



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Janice McMillan,
Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom

REVIEWED BY

Mohammad Faraz Naim,
Birla Institute of Technology and Science,
India

Manuel Sousa Pereira,
Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo,
Portugal

*CORRESPONDENCE

Claudiu Coman
✉ claudiu.coman@unitbv.ro

RECEIVED 25 March 2024

ACCEPTED 17 June 2024

PUBLISHED 01 July 2024

CITATION

Barbulescu F-M, Vasiluță-Ștefănescu M,
Stoicov I, Coman C and Coman E (2024)
Strategic management of internal employer
branding – guerilla strategies to engage and
retain top employees in a challenging
workforce environment.
Front. Commun. 9:1402125.
doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2024.1402125

COPYRIGHT

© 2024 Barbulescu, Vasiluță-Ștefănescu,
Stoicov, Coman and Coman. This is an
open-access article distributed under the
terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution
License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or
reproduction in other forums is permitted,
provided the original author(s) and the
copyright owner(s) are credited and that the
original publication in this journal is cited, in
accordance with accepted academic
practice. No use, distribution or reproduction
is permitted which does not comply with
these terms.

Strategic management of internal employer branding – guerilla strategies to engage and retain top employees in a challenging workforce environment

Florentina-Mihaela Barbulescu¹, Marius Vasiluță-Ștefănescu¹,
Ionela Stoicov¹, Claudiu Coman^{2*} and Ecaterina Coman³

¹Department of Sociology, Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, West University of Timișoara, Timișoara, Romania, ²Department of Social Sciences and Communication, Faculty of Sociology and Communication, Transilvania University of Brașov, Brașov, Romania, ³Department of Management and Economic Informatics, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration, Transilvania University of Brașov, Brașov, Romania

Introduction: In a globalized and constantly evolving employment environment, it is imperative that organizations cultivate effective employer branding strategies to maintain competitiveness and attractiveness. These would allow them to obtain unique advantages in the market but also support for the internal employer brand. Despite the critical role of employer branding in attracting and retaining top talent, there remains a gap in understanding its relationship to HRM practices and employee perceptions of those practices. The purpose of this research was to investigate the correlation between human resources management practices and employer branding measured through organizational attractiveness and seen from the employees' perspective. Additionally, to find out if there is a significant difference between the private and public sector in terms of the perception of HRM practices influencing organizational attractiveness.

Methods: A questionnaire was applied to 800 respondents, employed in various positions in private and public sector organizations in western Romania. Two scales were applied to evaluate human resources management practices and the employer's attractiveness from the employees' perspective.

Results: Findings indicate a direct and positive relation between HRM practices and organizational attractiveness, with particular emphasis on performance appraisal practice, training and development, and work-life balance practices. When it comes to private sector, the significant practices influencing organizational attractiveness are performance appraisal, safety, and work-life balance practices, whereas in the public sector we have training-development and performance appraisal practices.

Discussion: These results underline the role of human resource management in strengthening internal support for the employer brand and increasing overall employer attractiveness. The more appropriate human resource management practices are in the perception of employees, the more attractive the organization is perceived as an employer.

KEYWORDS

employer brand, employer branding, employer attractiveness, HRM practices, internal employer branding, organizational attractiveness

1 Introduction

The 21st century, with a challenging work environment, characterized by an emerging global economy, with business shifting to the online environment and increasing competitiveness, shortening learning time and increased demand for new skills and competencies, has led most organizations to seek to become attractive as employers to gain a competitive advantage. Manpower Group's (2024) Talent Shortage Survey found that 75% of employers reported difficulties in finding talent they need. The lack of talent in organizations and the continuous increase of competitiveness have led to a new focus point on the uniqueness of an employer and underlining the advantages it offers for potential or current employees (Highhouse et al., 2003; Sinčić Ćorić and Špoljarić, 2021). In this context, employer branding is used as a strategic tool by human resources management through which the organization builds a unique and easily recognizable identity as an employer on the market (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) to attract and retain the talent in the organization. It represents "a firm's efforts to promote internally and externally a clear vision of what makes them different and desirable as an employer" (Lievens, 2007) transforming an organization into an employer of choice (Sullivan, 2004). The concept of internal employer branding refers to building that image through which a company, as employer, is seen on the one hand as a good place to work for potential employees and on the other hand as managing to fulfill the promises among existing employees as well (Berthon et al., 2005; Backhaus, 2016). Externally, employer branding represents the organization as a potential employer, and it should aim to position itself as an employer that offers a superior employment experience compared to competitors (Love and Singh, 2011).

At the employee level, the favorable results of employer branding can be observed in the organizational identity and culture that contribute to the increasing loyalty and productivity, engagement, and innovation (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Benraiss-Noailles and Viot, 2021). Recent research emphasizes the importance of current employees in both creating and promoting the employer brand (Verčič, 2021; Deepa and Baral, 2022; Špoljarić and Tkalac Verčič, 2022). It has been observed that organizations that benefit from a positive employer brand have low rates of staff turnover, high rates of investment in employee development and training programs and incorporate human resource management practices such as recruitment, internal staff training, employee rewards and employee involvement in decision-making (Kuchеров and Zavyalova, 2012). Therefore, organizational factors can contribute to employee well-being and influence their decision to stay in the workplace (Baciu and Virgă, 2018). The inclusion of human resources management practices that support a positive employer brand is a promising path towards increasing its attractiveness (App et al., 2012) and obtaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Heilmann et al., 2013; Hitka et al., 2019).

In the last decades, increasing interest has been devoted to employee perceptions of human resource management practices because of their positive influence on individual attitudes, behaviors, and organizational performance (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Datta et al., 2005; Jiang et al., 2012). These HRM practices can be reflected in the form of benefits in the proposed value of employment and there is evidence about the existence of a direct link between employer branding and human resource management practices (App et al., 2012; Kuchеров and Zavyalova, 2012; Wahba and Elmanadily, 2015), but there has been insufficient research on which specific practices increase organizational attractiveness from employees' perspective. Despite the growing

relevance of employer branding for human resource management practitioners, there is a lack of substantial evidence regarding employer branding research (Špoljarić and Ozretić Došen, 2023). Limited research has directly explored the relationship between human resource management practices and employer branding from an internal perspective of existing employees within an organization. Most studies focus on measuring employer attractiveness from an external perspective of potential employees, using students and graduates as respondents (Berthon et al., 2005; Arachchige and Robertson, 2011; Baum and Kabst, 2013; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Almaçık et al., 2014; Rampl, 2014; Rampl and Kenning, 2014; Grajdieru and Khechoyan, 2019), who may value employer branding features and HRM practices differently than current employees. Thus, there is a gap in research evidence concerning the impact of HRM practices on an employer's attractiveness, particularly from the internal perspective of current employees within organizations. Considering all these limitations mentioned above we consider important to address some research questions related to the influence of HRM practices on increasing employer's attractiveness, which dimensions of the employer's attractiveness are the most important for existing employees and what kind of differences may occur between private and public sector. The answer to these questions can provide HR managers with guerilla strategies that will help them retain and motivate employees by responding to their specific needs, increasing organizational efficiency, and obtaining a better position on the market.

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between human resources management (HRM) practices and employer branding measured through organizational attractiveness and seen from the employees' perspective. It aims to identify the practices that contribute to sustaining a positive employer brand and the key qualities that attract employees when considering an employer. Additionally, to find out if there is a significant difference between the private and public sector in terms of the perception of HRM practices influencing organizational attractiveness. According to our knowledge, only one study has been conducted in Romania regarding employer attractiveness (Grajdieru and Khechoyan, 2019), but students and recent graduates were used as respondents. Therefore, the aspects that we are going to investigate in this study could provide Romanian employers with valuable information regarding the importance of different HRM practices from the employees' perspective and their relationship with employer branding, both for those in the private sector, as well as for those in the public sector.

The rest of the paper is presented as follows. Section 2 presents a review of the literature in the field of employer branding and human resources management practices. Research hypotheses are also offered in this section. Section 3 explains the research methodology: data collection and participants, measurement tools, and data analysis method. Section 4 presents the statistical analysis and results. Section 5 discusses the results and concludes our research, presents the limitations of the study, suggests some practical implications and future research recommendations.

2 Background and research hypotheses

2.1 Human resources management practices (HRM practices)

It is widely acknowledged that the way employees are managed within an organization through the human resources management

system largely determines the organizational performance (El-Ghalayini, 2017). This system encompasses specific human resources management practices that are designed to “attract, develop, motivate and retain employees in the organization in order to ensure the effective implementation of human resource management practices and the survival of the organization and its members” (Schuler and Jackson, 1987). Usually, these practices are addressed individually at the execution level when, in fact, they should be considered as a set of tools that can be used to promote the employer brand (Cascio and Graham, 2016).

