Employer Branding – Employer Attractiveness as a New Mindset in the Healthcare Sector

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Abstract: The shortage of skilled labour, demographic change and ever-increasing cost pressures are presenting healthcare organisations with key challenges in the areas of strategy, leadership and portfolio management. In the Federal Republic of Germany, there is an acute shortage of skilled workers in 352 of 801 occupational groups (44% of all occupational groups). Effective employer branding is the only way to sustainably increase employer attractiveness and generate competitive advantages on the labour market. Employer branding is the identity-based development and positioning of a company as an attractive employer. The aim of the article is to identify relevant characteristics of employer attractiveness, which can be located in particular in the perception of IT specialists. The identification of these characteristics should help organizations to optimize their personnel policy in the long term. The authors chose the mixed-methods research approach. The hypothesis system is conceptualized and operationalized within the framework of structural equation modelling (SEM). The practical relevance of the findings from the quantitative research is examined in expert interviews. The data analysis is based on qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz. Due to the research background, data collection is limited to the EU member state Germany. The shift in the balance of power in the labour market towards employees is not a development that can be limited to Europe. In a globalized world, companies have access to a wider talent pool, but are also exposed to increased competition for the best talent. A strong employer brand enables companies to stand out and attract top talent. The empirical results show that a positively perceived employer attractiveness can achieve the employer branding goals of recruiting employees and retaining them in the long term. The clever combination of tangible and intangible benefits, embedded in a modern corporate and error culture (mindset), is decisive in determining whether qualitative growth of the organization is possible.

Keywords: skills shortage; information technology; employer branding; competitive advantage; structural equation model; health care.

Introduction

The German healthcare system has undergone significant changes in recent years, with digitalization and information technology (IT) playing a central role. The digitalization of the German healthcare system is a central concern on the political agenda and is being driven by various initiatives (Cobelli & Blasioli, 2023). With the introduction of the electronic patient record in 2021, patients will be able to store their medical data securely and digitally. Medical stakeholders can access this data to coordinate and improve treatment. The telematics infrastructure is a nationwide network that enables the secure exchange of healthcare data between different players in the healthcare system. It forms the technical basis for the electronic patient file and other digital healthcare applications. Furthermore, the e-prescription is intended to replace paper-based prescriptions in the future and simplify processes. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of

digitalization and telemedicine. The German government has promoted the use of telemedicine during the pandemic and plans to further expand this form of medical care. Laws and EU regulations set high standards for the protection of health data (BMBF, 2020; BMG, 2023). Although Germany has made progress in the digitalization and IT of healthcare, challenges remain in the context of interoperability, data protection/ethics and funding/resources (Brunetti et al., 2020; Cobelli & Blasioli, 2023). The digital maturity level of healthcare institutions is still characterized by significant differences. Existing studies focus on the technological gap between less digitized and advanced digitized facilities and neglect the fact that German companies in all industries lack 137,000 IT specialists and that companies in the healthcare sector compete strongly with companies from other industries in this market. This presents companies in the healthcare sector with the challenge of positioning themselves as an attractive employer in the labor market for IT specialists (Amelung et al., 2022; Berg, 2022; Betts et al., 2020; Heider-Winter, 2014). This requires employees with new skills. Re-, up- and cross-skilling programs should provide an answer - also to the shortage of skilled workers (Kulkarni et al., 2020).

The shift from an employer market to an employee market is forcing companies to rethink the way they recruit and retain skilled workers. The applicant decides which offer or which company they consider attractive. Employer branding and employer attractiveness are thus gaining increasing strategic importance (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021; Fahim, 2018; Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2019; Ruthus, 2014). This leads to the research question: How can companies in the healthcare sector increase their attractiveness as an employer in order to attract and retain qualified IT specialists for the healthcare sector in the long term? By focusing the research question on the specific needs and challenges of companies in the healthcare sector, this work can help generate practical insights and support organizations in effectively developing and positioning their employer brand by increasing the quality of their employer attractiveness. In order to answer the aforementioned research question, the factors that determine employer attractiveness are determined on a theoretical basis and empirically tested for employees in the IT sector of the healthcare industry. In addition, recommendations are derived as to how employer branding can be used advantageously in companies in the sector in order to acquire employees and retain them in the company in the long term.

