them to stay in the company. This is supported by Wallace *et al.* (2014: 31), who defended that factors such as a "fun, positive and vibrant work environment", as well as an invitational atmosphere are considered as attributes of attractive employers, contributing to improve the Employee Retention.

Nonetheless, there were referred some less pleasant events, with some participants highlighting a work environment becoming more serious and individualist. Interestingly, these insights emerge from participants with a lower tenure, as Participants 6, 7 and 10. The researcher believes the weakened work environment is not apparently being originated by a sense of individualism or lack of concerning by colleagues, but as a consequence of the Voluntary Employee Turnover. Due to intense work demands and limited human resources, employees are having less time to disconnect from their work and have some relaxing and team moments with colleagues.

For example, teamwork was considered as one of the strengths of the company, being positively evaluated by the majority of employees. In a contradictory way, participants expressed lack of support among colleagues, since they do not feel as part of a group or a team in the company and consequently their attachment to the company is decreasing seriously. This statement is supported by Maslow's Pyramid (1943), where affiliation represents one of the human needs, being related with the capacity of building social relationships and the importance of the sense of belonging and membership. Employees who feel their individual needs are recognized and fulfilled, feeling they are welcome and belong to the organization, this will encourage their commitment, creating a healthy work environment (Miller, Erickson and Yust, 2001, as cited in Das and Baruah, 2013).

Additionally, the exit of colleagues is having a serious impact on the workplace climate, mainly for senior employees (P2, P4, P11 and P12) who shared more frequently these situations. This is creating a wave of dissatisfaction and also contributing to a more serious work climate, since some of the pillars of the company are leaving, what is a loss for the company in terms of interpersonal relations and know-how. Then, these leaves also creating a contagion effect and a more instable climate, as employees who stay start reflecting about their permanence at Company X, considering new opportunities: "*What am I doing to my life? Is here I want to stay? Why am I here if there are more opportunities outside?*" (P12). As supported by Das and Baruah (2013), these situations have a negative influence on employee performance and commitment, consequently affecting Employee Retention towards the organization, since "employees are more likely to stay when there is a predictable work environment and vice versa (…) instable organization have a high degree of Employee Turnover" (p.13).

The findings also supported the Social Capital approach introduced by Bourdieu (1986), emphasizing the importance of acquiring a professional network, namely for junior employees, who use the organization as launch pad to increase their professional network and to explore new opportunities outside. Evidences from interviews with employees and Recruitment and Selection companies demonstrate the most part of the employees leaving the company continue in the same area, embracing opportunities in companies where they already have some connections and relationships, so they are making use of their Social Capital. In fact, in a small market as the Health and Life Sciences sector, networking and word of mouth appear to be successful and effective tools to explore new opportunities outside.

Returning to the less pleasant events concerning the work environment, there were described some one-off situations of improper treatment, and difficult and incompatible relationships. In a deeper analysis, the researcher found these situations were related not with relationships among colleagues but with superiors, as shared by Participant 14, who shared a situation of a *"person hierarquically superior screaming with other person"*. Other different participants described *"incompatibility"* (P3), "*difficult personality*" and *"bad temper"* (P2) as characteristics of their leaders.

There is some inconsistency and contradiction in the findings, since there are participants expressing satisfaction, a *"friendly"* relationship (P11) and *"easy"* (P14) contact with their leaders, and on the other hand, there are ones expressing a difficult contact with them, mentioning situations of lack of respect and improper treatment, responsible for Voluntary Employee Turnover events. From the researcher perspective, and after an in-depth

analysis of climate survey results and interviews, it is important to separate superiors in two groups: the immediate ones and the Top Management leaders. The positive perceptions obtained are related with immediate superiors, who in spite of the noticed absence of leadership and people management skills, they are considered as *"good professionals"* (P9) and *"really good on technical field"* (P6). The negative perceptions are all related with Top Management leaders, due to its distance, disrespectful treatment and absence of leadership effectiveness. As referred by Participant 3, there were leaves caused by them, what can be supported by Barrow and Mosley, 2005, who defended that leadership quality is responsible for enhancing the employee satisfaction and commitment, contributing to retain employees.