In specialized literature, the configuration of the set of HRM practices varies considerably from study to study, depending on how performance-oriented the work system is (Boselie et al., 2005; Wood and Wall, 2007). A “high performance work system” interconnects HRM practices, individual organizational behavior, and organizational performance. In addition to recruitment and selection, training and development, performance evaluation and rewarding, high performance HRM practices should also include employee participation in organizational success, rewarding performance, decentralization, transparency of information, problem-solving groups, and teamwork (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Wood and Wall, 2007). Combs et al. (2006) showed that the high-performance practice system (HPWP) has a stronger effect on organizational performance than a system of stand-alone individual practices.

Research has demonstrated the correlation between human resources management practices and organizational performance, measured by a wide range of operational, financial, and human resource indicators, such as: profitability (Boselie et al., 2005), market share, job performance (Jiang et al., 2012), productivity, quality, job satisfaction and turnover intention (Boselie et al., 2005; Jiang et al., 2012). Although the link between HRM practices and performance was initially studied at the organizational level, another perspective, intensely discussed lately, on the system of HRM practices is that focused on the employee level and their perception of these practices (Pauwe, 2009; Guest, 2011; Boon et al., 2019). These studies indicate that employees’ perceptions of these practices may diverge from those reported by managers. Moreover, it is observed that different employees may perceive the same practices in varied ways and differently from the intentions of organizations. It has also been shown that employees’ perceptions are closely related to their attitudes as well as job and organizational fit (Boon et al., 2011). Some studies have shown that responses related to employees’ attitudes and behaviors are more related to their experiences with HRM practices than those reported by management on these practices (Den Hartog et al., 2013). In this context, we believe it is important to measure the impact of HRM practices on employer branding from employees’ internal perspective.

2.2 Employer brand and employer branding

The concept of employer branding is first mentioned and defined by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits offered by employment and identified with the employing company.” Applying the principles of human resources marketing, they highlighted the benefits that an employer brand offers to employees alongside those that a brand offers to consumers: (1) development activities (functional); (2) material or monetary rewards (economic); and (3) feelings of belonging, direction, and purpose (psychological). Psychological aspects are extremely complex, recent

studies show the importance of facilitating socialization, interpersonal communication, employer contact with nature even in the context of the work environment (Swami et al., 2020). Berthon et al. (2005) extend the three-dimensional model of the employer brand to five dimensions that reflect five types of values, namely: economic value (e.g., salary), interest value (e.g., interesting work), social value (e.g., a pleasant work environment), development value (e.g., opportunities for advancement), and application value (e.g., opportunities to implement one’s own knowledge). These attributes should be attractive and unique enough to distinguish an employer from its competitors in the labor market (Theurer et al., 2018), being also considered as the employer value proposition (Barrow and Mosley, 2005; Edwards, 2010; Franca and Pahor, 2012; Sengupta et al., 2015).

Employer brands are categorized as internal or external based on their focus either on current employees (internal employer brands) or potential employees (external employer brands) (Kunrath and Mosley, 2011). Studies show that organizations with a positive employer brand will attract more potential employees (Cable and Turban, 2003; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Almaçık et al., 2014) and will be able to retain them better (Gittel et al., 2010). Through employer branding the organization ensures that employees identify with it and develop commitment to the organization, corporate brand, mission, values, and beliefs and develop with it (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). Thus, employer branding is seen as a strategic process that creates, negotiates, and supports sustainable relationships between the organization, potential employees, and existing employees with the aim of creating sustainable values for the individual, the organization and society as a whole (Aggerholm et al., 2011). In this regard, employee perspective has been shown to be a better predictor of employee attitudinal outcomes (perceptions) than manager/employer perspective (Edgar and Geare, 2005; Khilji and Wang, 2006). However, it is important to note that there are differences in the meaning people attach to different aspects of employer branding across countries (Arachchige and Robertson, 2011; Almaçık et al., 2014; Grajdieru and Khechoyan, 2019; Sarkiunaite and Sciukauske, 2021) and in the context of an increasingly globalized world, managers should consider this aspect.

2.3 Employer attractiveness

One of the main objectives of the employer branding is to ensure that the organization (as an employer) is easily identifiable and attractive to potential employees. Therefore, many researchers use the terms “employer brand” and “employer attractiveness” together (Verčič, 2021). Berthon et al. (2005, p. 155) defined employer attractiveness as “the expected benefits that a potential employee sees from working for a specific organization.” It can also be seen as an antecedent of the value associated with the employer brand – the more attractive an organization is perceived by potential employees, the stronger that company’s employer brand value will be. Organizational attractiveness also refers to the power that attracts the attention of applicants to focus on an employer brand and encourages existing employees to stay within the company (Bakanauskiene et al., 2017) to the same extent that potential and existing employees perceive the organization as a good place to work (Jiang and Iles, 2011). A positive employer brand image generates organizational attractiveness (Lievens, 2007) and attractiveness means congruence between the

organization's values and goals and those of potential or existing employees (Elegbe, 2018).

Most studies have addressed in-depth theoretical discussions of the concept of being an attractive employer or investigated the main attributes of an attractive employer (Highhouse et al., 2003; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005, p. 42; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Alnaçık et al., 2014; Grajdieru and Khechoyan, 2019) as seen from the perspective of potential employees. Studies have identified factors that could enhance employer attractiveness, such as: leadership, organizational culture, two-way communication (Love and Singh, 2011), reward policies, simplification of work procedures and bureaucracy elimination, management style (Maxwell and Knox, 2009), as well as career development, the existence of important, diverse, and challenging tasks, a pleasant working environment (Joo and McLean, 2006). For current employees, the employer's attractiveness is also influenced by the extent to which the psychological contract is respected (Martin et al., 2005; Sandeepanig et al., 2023).

However, employees and candidates may perceive certain attributes of employers' attractiveness differently. Therefore, it is essential to understand the attributes related to organizational attractiveness not only from an external point of view, but also from within the organization, through the lens of human resource management practices as perceived and experienced by employees. This understanding encompasses how these attributes influence organizational attractiveness and play a role in retaining existing employees within the company.

2.4 Conceptual model and working hypotheses

To link HRM practices to the concept of employer branding we return to the theory. The theory of signs assumed that employer branding can signal the benefits of the job offer to potential employees (Celani and Singh, 2011). The employment offer incorporates existing human resources management practices that will be "packaged" into the employment value proposition conveyed to the market in the form of benefits that potential employees would receive if they worked for the company. Looking from the perspective of existing or potential employees, social identity theory (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) suggests that a positive, substance-oriented image of the employer can lead to an increase in existing or potential employees' concept of self-worth, thus employees identify with the organization and the organization is seen as having an attractive employer brand. Furthermore, the person-organization fit theory (Kristof, 1996) argues that individuals who work in an environment that matches their personal characteristics will have positive work experiences. These characteristics of the work environment are reflected in the proposed value of employment and in turn will attract certain individuals to the organization to apply, knowing that people are attracted to organizations with which they share important characteristics such as values (Schneider et al., 1995).

In the specialized literature, which addresses both concepts and attempts to establish and explain a link between HRM practices and organizational attractiveness, there are some conceptualizations of their relationship (App et al., 2012). Significant differences in terms of economic indicators have been observed in companies that have an employer brand and those that do not (Kuchеров and Zavyalova,

2012). Wahba and Elmanadily (2015) concluded in their study that HRM practices that positively impact employer branding are reward and training. Talent management has been shown to be strongly and positively correlated with employer branding (Maurya and Agarwal, 2018) and the predictors that are most effective are compensation and rewards practices, work-life balance, and talent attraction and recruitment. However, another study concluded that "compensation and benefits" is not the greatest factor for retaining talent (Alves et al., 2020), even if young graduates seem to be attracted by this aspect when choosing an employer (Grajdieru and Khechoyan, 2019). The main differentiators of best employers include human resources practices based on understanding employee requirements and needs, such as training and development opportunities, career growth opportunities, performance reward programs and promotion of a safe and healthy work environment, prevention of occupational diseases caused by physical or psychosocial factors (Joo and McLean, 2006; Virgă et al., 2020).

Regarding the public sector in terms of HRM practices, Gould-Williams (2004) states that eight out of the ten "high engagement" HRM practices were found to have significant effects on the attitudes of public sector employees, namely: teamwork, training and development programs, empowerment, involvement in decision-making, communication, rewards, etc. Parmar (2014) also shows in his comparative study between the public and private sector on HRM practices related to employer brand that there are differences in the perception of employer brand depending on the activity sector.

Thus, the premises for testing such a direct relationship exist, however the direct link between organizational attractiveness and HRM practices has not been proven so far, as other operationalization of employer branding have been used, e.g., the personality scale of an employer brand (Wahba and Elmanadily, 2015) and moreover, not in the private and public sector alike. Thus, based on the premises presented above, we formulate the following working hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Training and development (TD) practice is positively related to organizational attractiveness (EMP) for private and public sector.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Payment practice and contingent rewards (REW) are positively related to organizational attractiveness (EMP) for private and public sector.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Performance appraisal practice (PERF) is positively related to organizational attractiveness (EMP) for private and public sector.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Recruitment and selection practice (RS) are positively related to organizational attractiveness (EMP) for private and public sector.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Competitive Salary Package (SAL) practice is positively related to organizational attractiveness (EMP) for private and public sector.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Job security (JSS) practice is positively related to organizational attractiveness (EMP) for private and public sector.