While the demand for IT specialists in the German healthcare sector will increase even further, studies on employer attractiveness and work on attracting and retaining qualified specialists focus on medical and nursing staff. The fact that specialists often avoid the curative sector due to more attractive alternatives, or that they switch to other sectors of the economy for this reason, is not a surprising phenomenon. The Ramboll report (2004) and the cross-industry study by Hasebrook et al. (2014) have already pointed this out. Qualified staff is a decisive success and competitive factor for healthcare facilities, both in the curative and administrative areas. The top priority must be to ensure performance in this area too.

The authors choose the mixed-methods research approach. The hypothesis system is conceptualized and operationalized within the framework of structural equation modelling (SEM). The findings from the quantitative research are tested for their practical relevance in the context of situation-flexible expert interviews.

The originality of the authors' study lies in the fact that employer attractiveness and its effect on the intention to apply and the intention to stay is explicitly examined for IT specialists. This target group has not been taken into account to an appropriate degree to date (BMG, 2023; BMGS, 2004; Federal Statistical Office, 2024; Hasebrook et al., 2014; Kaiser et al., 2005). The results show that a positively perceived employer attractiveness can achieve the employer branding goals of recruiting employees and retaining them at the company in the long term. Designing an attractive employer brand must be seen as a management task, as various factors influence employer attractiveness. Both immaterial motives such as positive job quality and material motives play a central role.

The article is structured as follows: The thematic introduction is followed by a literature review and the presentation of the central research question. The third section consists of the research methodology, which leads to the results and discussions, before the conclusions and research perspectives are presented.

Literature review

Employer branding is related to the general branding of a company and its products and services. The term "branding" originates from communication policy. A strong brand helps to ensure that the company is perceived as an attractive employer (Bruhn, 2019; Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2019). The study by Banerjee et al. (2020) reveals that a strong product and/or company brand has a positive effect on the dimensions of the employer brand. The correlations between classic products and HR marketing can also be observed. A balanced use of the various marketing instruments of the marketing mix is intended to achieve the company's market-oriented goals (Bruhn, 2019; Goi, 2009; Mattmüller & Buschmann, 2019). Communication policy ensures an exchange of information between the individual stakeholders of a company. If communication policy is considered in relation to employer branding, it is an instrument that must be used to implement an attractive employer brand (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021; Buckesfeld, 2012; Fahim, 2018; Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2019). Clever marketing activities influence the company's image as an employer and thus current and potential employees. In turn, they represent the company, its values and culture, not only to customers, but also to other stakeholders. They play a key role in the reputation of an organization. It is therefore not possible to clearly separate the areas of influence of marketing and HR (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021; Bruhn, 2019; Kulkarni et al., 2020; Mattmüller & Buschmann, 2019).

Employer branding is a term that has become the focus of companies in recent years and refers to brand management that is geared towards employees. This has led to employees also being considered as a target group (Burmann & Piehler, 2013; Mattmüller & Buschmann, 2019). The aim of the employer brand is to convey a positive employer image to convince applicants of the company as an employer and to recruit them. The prerequisite for a memorable employer brand is the existence of a target group-oriented concept and a promise of quality that meets the expectations of the target group (Bruhn, 2019; Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2019). Employer branding encompasses all strategic and operational measures to increase productivity as well as the recruitment, retention and motivation of employees in the labor market. The aim of employer branding is to present an authentic and attractive image as an employer both internally and externally, thereby creating a competitive advantage (USP) (Berthon et al., 2005; Fahim, 2018; Iles & Jiang, 2011; Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2019). The aim is to make the corporate culture, brand image and employer quality more attractive both internally for existing employees and externally for potential employees. The employer brand is the set of characteristics of an organization that is attractive to potential and current employees and sufficiently unique to set an employer apart from the competition in the job market. The emphasis here is on the totality of characteristics. Accordingly, individual aspects do not necessarily have to be particularly unique or innovative in order to ensure the subjective attractiveness of potential or current employees towards the employer, but rather the synergetic combination of individual aspects (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Berthon et al., 2005; Iles & Jiang, 2011; Theurer et al., 2018). In the following, employer branding is understood as a key function of strategic HR marketing with the aim of establishing the desired employer image in the company's target groups (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Fahim, 2018; Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2019; Kulkarni et al., 2020; Theurer et al., 2018).