Economic Value

This was one of the most mentioned dimension, with almost all interview participants expressing dissatisfaction about the low and unattractive salary package offered by the company. According to them, the financial conditions are the main reason why employees left the company, since the most part of their ex-colleagues continue working in the same area.

However, the researcher found that the economic dimension has a different impact in generational groups, representing more dissatisfaction among junior employees. In fact, Participant 1, 9 and 13 were the ones who more actively expressed dissatisfaction and discomfort about the low wages offered by Company X. Interestingly, the 3 employees are performing the same position, that is the entry level position of Company X. Participant 9 and 13 were more expressive than Participant 1 about the salary dimension and it could be explained by their marital situations, since both are married and planning to increase their families.

Participant 11 is in the company for 5 years, and in spite of being currently in a stable position, she revealed a similar situation to the previous participants. When she started the company she was 23 and her salary was almost half of the earned by their friends in other similar companies, situation that lasted during two years. She admitted this situation was uncomfortable to her, and she had already planned to leave the company, since she wanted to live alone but her salary did not allow her to do it.

In fact, rewards are one of the most effective Employee Retention drivers, mainly the monetary ones (Milkovitch and Newman, 2004, as cited in Das and Baruah, 2013). Research from Rousseau (1989: 127) identified that "an individual paid less than market rates might feel inequitably treated". So, the uncompetitive salary package offered by the company is

regarded as a lack of recognition and appreciation towards employees, encouraging them to look for new opportunities outside Trevor *et al.* (1997, as cited in Das and Baruah, 2013).

Additionally, the salary package is also influencing negatively the image of the company as an employer, being recognised in the market as an underpaid and unattractive company. As defended by Franca and Pahor (2012: 104),"the better pays the company, the better is it known".

Employees with a higher seniority also mentioned the economic dimension, but as a kind of solidarity for their colleagues who received lower wages. Their seniority provides security in the company, namely in an economic dimension, being reflected in more attractive wages comparing to the junior employees. For example, Participant 3, who is in the company for 8 years, argued that *"for me the well-being and satisfaction I have in my work is the most valuable, I would not change it for a better salary"*. An overall analysis of the findings from exit questionnaires revealed that remuneration issues were not the exclusive motivator why senior employees left, they were just one of the several elements weighting in their decisions.

Development Value

From the findings in this dimension, it was possible to realize that generational differences have a strong impact in career development perspectives, since there are slight differences between the expectations, preferences and priorities that younger employees have, comparing to employees who have a longer tenure.

According to Fisher and Fraser's research (2010, as cited in Ito *et al.*, 2013: 733), "contract is dynamic as employee preference may change from recruitment through career and life stages". Each employee value differently the attributes offered by the organization, according to "different life/career stages they will have different motivations and may value the various aspects of employment differently" (Wallace *et al.*, 2014: 26).

Insights from interviews demonstrate that employees with a longer tenure are more concerned about work recognition. However, they are the ones who mostly feel the company is not recognising their efforts and commitment, mainly in more tumultuous periods, as the turnover situation the company is facing. According to Participant 11, the focus of the company is on junior employees, since there is a belief that if they are satisfied, they will not pretend to leave the company.

From a career growth perspective, the generational differences are also evident. Senior employees, as Participant 5, 11 and 14, expressed a higher satisfaction about the career opportunities the company has provided to them, being one of the main motivators of their

permanence in the company. Despite these results, the researcher found that 40% of employees leaving the company were there for more than 3 years. As defended by some participants, senior employees with a consolidated and leading position, do not need to look for job opportunities outside, since in a dynamic market as this, they come to them. Therefore, their leaves were mainly motivated by career stagnation and need of change, experiencing new challenges and new realities, mainly in multi-national companies.

Findings evidence that also junior employees demonstrate a considerable need for new challenges and evolution, feeling more stagnated comparing to employees with a longer tenure. This statement is supported by Chhabra and Sharma (2014), who defended that younger generations (Generation Y and Millennials) have priorities and expectations completely different from the Baby Boomers and Generation X. They appreciate meaningful jobs, with flexible working hours, where they can enjoy a work-life balance (Elving *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, they are more interested in a boundary less career, rather than job security, having the opportunity of exploring new opportunities in their career. Therefore, younger generations usually plan to stay for a shorter period in their company, comparing to the earlier generations who seek a lifetime job (Ito *et al.*, 2013).