Hypothesis 7 (H7): Work-life balance (WKB) practice is positively related to organizational attractiveness (EMP) for private and public sector.

Hypothesis 8 (H8): Exit management (EM) practice is positively related to organizational attractiveness (EMP) for private and public sector.

Hypothesis 9 (H9): There is a significant difference between the private and public sector in terms of the perception of HRM practices influencing organizational attractiveness.

The conceptual model that comprises the working hypotheses formulated in this study can be found in Figure 1. The variable EMP represents employer branding measured by organizational attractiveness. It will be defined and validated in the analysis stage as a second-order factor in the organizational attractiveness model.

3 Materials and methods

3.1 Data collection method and participants

The data for this study was collected from employees of medium and small private organizations, private and public non-governmental organizations and public institutions in Timisoara and its surrounding areas (max. 30km proximity), belonging to the Western area of Romania, from November 2019 to February 2020. For data collection, we used the definition offered by

European Commission for small and medium organizations. A small enterprise has fewer than 50 employees, with an annual turnover and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 10 million, while a medium-size enterprise has no more than 250 employees, an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million (European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, 2015, p. 41). The total targeted population consisted of 19,159 organizations.

The type of sample used is non-probabilistic, rational sampling. The selection of organization type was deliberated among a group of specialists and experts (including researchers, HR specialists and employer branding experts), based on the following criteria: geographical location, organization size, capacity to organize and support economic activities, industry sector and organization type (profit/nonprofit or private/public), thus resulting the sampling frame used. This approach ensured that the population under investigation aligned with the research objectives. Following this stage, participants were selected from these organizational units based on specific criteria, namely, to be employed within these units for at least 6 months in order to be considered professionally integrated, bearing in mind that we are analyzing a series of HRM practices that they should have already experienced. In the final stage, both face-to-face and online questionnaires were randomly administrated to each organizational unit, providing respondents with equal probabilities of inclusion in the sample. Various communications were undertaken to ensure sufficient responses from each organizational unit. Thus, the obtained sample includes a number of 800 respondents (263 online and 537 face-to-face), all of whom were employees within the researched organizational units. The online questionnaires were

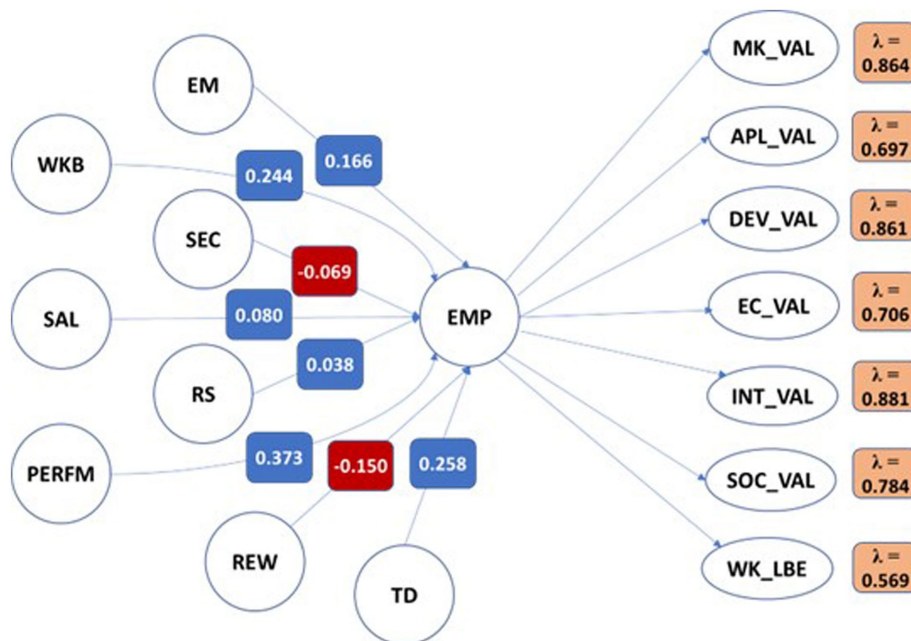


FIGURE 1 Final SEM model and standardized regression coefficients. EM - Exit management, WKB - Work-life balance, SEC - Employment security, SAL - Competitive salary, RS - Recruitment and selection, PERFM - Performance appraisal, REW - Contingent pay and rewards, TD - Training and development, EMP - Employer Branding, MK_VAL - Market value, APL_VAL - Application value, DEV_VAL - Development value, EC_VAL - Economic value, INT_VAL - Interest value, SOC_VAL - Social value, WK_LBE - Work-life balance.

applied through support persons from organizations, especially in public organizations where we were not allowed access to apply face-to-face questionnaires. The response rate is approximately 80% for face-to-face surveys and approximately 60% for online surveys. To control common methods bias we used well-established scales and multiple data collection methods: online and face-to-face. Also, it was insured anonymity and confidentiality during data collection. The distribution of the sample according to field of activity records the following dimensions: industry, services, trade, IT, education, and administration. Several fields of activity such as industry, services, trade, and IT operate in a labor market affected by increased competition in attracting and retaining employees and the unemployment rate is low in the western part of Romania. Respondents are employed in one of the above organizations, aged over 18 years and have at least 6 months of work experience, after which they are considered professionally integrated in the organization.

The sample includes employees working in one of the private or public organizations in the Western area of Romania, with the following structure: 67.9% work in private organizations and 32.1% in public ones. 50% of all organizations are for-profit and 50% non-profit. 59.5% of respondents are women and 40.5% men. In terms of education level 13.3% have secondary education (high school), 16.4% post-secondary education and approx. 70% higher education. Of all respondents 28.4% are aged 16–25, 64.8% are aged 25–45 and 6.9% are over 45. The sectors of activity most present in this sample are industry 16.8%, services 18.4%, IT 9.6%, administration 20.8%, education 11% and others.

3.2 The research instrument

The research instrument used in this quantitative study is the questionnaire, which consists of 2 Likert-type scales and demographic questions (gender, education, age, income, position/job title, length of service in the organization, residence, type of organization, etc.). The statements contained in the two scales are rated using a seven-point Likert scale, from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree.” We pre-tested the questionnaire on 36 employees and rephrased some items identified as too challenging to follow.

To assess HRM practices in organizations from the perspective of employees, the scale of Villajos et al. (2018) was used. The scale comprises a total of 24 items grouped into 8 HRM practices of 3 items each. The set of HRM practices in this scale are training and professional development, contingent pay and rewards, performance appraisal, recruitment and selection, competitive pay, safety and security, work-life balance, and exit (retirement) management. The scale has been translated in Romanian and verified with the help of several practitioners in the field and includes the following dimensions/items:

Training and Development (TD) practice refers to: ‘Opportunity to participate in courses and workshops (job profile)/ Opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge for my current job or possible future jobs/Support in planning professional development.’

The Contingent Rewards and Pay (REW) practice include the items: “A salary that corresponds to my performance/Benefits and

rewards plan linked to my performance/A salary bonus that depends on the organization’s profits.”

Performance Appraisal Practice (PERF) includes: “Regular evaluation of my performance/Fair evaluation of my performance/Reasons for performance appraisals.”

The Competitive Salary Package (SAL) practice includes “A competitive salary in the labor market/Above average salary for this job/A fair compensation system.”

The Recruitment and Selection (RS) practice includes: “Careful selection of new employees/Careful recruitment of new employees/Internal promotion opportunities.”

The Job Security Practice (JSP) consists of: “Guarantee to keep my job/An employment contract that offers job security/More job stability than normal.”

The Work Life Balance (WKB) practice is made up of: “Flexible working hours/Possibility to work part-time if I have to/Possibility to organize my working hours so that I can fulfill my family obligations.”

The Exit Management (EM) practice involves: “Professional (specialized) support in the retirement process/Support in looking for other jobs in case of redundancies/The best possible legal conditions in case of redundancy.”

The second scale measures employer attractiveness and it is adapted from Berthon et al.’s scale (2005), called the EmpAt (Employer Attractiveness) scale, which was used as a starting point. The original EmpAt scale contained a set of 25 items, grouped into 5 dimensions of employer attractiveness. These dimensions reflect five types of values (dimensions) offered by an employer to its potential employees and describe an organization’s employer brand: economic value, interest value, social value, development value and application value. Interest value and social value refer to psychological benefits and development value and applied value present functional benefits.

This scale has already been used in several international studies showing good predictability and stability (Roy, 2008; Arachchige and Robertson, 2011; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Almaçık et al., 2014; Reis and Braga, 2016; Grajdieru and Khechoyan, 2019). The EmpAt scale was initially used on final year students representing potential employees. The authors point out that because of this, the scale can only be generalized to under-graduates. Students’ perspectives on job attributes may be naiver due to the lack of work experience (Berthon et al., 2005). Reis and Braga (2016) validated the scale by also surveying within organizations the opinions of their own employees and the results suggested good predictability of the scale for employees as well.