Employer branding in the healthcare sector (Heider-Winter, 2014) has gained strategic importance in recent years due to various challenges and legal changes (Berry & Martin, 2019; Brunetti et al., 2020). The shortage of skilled workers in the healthcare sector is a persistent problem that will increasingly affect the IT sector of this industry in the context of digitalization. The German Federal Ministry of Health's digitalization project aims to

make medical care more efficient and patient oriented. In addition to medical experts, IT experts play an important role here, including in the innovative design of the digital transformation (Berry & Martin, 2019; Brunetti et al., 2020; Pirkkalainen et al., 2022). The increasing demand for digital healthcare solutions and the need to network medical healthcare facilities require qualified IT experts. The lack of such specialists not only leads to technological bottlenecks, but also to security risks in the healthcare sector (Berry & Martin, 2019). Corporate reputation" refers to the association that current and potential employees have with the company. The literature refers here to a reference effect that influences perception as an employer (Bruhn et al., 2013; Gansser, 2014; Petkovic, 2008). Based on the previous findings, the following hypothesis (H1) is formulated:

H1. Company reputation (UR) has a positive effect on perceived employer attractiveness (AA).

Work content" includes, for example, ergonomic standards, scope for action and decision-making or the tasks performed by an employee that contribute to the overall performance of a company. Job content influences employer attractiveness via job satisfaction (Berthon et al. 2005; Bruhn et al., 2013; Gansser, 2014; Petkovic, 2008; Wiese & Stertz, 2019). Based on the previous findings, the following hypothesis (H2) is formulated:

H2. Job content (AI) has a positive effect on perceived employer attractiveness (AA).

Employer branding in healthcare should not only be based on external factors such as salary and benefits but should also create a mindset that emphasizes the values and mission of the organization (Bruhn et al., 2013). A strong employer brand should emphasize the importance of the company's core competence as a holistic construct. In the context of employer attractiveness, the organizational and digital mindset concept will play an increasingly important role. Companies that promote digital innovation and transformation are perceived as attractive by IT specialists in particular. A digital mindset in the healthcare industry means recognizing and accepting the opportunities and challenges of digitalization (Betts, 2020; Brunetti et al., 2020) in order to continuously improve the quality of medical care and increase efficiency through targeted measures (Alsheyab et al., 2023). In addition to remuneration, the "material aspects" also include the potential for increases and employee benefits, which influence the perception of an employer (Bruhn et al., 2013; Gansser, 2014; Grobe 2003; Petkovic, 2008). Based on the previous findings, the following hypothesis (H3) is formulated:

H3. The material aspects (MA) have a positive effect on the perceived employer attractiveness (AA).

The sustainability mindset, which emphasizes ecological, economic, and social responsibility, also has an impact on employer attractiveness. Organizations that integrate sustainability into their business models (Alsheyab et al., 2023; Menchini et al., 2022; Troisi et al., 2023) are perceived as ethical and attractive by employees. Studies, such as that by Jones et al. (2018), show that employees are increasingly looking for sustainable, responsible and resource-conserving employers (Alsheyab et al., 2023). Based on the previous findings, the following hypothesis (H4) is formulated:

H4. Social values (SW) have a positive effect on perceived employer attractiveness (AA).

Traditional status symbols and reward systems as well as rigid working time models tend not to inspire demanding young professionals. Instead, existing systems are critically questioned as to how the job can be reconciled with their own interests and values (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021; Dannhäuser, 2017; Ruthus, 2014). Modern bonus systems and an appreciative corporate culture improve employee motivation and work-life balance at the same time (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021; Fortmann & Kolocek, 2018). Another important factor is how interesting and varied a job profile is (Bruch et al., 2015;

Bruhn et al., 2013). Based on the previous findings, the following hypothesis (H5) is formulated:

H5. Work-life balance (WLB) has a positive effect on perceived employer attractiveness (AA).