Company X is considered as a school for young employees, who found there their first job opportunity, using the company as a launch pad to join other companies. Analysis of the exist questionnaires indicates that 23% of the employees leaving the company had less than one year of seniority. This situation is described by Bourdieu in his Cultural Capital approach (1986: 26) "the scope of the educational system tends to increase, and together with this increase is the unification of the market in social qualifications which gives rights to occupy rare positions". This approach can be applied to the situation under analysis, since some employees consider Company X as a form of recognizing their academic qualifications, acquiring experience to reach other opportunities on the labour market. For example, Participant 13 admitted she joined the organization as an *"investment"*, since she was looking for acquiring knowledge, skills and experience, enabling her to find another opportunity.

Final remarks

There were noticed some interesting individual employment experiences, in the different Employer Attractiveness Dimensions, that are influencing the Employer Brand, either in a positive and negative perspective.

Regarding the positive perspective, the Social Value, followed by the Interest and Development Value, are the main responsible for strengthening the image of Company X as an employer. The work environment, teamwork, the challenging and diverse projects with impact to the society, the career opportunities and the feeling of security and stability can be considered as the most attractive employment experiences, contributing to employees' satisfaction and commitment, and being the main reasons why they stay in the company.

On the other hand, there were found some unattractive employment experiences, weakening the Employer Brand of Company X. The most part of them are associated with Economic, Development and Interest Value, as the low and unattractive salary, the lack of recognition, the stagnation and demotivation in career, the need for change, the excessive workload and the absence of work-life balance. In a less expressive way, there were also found employment experiences related with the Social Value, namely the more serious and less relaxing work environment, the contagion effect and the difficult relationship with superiors that are influencing the image of the company towards its workforce.

Regarding these unattractive experiences, there was also possible to observe that different groups of employees value different dimensions, according to their expectations and priorities about life and career. Managerial positions appointed mainly the Developmental Value, through the need of experiencing new challenges and progress on their career, as well as the Interest Value, due to the absence of work-life balance. Non-managerial positions, despite considering the Developmental Value important, the dimension most valued by them is the Economic Value, since they are not satisfied with financial conditions provided by the company. Regarding the three type of benefits introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996), it is possible to conclude employees at Company X are more concerned about economic and functional benefits, rather than psychological ones.

In fact, as defended by Ind (1998), unattractive employment experiences are critical companies, since employees have the power to make or break the brand of their employer. In this specific situation, the incapacity of Company X to satisfy and retain its employees is weakening its employer image and attractiveness not only internally, but also externally, among potential candidates.

What will be the implications of a weakened Employer Brand?

These less positive individual employment experiences are affecting negatively the attractiveness of the company and the strength of its Employer Brand. Participants expressed a misalignment between the Corporate Brand, transmitted externally, and the Employer

Brand, shared internally with employees. The implications of this misalignment can be critical, affecting its corporate and employer reputation, since "significant gaps between the way internal and external stakeholders see the organization have been associated with future crises" (Davies *et al.*, 2004: 126).

When Employer Brand and Corporate Brand are not aligned, sharing the same values and beliefs, they can negatively affect each other, creating unrealistic expectations and wrong perceptions among current and potential employees (Moroko and Uncles, 2008, as cited in Foster *et al.*, 2010). Research from Rousseau (1989) consider it as a breach on their Psychological Contract, since employees felt the promises made during the attraction process were not being respected and fulfilled by the company, as shared by Participant 1: "*I was expecting more from the company in some issues*".

According to the 'Managerial Implications of Employer Brand Success Characteristics Framework' by Moroko and Uncles (2008), Company X presents a weakened and unsuccessful Employer Brand, moving to a scenario of a long-term disconnection. Behind all the described, the Employer Brand of Company X is characterized as unattractive and aspirational, since employees do not feel attracted towards the company and they feel their Psychological Contract is not being fulfilled by the company.