In this research, the new scale was built from the original EmpAt scale which was translated and then checked and adjusted for comprehensibility with the help of 10 human resources specialists from the private and public sphere. Following the conclusions drawn in these discussions with the specialists and considering recommendations from previous studies (Sivertzen et al., 2013; Reis and Braga, 2016) 6 items were removed from the original scale (considered irrelevant and having a low score also in previous research) and 10 items were added to complete some aspects considered important such as: extra salary and other benefits, work-life balance and management aspects (capable, honest management, etc.). In the end, a total of 29 items were obtained and measured by Likert scale from 1 to 7 (1 = total disagreement/ 7 = total agreement).

3.3 Data analysis

The SPSS V20 software program was used to perform the preliminary data analyses and to obtain descriptive statistics for the two scales used: the HRM practices scale and the organizational attractiveness scale. To perform exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses for the purpose of testing and validating the two scales and for testing the final model (through structural equation modeling) of the working hypotheses, the software program R 4.1.0 (Lavaan package) was used.

Data analysis was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using the Lavaan package in R version 4.1.0 to confirm the 8 factors of the HRM practices scale: training and professional development, contingent pay and rewards, performance appraisal, recruitment and selection, competitive pay, safety and security, work-life balance and exit (retirement) management and to see if the proposed model (8 HRM practices) is suitable for the present sample data ($N=800$). In the second stage an exploratory and a confirmatory factor analysis were run to test and validate the new organizational attractiveness scale which was modified from the original model of Berthon et al. (2005). In the third stage, the relationship between the two concepts (HRM practices and employer brand attractiveness) was tested together with the working hypotheses.

4 Results

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis of the HRM practice scale

In this step a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the HRM practices scale was conducted to check whether the 8-factor model is confirmed and to see if it is suitable for the present sample data ($N=800$). As an initial step in the analysis process, the item correlation matrix was assessed to test the internal consistency of the HRM practices scale and descriptive statistics to assess the quality of the data, which were found to be adequate in terms of item-total correlations, variance and means (DeVellis, 2009). These data are illustrated in Table 1.

Next, using the Lavaan package in R 4.1.0., the confirmatory analysis was run. Following the confirmatory factor analysis 4 indicators (Q2_3, Q2_4, Q2_12 and Q2_15) were removed to improve the structure of the model. Analyzing the loadings of these indicators across all factors and their mode of formulation, the data obtained shows that respondents did not identify these indicators as only part of the factor in which they load, but rather they are attributed to the influence of more than one factor, or their formulation is very similar to other indicators of the same construct, and they overlap. E.g. Q2_4: "I get a salary that matches my performance" is more likely to be identified with the factor "Competitive salary package" and Q2_12: "There are opportunities for internal promotion/career advancement in the organization" loads into several factors and can also be attributed to the factors training and development and performance appraisal. The structure of the scale with factors and related items can be found in Table 2.

To assess if the 8-factor model is suitable for the Chi-square test, degrees of freedom (df) and significance threshold (p) values, and fit indices such as RMSEA, CFI, TLI and SRMR were used. The results obtained for the 8-factor model were: $\chi^2=952.491$, $p<0.001$,

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics for HRM practices scale.

Items	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q2_1	4.33	1.85	-0.16	-1.03
Q2_2	4.43	1.61	-0.29	-0.43
Q2_3	4.29	1.68	-0.23	-0.65
Q2_4	4.32	1.68	-0.16	-0.69
Q2_5	3.61	1.79	0.12	-0.97
Q2_6	3.16	1.89	0.41	-0.95
Q2_7	4.68	1.66	-0.51	-0.33
Q2_8	4.61	1.69	-0.54	-0.39
Q2_9	4.47	1.72	-0.48	-0.50
Q2_10	4.91	1.67	-0.67	-0.13
Q2_11	4.85	1.71	-0.66	-0.31
Q2_12	4.76	1.74	-0.67	-0.34
Q2_13	4.27	1.77	-0.17	-0.91
Q2_14	3.84	1.86	-0.01	-1.07
Q2_15	4.00	1.68	-0.02	-0.57
Q2_16	4.83	1.76	-0.57	-0.48
Q2_17	5.03	1.70	-0.75	-0.16
Q2_18	4.80	1.67	-0.39	-0.61
Q2_19	3.86	2.06	0.10	-1.27
Q2_20	3.92	2.21	0.05	-1.37
Q2_21	3.72	2.00	0.17	-1.17
Q2_22	3.71	2.00	0.10	-1.18
Q2_23	2.92	1.89	0.70	-0.58
Q2_24	3.86	1.97	0.01	-1.12
(N = 800)				

CFI=0.90, TLI=0.87, SRMR=0.054 compared to the 1-factor model: $\chi^2=5154.984$, $p<0.001$, CFI=0.54, TLI=0.497, SRMR=0.0111 (Table 3). The results show better fit indices for the 8-factor model and thus confirm that this model is the best fit for the data in this study. It will be used in the final structural model. Means (M), standard deviations (SD) and loadings are presented in Table 3.

The convergent validity of the scale was checked by calculating the AVE, CR and Cronbach's α coefficient of the subscales and the discriminant validity of each latent construct by calculating the $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$. The results can be found in Table 4. The internal consistency estimates exceed the threshold value of 0.7, indicating adequate structure. The AVE values are above 0.5 and the $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ above the latent factor correlation values, indicating convergent and discriminant validity. In conclusion, we can say that the HRM practice scale with its 8 dimensions is robust (Table 4).

4.2 Exploratory factor analysis-organizational attractiveness scale

Since the organizational attractiveness scale was adapted by removing some items and adding others, an exploratory factor analysis was carried

TABLE 2 Confirmatory factor analysis for HRM practices scale.

Variables/factors	Items	M	SD	λ	
Training & development (TD)	Q2_1	The opportunity to receive trainings and attend courses and workshops	4.33	1.85	0.85
	Q2_2	The opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge for my current job, or for possible future positions	4.43	1.61	0.75
	Q2_3	Support in planning my professional development	4.29	1.68	Out
Contingent pay and rewards (REW)	Q2_4	A salary that corresponds to my performance	4.32	1.68	Out
	Q2_5	A benefits and rewards plan that is linked to my performance	3.61	1.79	0.82
	Q2_6	A salary bonus that depends on the organization's profits	3.16	1.89	0.73
Performance appraisal (PERF)	Q2_7	The periodic evaluation of my performance	4.68	1.66	0.74
	Q2_8	A fair evaluation of my performance	4.61	1.69	0.87
	Q2_9	Motivating performance evaluations	4.47	1.72	0.75
Recruitment and selection (RS)	Q2_10	Careful selection of new employees	4.91	1.67	0.85
	Q2_11	Meticulous recruitment of new co-workers	4.85	1.71	0.89
	Q2_12	Opportunities for internal promotion	4.76	1.74	out
Competitive salary (SAL)	Q2_13	A competitive salary on the job market	4.27	1.77	0.80
	Q2_14	An above-average salary for this job	3.84	1.86	0.76
	Q2_15	An equitable compensation system	4.00	1.68	Out
Employment security (SEC)	Q2_16	The guarantee of keeping my job	4.83	1.76	0.80
	Q2_17	A work contract that offers job security	5.03	1.70	0.84
	Q2_18	More job stability than normal	4.80	1.67	0.71
Work-life balance (WKB)	Q2_19	Flexible work hours	3.86	2.06	0.75
	Q2_20	The opportunity to work part-time if I need to	3.92	2.21	0.69
	Q2_21	The opportunity to organize my work schedule so that I can fulfil my family obligations	3.72	2.00	0.89
Exit management (EM)	Q2_22	Professionalized support in the retirement process	3.71	2.00	0.77
	Q2_23	Support in looking for other jobs in the case of lay offs	2.92	1.89	0.77
	Q2_24	The best conditions legally possible in the case of being laid-off	3.86	1.97	0.81

TABLE 3 Confirmatory factor analysis for HRM practices scale.

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
8 factors (original model)	952.491 (142)*	0.90	0.87	0.084	0.0540
1 factor	5154.981 (252)	0.541	0.497	0.156	0.111

Measurement models goodness of fit indexes. * $p < 0.001$.

out to see the grouping of items into factors. Initially, the correlation matrix was evaluated to test the internal consistency of the scale and to check the quality of the data which was found to be suitable in terms of item-total correlation, means and standard deviations. The values of these correlations were greater than 0.3 and no items were dropped. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was applied to check the adequacy of the sample for factor analysis. The data from this sample produced a KMO value of 0.944, indicating that factor analysis is appropriate. Bartlett's test of sphericity also confirmed the appropriateness and relevance of the data for factor analysis (Approx. Chi Square 18688.492, df 406, $p = 0.0000$). Descriptive item statistics can be found in Table 5.