Hypotheses six and seven are based on the reflection of the results of the study by Clausnitzer et al. (2022) on the topic of employer branding. The recruitment of talent from abroad is also becoming increasingly strategically important (Crowley-Henry et al., 2021; Ruppel et al., 2022; Schnack, 2022). The German Skilled Immigration Act facilitates the immigration of qualified skilled workers from abroad. In this context, it is important that the employer branding strategy includes a sustainable integration and onboarding process that supports perceived employer attractiveness (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021; Heider-Winter, 2014; Hirt et al., 2017). The German Hospital Future Act is intended to make a further contribution and aims to modernize hospitals. Employers in the healthcare sector must build and maintain their employer brand in a targeted manner in order to attract and retain the urgently needed skilled workers in the long term (Heider-Winter, 2014; Hirt et al., 2017; Jotabá et al., 2022). Emphasizing values and innovation can help to establish a strong and attractive employer brand (Crowley-Henry et al., 2021; Ruppel et al., 2022; Schnack, 2022) and at the same time highlight the healthcare sector as an attractive working environment. Based on the previous findings, the following hypothesis (H6 and H7) are formulated:

H6. The greater the perceived employer attractiveness (AA), the higher the intention to apply (BWA).
H7. The greater the perceived employer attractiveness (AA), the greater the intention to stay with the respective company (BLA) (see Figure 1).
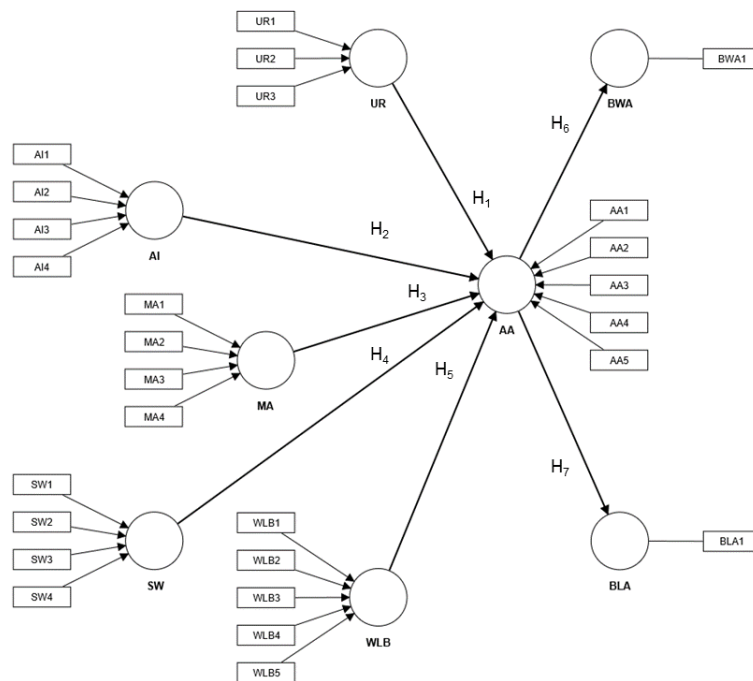

Figure 1. Research model for employer attractiveness
Source: own processing

In this context, seven hypotheses were formulated based on the literature. These form the basis of the forthcoming investigation and analysis of the presumed cause-and-effect relationships. Based on the previous explanations, Figure 1 visualizes the structural model

of the causal analysis of this study. By abstracting empirically not directly observable facts, constructs were formed, which were provided with indicators in the context of conceptualization. In the context of this work, the choice of model was made in favor of a formative measurement model, so variance-based estimation using PLS analysis is used to test the causal model (Eberl, 2006; Schröder, 2017; Weiber & Sarstedt, 2021).

Methodology

This article uses the mixed method approach, which is the combination of qualitative and quantitative research (Kuckartz, 2018). The mixed method approach is characterized by the fact that qualitative and quantitative methods are combined when collecting data. The data relate to the same research interest, but different perspectives are used in relation to the research subject (Kelle, 2019; Kuckartz, 2018). The insights gained were reflected and discussed in n = 9 situation-flexible expert discussions. Through the openness of qualitative data, subjective perspectives, opinions and/or impulses for improvements are discovered. In addition, the mixed method approach increases validity.

The health industry represents a cross-sectional industry within the German economy. Its coverage is based on a definition of the national industry conference from 2005. Accordingly, the health industry includes the creation and marketing of goods and services that serve to preserve and restore health. The healthcare industry is divided into three overarching areas - medical care, industrial healthcare, and other sub-areas. With a total gross value added of 439.6 billion euros and around 8 million employees, this area is an important economic factor in Germany (BMWK, 2022).

Due to the diverging objectives of the sometimes-regional focus, the comparability of researched studies is only possible to a limited extent. In this context, many of the studies make no claim to representativeness or generalization of the results, which becomes clear from the very different structures of the underlying samples. The empirical study includes companies in the healthcare industry in Germany, which primarily follow the systematization of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection: medical care, industrial healthcare, and other facilities.