This situation creates an unsustainable and deteriorated relationship between employer and employee, decreasing job satisfaction and affecting the sense of belonging, as well as the commitment of employees towards the company. Insights as the ones provided by Participant 13, expressing dissatisfaction about work content, reveal some attention and concern. As supported by Hytter (2007, in Das and Baruah, 2013), this noticeable low commitment has serious implications, namely on Employee Retention, and consequently on the increase of intentions to leave the company in the near future, affecting Voluntary Employee Turnover rates.

Therefore, testimony from Participant 12 expressed some serious consequences about employee turnover, mainly among employees with more experience and tenure. When these employees leave the company, they are taking all their knowledge with them and according to Das and Baruah (2013: 11) it "is the most expensive asset of any firm". This know-how loss is considerably affecting the capacity of the company to provide a service of quality to clients and ensuring stability on project running, as defended by Participant 12: "*I think for the client, that robustness and security do not exist anymore*". Findings in the literature also supported this, with Abbasi and Hollman (2000) and Holtom *et al.*(2008) highlighting the consequences in organizational performance.

Then, there is other important factor: the Human Capital cost. When these employees leave the company, especially in an early stage, this also represents a high investment in training and development with almost no return, regarding the initial investment made by the company. As supported by Ambler and Barrow (1996: 12), "the costs of recruiting the best people, training and developing them can only be recovered if they stay long enough to make a return on that investment".

Voluntary Employee Turnover has serious implications in the remaining workforce, due to the 'contagion effect'. When an employee leaves the company, he 'leaves the door open', encouraging other employees to reflect about their own situation and consequently do the same. This situation creates serious implications for the company, since the exit of employees is one of the responsible for the current wave of dissatisfaction and deterioration in the working environment of the Company, also potentiating the word of mouth effect.

Furthermore, there are the junior employees who join Company X on a short-time perspective, with the aim of acquiring experience, upgrading their career and consequently leaving the company, mostly to large and multinational companies. The Employer Brand of Company X is not strong enough to retain them, contributing to their lack of commitment towards the organization.

As highlighted, a weakened Employer Brand affects a company not only internally, among current employees, but also externally, among potential applicants. Company X is facing a serious challenge not only retaining the current employees, but also in attracting new talent. Due to an exponential increase in its turnover rates, combined with a weakened Employer Brand, the company is facing some difficulties to replace conveniently and on proper time employees' leaves. As argued by Moroko and Uncles (2008: 172), if an "employer is not seen as attractive, is not considered by potential employees and does not have an employment experience sufficiently robust to retain staff".

In fact, Company X is being left behind by other companies competing in the War for Talent, since they are taking advantage from the company's weakened brand, extracting its talent and undermining its employer competitiveness in the labor market (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

As observed, the consequences of this weakened and damaged Employer Brand are affecting Company X in a wider perspective. This statement is supported by Wallace *et al.* (2014: 34), who defended that "a weak brand image and reputation as an employer can lead to poorer candidates, disengaged and resentful employees, higher turnover and ultimately reduced organizational performance".

VI – CONCLUSION

Despite of the several studies conducted separately in the Voluntary Employee Turnover and Employer Branding fields, literature exploring the relationship between Voluntary Employee Turnover antecedents and Employer Brand is still in a development stage.

The purpose of this dissertation was identifying the main predictors of the considerable Voluntary Employee Turnover experienced by Company X, as well exploring its influence on the weakening of the Employer Branding.

As defended Das and Baruah (2013: 8), "the reasons people stay are not always the same as the reasons people leave". Therefore, during the conduction of the study, the researcher found some interesting insights about the main motivators why employees stay in the company, where the Social Value was considered as the main responsible for employee retention.

Analysis of the findings demonstrate the most relevant dimensions contributing to increase employees' willingness to leave the company are Economic, Development and Interest Value. Within these unattractive employment experiences, there were evidenced some generational differences with Managerial positions expressing more concern about Development and Interest Value. On the other hand, Non-managerial positions are more concerned about the Economic Value.