In Berthon et al.'s (2005) initial study, which was applied on students, a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.96 was obtained. The scale used in this study on employees in private and public institutions showed a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.955 showing good internal consistency of the items. Reis and Braga (2016) who applied the scale

of Berthon et al. on a population of employees, also proved that the scale shows a good stability also on employees (alpha 0.905).

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the Lavaan package in R 4.1.0. Parallel analysis suggested 7 factors and 3 components. Using OLS method to find the minimum residual solution and oblimin rotation 7 factors were obtained. Nine items were eliminated due to weak loadings and loadings in several factors: Q3_20, Q3_19, Q3_6, Q3_13, Q3_10, Q3_1, Q3_16, Q3_21, Q3_25, thus reducing the scale from 29 items to 20 items. The resulting solution with 7 factors (Table 6) and 20 items has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.938 and is appropriate. The resulting 7 dimensions of the new scale from the scale of Berthon et al. were named as follows: social value (4 items), interest value (3 items), economic value (2 items), development value (2 items), applied value (2 items) with most of the items from the basic dimensions of the EmpAt scale and two new dimensions, named after the content of the items, market value (3 items) and work-life balance value (4 items) (Table 6).

4.3 Confirmatory factor analysis-organizational attractiveness scale

In the second step, the new scale obtained from the exploratory factor analysis was tested and validated by confirmatory factor analysis

TABLE 4 Correlation matrix for latent constructs and reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the HRM Practices scale.

Variable/ factor	M	SD	α	CR	AVE	TD	REW	PERF	RS	SAL	SEC	WKB	EM
TD	4.35	0.76	0.78	0.58	0.55	0.74	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
REW	3.39	0.77	0.75	0.64	0.60	0.65***	0.77	-	-	-	-	-	-
PERF	4.59	0.8	0.83	0.76	0.63	0.66***	0.48***	0.79	-	-	-	-	-
RS	4.84	0.87	0.80	0.82	0.75	0.37***	0.37***	0.54***	0.87	-	-	-	-
SAL	4.04	0.78	0.76	0.66	0.61	0.47***	0.62***	0.50***	0.23***	0.78	-	-	-
SEC	4.89	0.79	0.83	0.75	0.62	0.35***	0.31***	0.55***	0.52***	0.45***	0.79	-	-
WKB	3.83	0.78	0.82	0.75	0.61	0.48***	0.56***	0.37***	0.23***	0.28***	0.31***	0.78	-
EM	3.5	0.78	0.83	0.75	0.61	0.60***	0.72***	0.47***	0.40***	0.39***	0.38***	0.64***	0.78

The correlations are significant at the level of *** <0.001. Bold values on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance extracted. Values below the diagonal are the correlations between the latent factors.

TABLE 5 Descriptive statistics for employer branding scale.

Items	Median	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q3_1	4.87	1.72	-0.52	-0.59
Q3_2	5.63	1.24	-0.56	-0.48
Q3_3	5.51	1.37	-0.88	0.52
Q3_4	5.62	1.31	-0.86	0.31
Q3_5	5.43	1.34	-0.53	-0.40
Q3_6	5.3	1.41	-0.66	-0.08
Q3_7	5.11	1.54	-0.53	-0.39
Q3_8	5.07	1.49	-0.40	-0.43
Q3_9	4.95	1.56	-0.27	-0.70
Q3_10	4.81	1.74	-0.26	-0.95
Q3_11	4.11	2.19	-0.07	-1.39
Q3_12	4.46	2.01	-0.21	-1.16
Q3_13	5.38	1.54	-0.78	0.01
Q3_14	5.15	1.65	-0.77	0.03
Q3_15	5.11	1.61	-0.69	-0.09
Q3_16	5.35	1.48	-0.83	0.45
Q3_17	5.45	1.46	-0.70	-0.14
Q3_18	5.37	1.43	-0.72	0.10
Q3_21	5.41	1.50	-1.00	0.59
Q3_22	5.31	1.41	-0.69	0.14
Q3_23	5.1	1.65	-0.77	-0.03
Q3_24	4.89	1.78	-0.55	-0.59
Q3_25	4.07	2.27	-0.05	-1.47
Q3_26	3.39	2.21	0.35	-1.35
Q3_27	3.35	2.18	0.45	-1.23
Q3_28	3.38	2.22	0.45	-1.28
Q3_29	3.74	2.26	0.13	-1.47
		(N = 800)		

using the Lavaan package in R 4.1.0. The results of the confirmatory analysis show the existence of a good model: $\chi^2(df) = 861,760 (149)$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.942, TLI = 0.926, RMSEA = 0.077, SRMR = 0.044

versus the 1-factor model: $\chi^2(df) = 4890.518(170)$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.617 TLI = 0.572, RMSEA = 0.186, SRMR = 0.117. In conclusion, we can say that the model with 7 dimensions of organizational attractiveness (employer brand) is suitable for the data which is analyzed. Convergent and discriminant validity analyses showed AVE values above 0.5 and CR values above 0.7 and \sqrt{AVE} above the latent factor correlation values. These results indicate good convergent and discriminant validity. In conclusion, we can say that the new scale with the 7 dimensions of employer brand attractiveness is robust (Table 7).

To allow the hypotheses to be tested and the final structural equation model to be run, the variable called EMP (Employer Branding) was used and defined as a second factor in the organizational attractiveness scale, with the 7 previously validated organizational attractiveness dimensions (SOC_VAL, INT_VAL, EC_VAL, DEV_VAL, APL_VAL; MK_VAL and WK_LBE) as first factors. A new confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to use this new scale structure with a second factor. Following the analysis, the results show that the model of the organizational attractiveness scale with 7 factors and 1 second degree factor (EMP) is suitable having the following fit indices: $\chi^2(df) = 1091.584 (163)$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.925, TLI = 0.912, SRMR = 0.084, RMSEA = 0.067 as shown in Table 8.

It can be observed that both 7-factor and 7-factor models with 1 factor of second degree have good indices, but in the analysis of the final structural equation model the 7-factor model with 1 factor of second degree will be used to test the hypotheses formulated in the proposed research model. In the next step, the SEM model containing the two scales corresponding to the two concepts was tested. The results of the final model suggest a good fit considering the large sample size and the large number of items in the model: $\chi^2(df) = 3384.889 (697)$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.877, TLI = 0.863, SRMR = 0.067, RMSEA = 0.069. As it can be seen in Figure 1 there is a direct and positive relationship between organizational attractiveness (employer branding) and human resources management practices.

The results show a significant relationship between human resources management practices such as training-development, performance appraisal, work-life balance and retirement and organizational attractiveness, of which, surprisingly, the one that largely determines organizational attractiveness is the performance appraisal practice. Thus, hypotheses H1, H3, H7 and H8 are confirmed. On the other hand, there is a weak relationship between pay practice and organizational attractiveness and recruitment-selection practice and organizational attractiveness, which confirms

TABLE 6 EFA for employer branding adapted scale from Berthon et al. (2005) (factor loadings).

Variable (factors)	Items	SOC_VAL	INT_VAL	EC_VAL	DEV_VAL	APL_VAL	MK_VAL	WK_LBE
Social value (SOC_VAL)	Q3_1	A fun working environment	0.47					
	Q3_2	Having a good relationship with your colleagues	0.78					
	Q3_3	Supportive and encouraging colleagues	0.79					
	Q3_4	Pleasant work environment	0.67					
	Q3_5	Acceptance and belonging	0.60					
Interest value (INT_VAL)	Q3_7	Challenging tasks and projects		0.67				
	Q3_8	Hands-on experience and cross-departmental collaboration		0.68				
	Q3_9	Ambitious objectives		0.73				
Economic value (EC_VAL)	Q3_10	An attractive salary			0.48			
	Q3_11	Extra salary benefits (performance bonuses, 13rd salary, share profit, etc.)			0.68			
	Q3_12	Other benefits (meal tickets, medical insurance, sport allowance, pension program, etc.)			0.68			
Development value (DEV_VAL)	Q3_13	Job security within the organization				0.38		
	Q3_14	Good promotion opportunities within the organization				0.69		
	Q3_15	Gaining career-enhancing experience				0.61		
Application value (APL_VAL)	Q3_16	Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution					0.53	
	Q3_17	Significant work, gives back to society					0.79	
	Q3_18	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned					0.79	
Market value (MK_VAL)	Q3_21	Competent and honest managers						0.54
	Q3_22	The organization produces high-quality products and services						0.75
	Q3_23	Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking						0.76
	Q3_24	The organization both values and makes use of your creativity						0.62
Work-life balance (WK_LBE)	Q3_25	Flexible work						0.53
	Q3_26	Work from home						0.94
	Q3_27	Remote work						0.91
	Q3_28	Benefits for other family members						0.78
	Q3_29	Family invited to the company's events (parties)						0.63
	Q3_6	High professional working environment						Out
	Q3_19	Recognition and appreciation from management						Out
	Q3_20	Having a good relationship with your superiors						Out

TABLE 7 Correlation matrix for latent constructs and reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the HRM practices scale.