In 2022, 8,100,000 people were employed in the individual sectors. The IT areas provide around 83,500 jobs (triangulated), which corresponds to 1.03% (BMWK, 2022). Naturally, the planning of the sample size is always based on subjective assumptions. To put the resulting influence into perspective, this study was based on the parameters selected in previous studies (Singh & Masuku, 2014). Based on the population of 83,500 people, a required sample size of n = 96 is recommended (confidence level: 95%, margin of error: 10%). The quantitative analysis shows that the effective response of 136 usable answer sheets allows representative statements about the population (Hill, 1998; Singh & Masuku, 2014) (Table 1).

Table 1. Structure of the initial sample

Sector	Number of organisations	in %
Medical care	89	35.74
Industrial healthcare	103	41.37
Other facilities	57	22.89
Σ	249	100.00

Source: own processing

The initial sample comprised 287 companies in the health economy. Of the companies contacted, 21 could not be reached at the registered e-mail address and 12 companies formally cancelled their participation in the survey, so the initial sample was reduced to 249 companies (see Table 1). All completed questionnaires received during the survey

period were taken into account in the evaluation. In total, 136 questionnaires were returned (see Table 2). In relation to the reduced initial sample, this corresponds to a response rate of 54.62%.

Table 2. Structure of the return

Sector	Mentions absolutely	in %
Medical care	45	33.08
Industrial healthcare	58	42.64
Other facilities	33	24.26
Σ	**136**	**100.00**

Source: own processing

Results

In the context of this article, the model choice has been made in favour of a formative measurement model. For the verification of the causal model, variance-based estimation by means of PLS analysis is applied. Since least squares regression is only slightly affected by a small sample size, the PLS algorithm is also suitable for small sample sizes. "PLS follows the largest regression equation in the model as a heuristic rule for estimating the required sample size. The construct with the largest number of parameters to be estimated is multiplied by five or ten. Only rarely will the required sample size exceed 100" (Nitzl, 2010, p. 18). When using PLS analysis, the recommended minimum sample size is between 30 and 100 (Fuchs, 2011; Schröder, 2017; Weiber & Sarstedt, 2021). The PLS estimation of the causal model was carried out with the software SmartPLS version 4.

The goodness of fit of the formative measurement model

Formative indicators do not have to correlate with each other, nor is a strong correlation between a construct and the indicators assigned to it required (Chin, 1998; Diamantopulus & Winklhofer, 2001; Schröder, 2017) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Criteria for assessing the quality of the measurement model

Quality criterion	Quality type	Quality measure	Level of aspiration
Content validity		Conceptualization/ operationalization based on the theoretical framework	Qualitative preliminary phase, pretest, qualitative analysis
Reliability			
		Relevance indicator	Qualitative analysis
	Weights	Significance of the indicator weights (t-value)	t ≥ 1.650 (10 % chance of error)
	Multicollinearity	Variance inflation factor (VIF)	VIF ≤ 10

Source: own processing

In the formative measurement model, the indicators do not represent the same state of affairs, so that the methodology of the goodness-of-fit test is limited accordingly (Fuchs, 2011; Nitzl, 2010; Schloderer et al., 2009; Schröder, 2017; Weiber & Sarstedt, 2021). In the context of this article, the criteria recommended by Krafft et al. (2005) and Fuchs (2011) are used to assess the quality of the formative constructs (see Table 3): Content validity, reliability in the sense of indicator relevance and indicator significance as well as the evaluation of multicollinearity are relevant. The variance inflation factor (VIF) is a recognised indicator for testing multicollinearity (Fuchs, 2011; Krafft et al., 2005) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Statistical characteristics of the quality measures of the formative measurement model