Therefore, these unattractive employment experiences are weakening the Employer Brand of Company X, creating serious organizational implications. At an overall perspective, this is affecting the employer-employee relationship, due to a misalignment between Corporate and Employer Brand and consequent unfulfillment of expectations agreed in the Psychological Contract between employer and employee. This disengagement is responsible for decreasing employee's levels of satisfaction and commitment, leading to a violation of the Psychological Contract and increase of the Voluntary Employee Turnover.

The consequences of this situation are critical to the company: instability in projects with clients, decrease in organizational performance, know-how loss, no return on the investment in training and development made with employees who left, as well as a 'contagion effect' in the remaining workforce. This also affects the corporate reputation, as well as the employer reputation, since attracting talent becomes harder when the Employer Brand is weakened, hampering the competition with other companies in the War for Talent.

Limitations of the Study

This study presents some limitations, namely regarding the groups of participants and the access to information.

First, there was not possible to directly interview ex-employees, only collecting their feedback through exit interviews previously responded. The researcher believes the possibility of interacting with ex-employees would be an invaluable opportunity to address further questions and corroborating their exit questionnaires.

Second, the researcher could only conduct 14 interviews among current employees. The possibility of interviewing a larger number of employees would certainly provide more confirmability to the results.

Additionally, the analysis of interviews could originate some bias, since data was transcribed and then translated from Portuguese to English. There was no opportunity to doing a follow up of the findings with participants, to insure they agreed about the transcriptions made, giving them space for some revisions.

Then, there were evidenced some contradictions between results from interviews with current employees and the results from organizational climate and satisfaction survey. The researcher believes the different scope and intervenients in both sources lead to these different results. The climate survey was requested and analysed in an upper level what could possibly compromise the transparency and veracity of the results. In the interviews, participants were inquired by an external element of the organization, knowing in advance the academic scope of the interview.

Finally, during process of interviewing Recruitment and Selection companies, just two of four companies contacted accepted to be involved on this study, compromising the richness of the findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study examined how the Voluntary Employee Turnover can influence the weakening of the Employer Branding, in an internal perspective. The researcher suggests further research to explore the implications of Voluntary Employee Turnover in an attraction perspective, examining how retention problems can affect the Employer Brand of the Company, as well as its ability to attract talent.

In order to face some of the limitations previously addressed, the researcher recommends a longitudinal study, through follow up interviews with current employees, to

explore different perceptions. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct interviews with ex-employees and also with superiors, in order to explore Company X in a wider perspective.

Contributions and Suggestions

As defended by Barrow and Mosley (2005: 162), "there is no ideal template for an Employer Brand. An Employer Brand need to be shaped to match the organizational objectives, using all the available types of resources. The organizational climate and satisfaction survey conducted in 2016 at Company X concluded 23% of the respondents expressed a moderate or low commitment, what shows there is room for improvement in the attraction and retention field. Some practices can be adopted to facilitate this process, as suggested in the intervention proposal.

The literature is full of some good examples of good strategies to implement, in order to strengthen the Employer Brand, contributing to enhance the attraction and retention field. Therefore, the experienced lived by the researcher, as well as the invaluable contributions and suggestions given by respondents on interviews, exit questionnaires and organizational surveys showed some interesting actions that can be applied by the company, as the following:

- Transparent and authentic communication and feedback sharing within the company (for example in a quarterly basis) about strategic goals, financial results, global performance and accomplishments, as well as organizational life information (employees' hires, promotions and leaves);

- Investment in an Employer Branding strategy (development of a clear Employer Value Proposition), through a close collaboration between Human Resources and Marketing areas;

- Defining internal and external metrics to measure the success of the Employer Branding strategy, as the percentage of job offers accepted, the number of applicants per role, the average length of tenure, the average staff turnover and the level of staff engagement;

- Ensuring that workload is adequate and not excessive, promoting employee's quality of life and well-being and investing in work-life balance activities;

- Conducting teambuilding activities and initiatives to improve team recognition, celebrate success, creating a healthy and comfortable environment at work;

- Updating the onboarding process for new employees, through the implementation of a more consistent programme of mentors and buddies;

- Leading by example, engaging and communicating more frequently with subordinates, being open to their feedback, opinions, and suggestions;

- Leadership skills improvement, through leadership training programs and development of an internal team of coaches;

- Assuring salaries in all positions are competitive and balanced, creating salary grids, to ensure transparency and equity for all employees;

- Investing on rewards and recognition programs for all employees to reward them through intangible and non-tangible rewards, according to their level of performance;

- Development of a clear performance appraisal model on a semi-annual or annual basis, providing feedback about its results to employees;

- Creating a career development plan and talent management strategy, with clear expectations and objectives, ensuring fair promotion policies;

- Implementing retention policies and succession plans, with adequate training and development to hold employees with higher potential;

- Clear understanding about the real reasons of historical turnover and dissatisfaction, to act accordingly.