Variable/ factor	M	SD	α	CR	AVE	SOC_ VAL	INT_ VAL	EC_ VAL	DEV_ VAL	APL_ VAL	MK_ VAL	WK_ LBE
SOC_VAL	4.35	0.82	0.89	0.849	0.676	0.82	–	–	–	–	–	–
INT_VAL	3.39	0.85	0.89	0.848	0.721	0.78***	0.85	–	–	–	–	–
EC_VAL	4.59	0.86	0.85	0.808	0.740	0.46***	0.62***	0.86	–	–	–	–
DEV_VAL	4.84	0.86	0.86	0.818	0.750	0.62***	0.73***	0.62***	0.86	–	–	–
APL_VAL	4.04	0.85	0.83	0.781	0.714	0.62***	0.59***	0.43***	0.62***	0.83	–	–
MK_VAL	4.89	0.84	0.86	0.828	0.698	0.68***	0.73***	0.58***	0.78***	0.59***	0.86	–
WK_LBE	3.83	0.88	0.93	0.884	0.768	0.33***	0.46***	0.62***	0.49***	0.32***	0.49***	0.93

Bold values on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance extracted. Values below the diagonal are the correlations between the latent factors. Asterisks indicate the level of statistical significance for correlation coefficients between variables. ***Correlations are significant at the $* < 0.001$ level.

TABLE 8 CFA Results for employer branding adapted scale.

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
7 factors (from EFA model)	861.760 (149)	0.942	0.926	0.077	0.044
1 factor	4890.518(170)	0.617	0.572	0.186	0.117
7 factors and one second order	1091.584 (163)	0.925	0.912	0.084	0.067

Measurement models goodness of fit indexes.

hypotheses H4 and H5, and a negative relationship between safety practice and rewards, which denies hypotheses H2 and H6, as can be seen in Table 9 showing the presence of relationships between the variables studied.

To test the hypothesis of significant differences between public and private sectors, the results of the model were analyzed according to each sub-group: public/private. From Table 10 it can be observed that there are significant differences depending on the analyzed sector. When it comes to private sector, the significant practices influencing organizational attractiveness are performance appraisal, safety, and work-life balance practices, whereas in the public sector we have training-development and performance appraisal practices.

5 Discussion

This study highlights the impact that human resources management practices have in increasing internal organizational attractiveness and adding value to the organizational image through how the employer brand is perceived by employees. The more appropriate human resource management practices are in the perception of employees, the more attractive the organization is perceived as an employer. For the sample population of this study, the practices that have the greatest impact on employer brand are the performance appraisal practice, the training-development practice, the work-life balance practice, followed by the retirement practice, payroll, and recruitment practices, with less influence. These practices are perceived from an internal perspective, of employees who already have experience of working in different roles and who come from different industries and sectors (private and public). The results of this study are in line with those obtained from the exploratory study by Wahba and Elmanadily (2015), namely, that training-development practice and performance appraisal significantly impacts employer brand from an internal employee perspective.

Slightly surprisingly, with a negative influence we note the practice of contingent rewards (those linked to organizational performance) and the practice of safety, there being an inverse relationship. The results are in line with previous research (Highhouse et al., 2003) showing that in attractive companies, employees or potential employees are willing to accept lower salaries in exchange for the promise of an employer brand. The negative relationship between safety practice and organizational attractiveness can also be understood in terms of the fact that in organizations that already have an employer brand, employees do not need human resources management practices related to safety and security in the workplace as long as the company has an already known reputation and the employer brand is positive. Instead, we can argue that in organizations that do not benefit from an employer brand, they can become more attractive by having these practices which compensate for the lack of a strong employer brand and convey trust to employees. Moreover, this study confirms that these practices are important to a large extent for employees in both private and public organizations, thus proving that HRM practices are found implemented to a large extent in public organizations and there are no major differences between them in terms of implemented practices.

Although these results may seem counterintuitive, since there are differences between the structures and cultures of public and private organizations, we believe that they could be explained by the fact that both private and public environments are trying to adapt to the increasingly challenging workforce environment, adopting similar HRM practices in an attempt to attract and retain talent, and these practices may be similarly valued by employees in all sectors, leading to comparable perceptions. In addition, public organizations may adopt practices commonly associated with the private sector to increase efficiency and effectiveness. On the other hand, cultural, economic and social contextual factors could have an influence on the perception of HRM practices, more than organizational factors. In other regions or countries, there may be more pronounced differences

TABLE 9 Hypotheses and relationship between studied constructs.

Hypothesis	Description	Confirmation (yes/no)
H1	There is a direct and positive link between the Training and development practice (TD) and the employer attractiveness (EMP)	Yes
H2	There is a direct and positive link between the Contingent pay and rewards practice (REW) and the employer attractiveness (EMP)	No
H3	There is a direct and positive link between the Performance appraisal practice (PERF) and the employer attractiveness (EMP)	Yes
H4	There is a direct and positive link between the Recruitment and selection practice (RS) and the employer attractiveness (EMP)	Yes
H5	There is a direct and positive link between the Competitive salary practice (SAL) and the employer attractiveness (EMP)	Yes
H6	There is a direct and positive link between the Employment security (SEC) practice and the employer attractiveness (EMP)	No
H7	There is a direct and positive link between Work-life balance practice (WKB) and the employer attractiveness (EMP)	Yes
H8	There is a direct and positive link between the Exit management practice (EM) and the employer attractiveness (EMP)	Yes
H9	There is a significant difference between the private and the public sector in terms of the perception of HRM practices that influence organizational attractiveness	Yes

TABLE 10 SEM model on subgroup private and public sector.

Variable/private sector	P(> z)	β
EMP ~		
FD	0.859	-0.013
REW	0.477	0.083
PERF	0.000**	0.511
RS	0.524	-0.042
SAL	0.485	-0.073
SEC	0.004**	-0.228
WKB	0.000**	0.315
EM	0.094	0.167
** $p < 0.01$ (significant)		

Variable/public sector	P(> z)	β
EMP ~		
FD	0.000**	0.493
REW	0.165	-0.179
PERF	0.000**	0.301
RS	0.462	0.045
SAL	0.394	0.068
SEC	0.068	0.118
WKB	0.012	0.189
EM	0.405	0.078
** $p < 0.01$ (significant)		

in the perception of HRM practices between the public and private sectors.

However, our research also revealed some differences between sectors. In the private sector, from employees' perspective, the practice of performance appraisal, job security and work-life balance is more important, whereas in the public sector the practice of performance appraisal and training and development is more important, naturally

following the logic of organizational objectives (performance and profit in the private sector, service quality in the public sector) and proving to be directly linked to increasing internal organizational attractiveness and the positive image of the employer brand regardless of the sector of activity.

When it comes to the relationship between employer brand attractiveness and employer brand dimensions, employees perceive the market value dimension (newly defined value) the most important, having the following attributes: competent and honest managers, company has quality products/services, innovative employer, employees value creativity, followed by the development value dimension (how much the employer offers development opportunities), social and interest value associated with the work environment, professional-personal life balance value and lastly application value. In contrast to other studies (Roy, 2008; Arachchige and Robertson, 2011; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Almiçık et al., 2014; Reis and Braga, 2016) that identified employer attractiveness dimensions on student/employee samples, we note that for internal employees the market and development value dimensions score higher than the social and interest value. This can be explained first by the quality of the respondents as current employees who may have different work expectations than potential employees and these expectations may change over time. Second, there is a different perspective on the organization's attractiveness, existing employees know the organization from the inside compared to potential employees who see the organization through the image conveyed and formed externally.

Other important finding that emerges from this research is that employees attach great importance to the fair evaluation of their performance regardless of the sector (public/private) followed by the existence of professional development programs (more significant for the public sector) and work-life balance (for the private sector) and organizational attractiveness is not necessarily increased by adopting contingent reward and job security practices. The significance of training and development programs was also underscored by Gould-Williams (2004) in this research within the public sector.

This study has several limitations. It was conducted in the Western area of Romania (Timisoara and surrounding areas), potentially limiting its applicability to the broader Romanian labor force. The study is specific to the Western region of Romania which is an

important hub in the automotive and IT industry in Romania with organizations that attract workforce from all over the Western region. However, the rational selection of the sample, which respects the logic of the economic-administrative structure of the Western region of Romania, allows the generalization of the results to a regional level. Thus, future studies may include a more diversified sample, representing other regions of Romania that may have different regional characteristics of the workforce (industry of origin, size of organization, specificity of jobs). Another limitation is given by the type of study conducted, which is not a longitudinal one that could provide information on the dynamics over time of the concepts studied and the causality of the relationships between them. Future studies may test the causality between these concepts and the present study may constitute a reference point given the fact that it was conducted in a pre-pandemic context.