Construct	Indicator	Coding	Weight	t-value	VIF
Company reputation **(UR)**	Good reputation	UR1	0.892	1.825	1.169
	Familiarity of the institution in the industry	UR2	0.348	1.548	1.864
	Good reference	UR3	0.837	2.767	2.937
Work content **(AI)**	Varied	AI1	0.492	2.093	2.638
	Interesting tasks	AI2	0.516	1.739	2.882
	Independent, creative tasks	AI3	0.151	0.835	2.722
	Responsibility	AI4	0.861	4.587	2.853
Material aspects **(MA)**	Salary increase	MA1	0.882	2.357	2.215
	Additional services	MA2	0.925	1.874	1.957
	General pay	MA3	0.639	1.842	1.726
	Job security	MA4	0.614	6.163	4.874
Social values **(SW)**	Team cohesion	SW1	0.891	2.975	2.927
	Social responsibility	SW2	0.190	0.381	5.089
	Working atmosphere	SW3	0.381	1.653	4.649
	Relationship with superiors	SW4	0.515	1.578	1.831
Work-life balance **(WLB)**	Childcare	WLB1	0.259	1.243	2.927
	Career planning	WLB2	0.326	1.946	2.397
	Leisure, cultural, sports activities	WLB3	−0.381	1.729	3.526
	Flexible working hours	WLB4	0.376	1.028	2.371
	Flexible workplace	WLB5	0.153	1.172	4.283
Employer attractiveness **(AA)**	Satisfaction with company reputation	AA1	0.239	1.725	4.375
	Satisfaction with the work content	AA2	0.843	6.492	3.759
	Material aspects correspond to expectations	AA3	0.927	1.982	2.942
	Social values harmonize with individual attitudes	AA4	0.435	0.947	2.153
	Work-life balance harmonizes with personal expectations	AA5	0.197	0.951	4.726
Intention to apply **(BWA)**	Positive perception of employer attractiveness	BWA	1.000	0.000	1.000
Intention to stay **(BLA)**	Positive perception of employer attractiveness	BLA	1.000	0.000	1.000

Source: own processing

Quality check of the structural model

After a reliable estimation of the constructs by the measurement model has been confirmed, the PLS estimation results of the structural model can be validated. For this purpose, research practice uses criteria (see Table 5) that allow an assessment of the path coefficients within the structural model as well as an evaluation of the constructs for their informative and predictive power (Fuchs, 2011; Weiber & Sarstedt, 2021). The coefficient of determination R^2 plays a central role in the quality test of all endogenous variables of the structural model. The higher the value, the better the fit of the regression function. A generally valid critical threshold value is not defined in the scientific literature, as this is

fundamentally dependent on the respective problem (Backhaus et al., 2011; Götz & Liehr-Gobbers, 2004). Table 6 shows the R2 values of the constructs AA, BWA and BLA.

Table 5. Criteria for assessing the quality of the structural model

Quality type	Quality criterion	Level of aspiration
Testing the constructs	**Coefficient of determination R^2**	$R^2 \geq 0.667$ (substantial) $R^2 \geq 0.333$ (moderate) $R^2 \geq 0.199$ (weak)
Testing the path coefficients	**Standardized path coefficients**	$\geq +0.1$ (with positive correlation) ≤ -0.1 (with negative correlation)
	t-value	$t \geq 1.650$ (10 % chance of error)
	Effect size f^2	$f^2 \geq 0.350$ (substantial) $f^2 \geq 0.150$ (moderate) $f^2 \geq 0.020$ (weak)

Source: own processing

Table 6. Statistical characteristics of the coefficients of determination R^2

Construct	Coding	R^2	t-value
Employer attractiveness	AA	0.692	4.473
Intention to apply	BWA	0.341	4.357
Intention to stay	BLA	0.781	4.583

Source: own processing

Significant paths that correspond to the sign determined during hypothesis formation promote empirical proof of the assumed relationship. Non-significant paths as well as paths with the opposite sign (compared to the hypothetical assumption) call the corresponding hypotheses into question but can provide important clues to further scientific questions (Fuchs, 2011; Krafft et al., 2005; Nitzl, 2010) (see Table 7 and Figure 2).

Table 7. Testing the hypotheses

Hypothesis (H)	Effect relationships/ Coding	Suspected influence	Path coefficient	t-value	f^2	H confirmed?
H_1	UR → AA	+	0.328	2.438	0.125	✓ (yes)
H_2	AI → AA	+	0.427	1.927	0.037	✓ (yes)
H_3	MA → AA	+	0.384	1.729	0.032	✓ (yes)
H_4	SW → AA	+	0.279	1.693	0.225	✓ (yes)
H_5	WLB → AA	+	0.351	2.297	0.038	✓ (yes)
H_6	AA → BWA	+	0.816	2.532	0.429	✓ (yes)
H_7	AA → BLA	+	0.787	6.276	0.542	✓ (yes)