You need to get the right people on the bus to deliver your strategic intent, you first need to ensure that you make your bus attractive to the right people."

— Jim Collins (2001)

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ANNEXES

Annex 1 - Interview Guide for Current employees

- How long have you been working for Company X? How did you get here?

- Before working here, did you have already any work experience?

- What did you find here that did not exist in your previous job?

- Was it easy to adapt to this new work environment (e.g. work pace, procedures, responsibilities)?

- Are you satisfied with the decision you made, embracing this project in Company X?

- Is there anything you would like to have brought from your previous job?

- Do you like to work here? What do you like the most here? What keeps you here?

- Do you remember any less enjoyable experience or situation you have seen or experienced here?

- Regarding the recent turnover, can you identify the main motivations/factors related to this?

- During your permanence at Company X, have you ever considered looking for a new professional experience? Which were the factors that influenced you to this reflection?

- Do you think the image shared internally by the company is the same that is transmitted outside? Is there any mismatch between the internal and external image of Company X?

- Which suggestions would you give to improve the company overall if your opinion could be heard?

Annex 2 - Interview Guide for Recruitment and Selection Companies

- What is the context of the Health & Life Sciences sector? (e.g. size, positioning, turnover)

- What is your feedback when comparing Company X with other similar companies? (e.g. environment, reputation, culture, workload, turnover, salary package)

- What are candidates looking for? What are their professional expectations? What aspects do they value most to embrace a new professional project? (e.g. salary package, benefits, career progression, international opportunities, international company versus familiar company)

- What image do the candidates have about Company X?

- What motivates them to join the company?

- Which reasons can lead them to refuse an opportunity at Company X? (e.g. candidates who rejected integration proposals)

Annex 3 – Exit Questionnaire

EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

Under the commitment of continuous evolution, this exit questionnaire represents a valuable source of information in the evaluation of the quality of Company X as an employer.

We appreciate your availability to replying honestly to this questionnaire.

IDENTIFICATION

Name:_____

Unit:_____ Position: _____

Superior:_____ Exit Date:_____

Seniority: ☐ Less than 1 year   ☐ 1 to 3 years   ☐ More than 3 years

MOTIVATIONS TO CHANGE

1. What are your motivations to leave Company X?

☐ A better job/career opportunity

☐ Environment among colleagues

☐ Work environment

☐ Need for change

☐ Familiar and personal motivations

☐ Demotivation

☐ Remuneration (salary and other benefits)

☐ Own business

☐ Change of residence

☐ Incompatibility between professional and academic life

☐ Workload

☐ Hierarchical superiors

☐ More flexible work practices outside

☐ Other (Please, specify) _____

2. How long have you been planning to leave Company X?

☐ Less than 1 year   ☐ 1 to 5 months   ☐ More than 5 months

3. Change initiative

☐ Application to a job vacancy

☐ Company invitation

☐ Contact through R&S company

☐ Other (Please, specify) _____

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

4. What is your level of satisfaction concerning the following aspects?

	Extremely Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied	NS/NA
Relationship with colleagues					
Organizational culture and values					
Work recognition					
Social benefits					
Training					
Workload					
Potential of career promotion					
Salary package					
Immediate superior					
Hierarchical superior					
Work environment					

COMMENTS AND SUGESTIONS

5. Would you recommend Company X to a friend or familiar to work?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Perhaps

Why? _____

6. If you had the opportunity, would you return to Company X in the future?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Perhaps

Why? _____

7. Positive points

_____

8. Less satisfactory points

_____

9. Suggestions and improvement opportunities

_____