This research was conducted between November 2019 and February 2020, in a pre-pandemic context, and can serve as a benchmark in analyzing the dynamics of the influence that HRM practices had on organizational attractiveness during the pandemic period, considering that the pandemic changed the way employees work and remote working became an almost common HRM practice in both the private and public sectors. Also, employees' needs for safety-security, socialization and work-life balance have become much more important and may change the way employees currently perceive HRM practices. Thus, it would be of interest to replicate this study in a new post-pandemic context, using the same tools to see if the results remain the same or if they differ from the current ones. Other possible research direction may be to calibrate the scale for human resources management practices taking into consideration that the pandemic and the opening of a global labor market has significantly changed the work context and employees attach greater importance to the possibility of working from home or remotely and having work-life balance. Also, the ways of assessing employees' performance, who now work more out of the office, require suitable adjustments regarding the context in which they work now.

The results of this study have several theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective the present study contributes to the existing literature by confirming the relationship between HRM practices and organizational attractiveness from an employee perspective for both private and public sector and highlights certain differences between the two types of companies. Regarding the managerial implications, human resources managers and employer branding specialists should develop employer branding strategies that consider how internal employees perceive the attractiveness of the organization through HRM practices. For example, employers may develop performance appraisal systems that are perceived as fair, transparent, and aligned with employee development goals. Also, comprehensive training and development programs should be tailored to employees' career aspirations and organizational needs. Moreover, companies may consider implementing several flexible work arrangements in order to ensure the work-life balance, which proved to be a very important aspect for the respondents of this study. Another initiative to ensure this balance is to provide support for managing workload, stress and personal problems. Furthermore, they should tailor their employer brand communication strategies to resonate with potential employees by presenting an authentic image of the employer brand supported by current employees.

This study provides a fresh approach to crafting employer branding strategies, emphasizing the crucial role of human resources management practices within organizations, but especially how they are perceived and experienced by current employees, across both private and public sectors. The present study highlighted the impact of these practices through their authentic value that can be added to the image of the organization as an employer, which in turn influences organizational attractiveness among current employees. The study suggests that the more HRM practices are perceived by the employees as appropriate to their needs, the more they perceive the company as an attractive employer. For the study's sample population, the practices of performance appraisal, training and development, and work-life balance were highlighted as important factors that play a crucial role in employer brand attractiveness.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Council of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, from Transilvania University of Brasov (No.19. 11/10/2019). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

F-MB: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. MV-Ş: Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. IS: Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Resources, Methodology. CC: Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Validation. EC: Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Validation.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated

organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

- Aggerholm, H. K., Andersen, S. E., and Thomsen, C. (2011). Conceptualising employer branding in sustainable organisations. *Corp. Commun. Int. J.* 16, 105–123. doi: 10.1108/13563281111141642
- Alniaçık, E., Alniaçık, Ü., Erat, S., and Akçin, K. (2014). Attracting talented employees to the company: do we need different employer branding strategies in different cultures? *Procedia Soc. Behav. Sci.* 150, 336–344. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.09.074
- Alves, P., Santos, V., Reis, I., Martinho, F., Martinho, D., Correia Sampaio, M., et al. (2020). Strategic talent management: the impact of employer branding on the affective commitment of employees. *Sustain. For.* 12:9993. doi: 10.3390/su12239993
- Ambler, T., and Barrow, S. (1996). The employer brand. *J. Brand Manag.* 4, 185–206. doi: 10.1057/bm.1996.42
- App, S., Merk, J., and Büttgen, M. (2012). Employer branding: sustainable HRM as a competitive advantage in the market for high-quality employees. *Manag. Rev.* 23, 262–278. doi: 10.1688/1861-9908_mrev_2012_03_App
- Appelbaum, E., Bailey, T., Berg, P., and Kalleberg, A. (2000). Manufacturing advantage: Why high-performance work systems pay off. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 119–140.
- Arachchige, B. J., and Robertson, A. (2011). Business student perceptions of a preferred employer: a study identifying determinants of employer branding. *IUP J. Brand Manag.* 8, 25–46.
- Ashforth, E., and Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* 14, 20–39. doi: 10.2307/258189
- Baciu, L., and Virgă, D. (2018). Wellbeing and turnover intentions among Romanian social workers. *Soc. Work Rev.* 19, 89–107.
- Backhaus, K. (2016). Employer branding revisited. *Organ. Manag. J.* 13, 193–201. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2016.1245128
- Backhaus, K. B., and Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Dev. Int.* 9, 501–517. doi: 10.1108/13620430410550754
- Bakanauskienė, I., Bendaravičienė, R., and Barkauskė, L. (2017). Organizational attractiveness: an empirical study on employees' attitudes in Lithuanian business sector. *Probl. Perspect. Manag.* 15, 4–18. doi: 10.21511/ppm.15(2).2017.01
- Barrow, S., and Mosley, R. (2005). The employer brand: bringing the best of brand management to people at work. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 85–126.
- Baum, M., and Kabst, R. (2013). How to attract applicants in the Atlantic versus the Asia-Pacific region? A cross-national analysis on China, India, Germany, and Hungary. *J. World Bus.* 48, 175–185. doi: 10.1016/j.jwb.2012.07.002
- Benraiss-Noailles, L., and Viot, C. (2021). Employer brand equity effects on employees well-being and loyalty. *J. Bus. Res.* 126, 605–613. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.02.002
- Berthon, P., Ewing, M., and Hah, L. L. (2005). Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *Int. J. Advert.* 24, 151–172. doi: 10.1080/02650487.2005.11072912
- Boon, C., Den Hartog, D. N., Boselie, P., and Pauwe, J. (2011). The relationship between perceptions of HR practices and employee outcomes: examining the role of person-organisation and person-job fit. *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manag.* 22, 138–162. doi: 10.1080/09585192.2011.538978
- Boon, C., Den Hartog, D. N., and Lepak, D. P. (2019). A systematic review of human resource management systems and their measurement. *J. Manag.* 45, 2498–2537. doi: 10.1177/0149206318818718
- Boselie, P., Dietz, G., and Boon, C. (2005). Commonalities and contradictions in HRM and performance research. *Hum. Resour. Manag. J.* 15, 67–94. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-8583.2005.tb00154.x
- Cable, D. M., and Turban, D. B. (2003). The value of organizational reputation in the recruitment context: a brand-equity perspective. *J. Appl. Soc. Psychol.* 33, 2244–2266. doi: 10.1111/j.1559-1816.2003.tb01883.x
- Cascio, W. F., and Graham, B. Z. (2016). New strategic role for HR: leading the employer-branding process. *Organ. Manag. J.* 13, 182–192. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2016.1244640
- Celani, A., and Singh, P. (2011). Signaling theory and applicant attraction outcomes. *Pers. Rev.* 40, 222–238. doi: 10.1108/00483481111106093
- Combs, J., Liu, Y., Hall, A., and Ketchen, D. (2006). How much do high-performance work practices matter? A meta-analysis of their effects on organizational performance. *Pers. Psychol.* 59, 501–528. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6570.2006.00045.x
- Datta, D. K., Guthrie, J. P., and Wright, P. M. (2005). Human resource management and labor productivity: does industry matter? *Acad. Manag. J.* 48, 135–145. doi: 10.5465/amj.2005.15993158
- Deepa, R., and Baral, R. (2022). Is my employee still attracted to me? Understanding the impact of integrated communication and choice of communication channels on employee attraction. *Corp. Commun. Int. J.* 27, 110–126. doi: 10.1108/CCIJ-09-2020-0136
- Den Hartog, D. N., Boon, C., Verburg, R. M., and Croon, M. A. (2013). HRM, communication, satisfaction, and perceived performance: a cross-level test. *J. Manag.* 39, 1637–1665. doi: 10.1177/0149206312440118
- DeVellis, R. F. (2009). Scale development. Theory and applications. Applied social research methods series, vol. 26. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Edgar, F., and Geare, A. (2005). HRM practice and employee attitudes: different measures—different results. *Pers. Rev.* 34, 534–549. doi: 10.1108/00483480510612503
- Edwards, M. R. (2010). An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory. *Pers. Rev.* 39, 5–23. doi: 10.1108/00483481011012809
- Elegbe, J. A. (2018). Determinants of success of employer branding in a start-up firm in Nigeria. *Thunderbird Int. Bus. Rev.* 60, 265–277. doi: 10.1002/tie.21897
- El-Ghalayini, Y. (2017). Human resource management practices and organizational performance in public sector organization. *J. Bus. Stud. Q.* 8:65.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (2015). *User guide to the SME definition*, Publications Office, p. 41. Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2873/620234> (Accessed August 15, 2018)
- Franca, V., and Pahor, M. (2012). The strength of the employer brand: influences and implications for recruiting. *J. Mark. Manag.* 27, 58–63. doi: 10.1515/eb-2015-0009
- Gittell, J. H., Seidner, R., and Wimbush, J. (2010). A relational model of how high-performance work systems work. *Organ. Sci.* 21, 490–506. doi: 10.1287/orsc.1090.0446
- Gould-Williams, J. (2004). The effects of 'high commitment' HRM practices on employee attitude: the views of public sector workers. *Public Adm.* 82, 63–81. doi: 10.1111/j.0033-3298.2004.00383.x
- Grajdieru, E., and Khechoyan, T. (2019). The Main attributes of the employers' attractiveness—a cross-National Analysis on Romania, Italy and Armenia. *Bull. Transilvania Univ. Brasov. Ser. V: Econ. Sci.* 12, 97–106. doi: 10.31926/but.es.2019.12.61.13
- Guest, D. E. (2011). Human resource management and performance: still searching for some answers. *Hum. Resour. Manag. J.* 21, 3–13. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-8583.2010.00164.x
- Heilmann, P., Saarenketo, S., and Liikkanen, K. (2013). Employer branding in power industry. *Int. J. Energy Sect. Manag.* 7, 283–302. doi: 10.1108/IJESM-03-2012-0003
- Highhouse, S., Lievens, F., and Sinar, E. F. (2003). Measuring attraction to organizations. *Educ. Psychol. Meas.* 63, 986–1001. doi: 10.1177/0013164403258403
- Hitka, M., Kucharčíková, A., Štarchoň, P., Balázová, Ž., Lukáč, M., and Stacho, Z. (2019). Knowledge and human capital as sustainable competitive advantage in human resource management. *Sustain. For.* 11:4985. doi: 10.3390/su11184985
- Jiang, T., and İles, P. (2011). Employer-brand equity, organizational attractiveness and talent management in the Zhejiang private sector. *J. Technol. Manag. China* 6, 97–110. doi: 10.1108/17468771111105686
- Jiang, K., Lepak, D. P., Hu, J., and Baer, J. C. (2012). How does human resource management influence organizational outcomes? A meta-analytic investigation of mediating mechanisms. *Acad. Manag. J.* 55, 1264–1294. doi: 10.5465/amj.2011.0088
- Joo, B. K., and Mclean, G. N. (2006). Best employer studies: a conceptual model from a literature review and a case study. *Hum. Resour. Dev.* 5, 228–257. doi: 10.1177/1534484306287515
- Khilji, S. E., and Wang, X. (2006). Intended' and 'implemented' HRM: the missing linchpin in strategic human resource management research. *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manag.* 17, 1171–1189. doi: 10.1080/09585190600756384
- Kristof, A. L. (1996). Person-organization fit: an integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. *Pers. Psychol.* 49, 1–49. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6570.1996.tb01790.x
- Kucherov, D., and Zavyalova, E. (2012). HRD practices and talent management in the companies with the employer brand. *Eur. J. Train. Dev.* 36, 86–104. doi: 10.1108/03090591211192647
- Kunerth, B., and Mosley, R. (2011). Applying employer brand management to employee engagement. *Strateg. HR Rev.* 10, 19–26. doi: 10.1108/1475439111121874