Source: own processing

The effect size f^2 assesses the explanatory contribution of the exogenous variable to the endogenous variable. If the value exceeds 0, the existence of a general influence can be assumed (see Table 7).
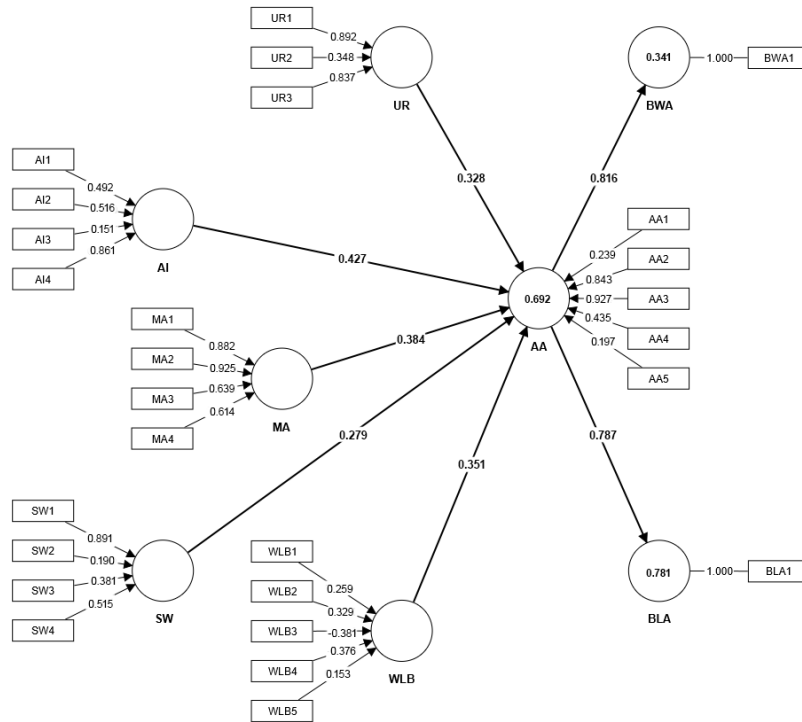
Figure 2. Representation of the path coefficients
Source: own processing

Discussion

This section interprets the results of the study and analyses their significance for the field of research. The authors begin with a summary of the most important results, followed by an interpretation and discussion of the findings. Employer branding has become a central management topic in recent years. It refers to the design and communication of an employer brand to recruit qualified specialists and retain them in the organization in the long term. Despite the widespread acceptance of employer branding, there are various aspects and approaches that are discussed, sometimes controversially, on an industry-specific basis.

After the assessment of the reliable estimation of the constructs by the measurement model was checked, the structural model was tested using the PLS estimation results. As the statistical values of the coefficients of determination R^2 show, the values for R^2 are moderate for BWA and substantial for AA and BLA. Accordingly, the fit of the regression function can be considered good. The significance with the specified error probability of 10 %, i.e. $t \geq 1.650$, is also given. All path coefficients shown in Figure 2 are greater than +0.2, meaning that a significant positive correlation can be assumed. As can be seen in the presentation of the hypothesis test, all t-values indicate that the path coefficients shown are significant. The effect size f^2 assesses the influence of an independent exogenous variable on an endogenous variable. Thus, f^2 measures the explanatory range of an exogenous variable, for example UR on the endogenous variable AA. If f^2 is greater than 0, it can be assumed that the variable has an influence. Thus, the hypotheses defined in this paper can be considered empirically confirmed.

Company reputation ($\beta = 0.328$), work content ($\beta = 0.427$), material aspects ($\beta = 0.384$) and work-life balance ($\beta = 0.351$) have a significantly higher influence on the assessment of employer attractiveness than social values ($\beta = 0.2798$). Nevertheless, all influencing variables have a significantly positive influence on employer attractiveness. This has a

considerable influence on the intention to apply to a company ($\beta = 0.816$) as well as on the intention of employees to stay ($\beta = 0.787$). The results differ significantly from the results of similar studies conducted in industry. The study by Gansser (2014), for example, shows that an overly positive work-life balance tends to have a negative impact on employee attractiveness. He argues this with the employee's perception that increased recovery from work in their free time is necessary. Employees interpret the communication of work-life balance as an indicator of a high workload (Gansser, 2014). The study by Bruhn et al. (2013) also shows that company reputation or corporate image, work content and material aspects have a significantly lower influence on employer attractiveness.