- Lievens, F. (2007). Employer branding in the Belgian Army: the importance of instrumental and symbolic beliefs for potential applicants, actual applicants, and military employees. *Hum. Resour. Manag.* 46, 51–69. doi: 10.1002/hrm.20145
- Love, L. F., and Singh, P. (2011). Workplace branding: leveraging human resources management practices for competitive advantage through 'best employer' surveys. *J. Bus. Psychol.* 26, 175–181. doi: 10.1007/s10869-011-9226-5
- Manpower Group. (2024). *Global Talent Shortage*. Available at <https://go.manpowergroup.com/talent-shortage> (Accessed May 04, 2024).
- Martin, G., Beaumont, P., Doig, R., and Pate, J. (2005). Branding: a new performance discourse for HR? *Eur. Manag. J.* 23, 76–88. doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2004.12.011
- Maurya, K. K., and Agarwal, M. (2018). Organisational talent management and perceived employer branding. *Int. J. Organ. Anal.* 26, 312–330. doi: 10.1108/IJOA-04-2017-1147
- Maxwell, R., and Knox, S. (2009). Motivating employees to "live the brand": a comparative case study of employer brand attractiveness within the firm. *J. Mark. Manag.* 25, 893–907. doi: 10.1362/026725709X479282
- Pauwe, J. (2009). HRM and performance: achievements, methodological issues and prospects. *J. Manag. Stud.* 46, 129–142. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6486.2008.00809.x
- Parmar, A. (2014). The role of HR department in employer branding at public and private sector. *J. Hum. Resour. Manag. Labor Stud.* 2, 201–225.
- Rampl, L. V. (2014). How to become an employer of choice: transforming employer brand associations into employer first-choice brands. *J. Mark. Manag.* 30, 1486–1504. doi: 10.1080/0267257X.2014.934903
- Rampl, L. V., and Kenning, P. (2014). Employer brand trust and affect: linking brand personality to employer brand attractiveness. *Eur. J. Mark.* 48, 218–236. doi: 10.1108/EJM-02-2012-0113
- Reis, G. G., and Braga, M. B. (2016). Employer attractiveness from a generational perspective: implications for employer branding. *Rev. Administração* 51, 103–116. doi: 10.5700/rausp1226
- Roy, S. K. (2008). Identifying the dimensions of attractiveness of an employer brand in the Indian context. *South Asian J. Manag.* 15, 110–130.
- Sandeepanie, M. H. R., Gamage, P., Perera, G. D. N., and Sajewani, T. L. (2023). The role of talent management and employee psychological contract on employer branding: a pragmatic conceptual model. *Manag. Res. Rev.* 46, 196–222. doi: 10.1108/MRR-02-2021-0136
- Sarkianaite, I., and Sciukauske, I. (2021). The assessment of employer brand impact on the attraction of employees in international organization. *Transform. Bus. Econ.* 20, 387–404.
- Schneider, B., Goldstein, H. W., and Smith, D. B. (1995). The ASA framework: an update. *Pers. Psychol.* 48, 747–773. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6570.1995.tb01780.x
- Schuler, R. S., and Jackson, S. E. (1987). Linking competitive strategies with human resource management practices. *Acad. Manag. Perspect.* 1, 207–219. doi: 10.5465/ame.1987.4275740
- Sengupta, A., Bamel, U., and Singh, P. (2015). Value proposition framework: implications for employer branding. *Decision* 42, 307–323. doi: 10.1007/s40622-015-0097-x
- Šinčić Čorić, D., and Špoljarić, A. (2021). The origins of internal communication and employer branding in marketing theories. *Commun. Manage. Rev.* 6, 30–45. doi: 10.22522/cmr20210163
- Sivertzen, A. M., Nilsen, E., and Olafsen, H. A. (2013). Employer branding: employer attractiveness and the use of social media. *J. Prod. Brand Manag.* 22, 473–483. doi: 10.1108/JPBM-09-2013-0393
- Špoljarić, A., and Ozretić Došen, Đ. (2023). Employer brand and international employer brand: literature review. *Corp. Commun. Int. J.* 28, 671–682. doi: 10.1108/CCIJ-11-2022-0141
- Špoljarić, A., and Tkalac Verčič, A. (2022). Internal communication satisfaction and employee engagement as determinants of the employer brand. *J. Commun. Manag.* 26, 130–148. doi: 10.1108/JCOM-01-2021-0011
- Sullivan, J. (2004). Eight elements of a successful employment brand. *ER Daily*, 23, 501–517. Available at: <http://www.ere.net/2004/02/23/the-8-elements-of-a-successful-employment-brand/> (Accessed February 21, 2014).
- Swami, V., Mohd Khatib, N. A., Vidal-Mollón, J., Vintila, M., Barron, D., Goian, C., et al. (2020). Visits to natural environments improve state body appreciation: evidence from Malaysia, Romania, and Spain. *Ecopsychology* 12, 24–35. doi: 10.1089/eco.2019.0065
- Theurer, C. P., Tumasjan, A., Welpe, I. M., and Lievens, F. (2018). Employer branding: a brand equity-based literature review and research agenda. *Int. J. Manag. Rev.* 20, 155–179. doi: 10.1111/ijmr.12121
- Verčič, A. T. (2021). The impact of employee engagement, organisational support and employer branding on internal communication satisfaction. *Public Relat. Rev.* 47:102009. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102009
- Villajos, E., Tordera, N., Peiro, J., and Van Veldhoven, M. (2018). Refinement and validation of a comprehensive scale for measuring HR practices aimed at performance-enhancement and employee-support. *Eur. Manag. J.* 37, 387–397. doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2018.10.003
- Virgă, D., Baciu, E.-L., Lazăr, T.-A., and Lupșa, D. (2020). Psychological capital protects social workers from burnout and secondary traumatic stress. *Sustainability* 12:2246. doi: 10.3390/su12062246
- Wahba, M., and Elmanadily, D. (2015). Human resources management practices & employer branding comparative study between service and product sector. *Int. E-J. Adv. Soc. Sci.* 1, 255–262. doi: 10.18769/ijasos.57050
- Wood, S. J., and Wall, T. D. (2007). Work enrichment and employee voice in human resource management-performance studies. *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manag.* 18, 1335–1372. doi: 10.1080/09585190701394150