The results of our study show a different picture. Companies in the healthcare sector should not neglect any of the constructs. However, it can be assumed that over-communication of social values was considered rather untrustworthy by some of the respondents. However, at $\beta = 0.279$, the effect on employer attractiveness is so pronounced that this construct should not be neglected. However, the intensity with which the social values are communicated should be characterized by a certain restraint.

Nadler et al. (2010) and Theurer et al. (2018) state that studies with different names examine similar concepts that focus on measuring employer attractiveness, among other things. However, the constructs used for this purpose differ greatly in some cases. This is partly because studies have often only examined individual aspects of employer attractiveness, such as the influence of flexitime, and partly because the influencing factors themselves are individual within certain target groups and are constantly changing (Nadler et al., 2010; Theurer et al., 2018).

Conclusions

The aim of the study was to identify the relevant characteristics of employer attractiveness that can be located in the perception of IT specialists in particular. The authors' intention was to identify these characteristics in order to provide organizations with support for the sustainable optimization of personnel policy. The suspected cause-effect relationships were conceptualized and operationalized within the framework of structural equation modelling (SEM).

The results show that the construct of "social values" has a lower influence on employer attractiveness. Nevertheless, all influencing variables have a significantly positive impact on employer attractiveness. A modern corporate and error culture (mindset) is crucial for the qualitative growth of the organization.

The results show that a positively perceived employer attractiveness can achieve the employer branding goals of recruiting employees and retaining them in the long term. However, good pay is not enough to be perceived as an attractive employer by the target group. The combination of tangible and intangible benefits is crucial in order to positively influence employer attractiveness. If the employer attractiveness of a company is perceived positively, this has a clearly positive impact on the intention of potential employees to apply and the intention of current employees to stay with the company. Due to the specific characteristics of different companies, it is not possible to present a uniform, universally valid employer branding strategy.

Furthermore, the results show that it is easier for healthcare facilities to retain current employees in the long term through a positively perceived employer attractiveness than to recruit new employees. Due to the complexity of an employer branding strategy and the fact that current employees are also an important factor in the recruitment of new specialists and managers, it is recommended that the main focus should initially be on measures to reach the internal target group. Here, material aspects and work content can be identified as the most important factors influencing (internal) employer attractiveness.

HR policy and its innovative design by managers must be designed in such a way that it is perceived as attractive by employees. The (agile) mindset, the management style applied, and an open and transparent information and communication policy play a central role in organizational development. Personnel recruiting measures must place particular emphasis on the development of a visible and positive employer brand. Relevant company-internal unique selling points such as job content, material aspects, work-life balance as well as practiced social values must be communicated to the outside world. Social media offers the ideal platform to maximize the digital discoverability of the company.

Creating an attractive employer brand must be seen as a management task in organizations. Many industries have clear problems in meeting their need for skilled workers. Conventional methods no longer seem to work these days. Affected companies are required to take measures and find new ways to acquire and retain suitable personnel. Due to demographic change and the global coronavirus pandemic, the situation has escalated noticeably in recent years. Now more than ever, it is important to secure the best starting position, do your homework and understand how to organize the handling of the scarce resource "personnel" at all levels of the company. Cooperative and value-oriented management styles help to understand the communication behavior of stakeholders. For example, Generation Y and Z organize themselves via social networks and exchange information intensively via these networks. This means that the workforce of an organization is not only a target group, but as ambassadors of a company, they become actors in brand management.

A new research perspective could be defined from the construct "social values", which was highlighted by the study. Practice shows clear discrepancies between communicated social values and their implementation in management or the behavior of managers. This leads to the so-called "psychological contract" according to Rousseau and its significance for the intention to stay. Performance and consideration in the employment relationship are regulated in the employment contract. Psychological contracts, on the other hand, describe individual perceptions of mutual promises and obligations in the employer-employee relationship. The perception of compliance with or breach of the psychological contract is an individual re-definition based on perceptions that influence psychosocial well-being.

The rapidly changing framework conditions (VUCA world) are forcing companies to act and continuously rethink. Digitalization, artificial intelligence, changing values and an aging society are bringing about far-reaching changes in the world of work and require continuous adaptation of communication and management models. The authors also see a need for further model testing in order to investigate whether and to what extent the results should be considered in relation to macroeconomic conditions (e.g. post-coronavirus pandemic, Ukraine war, high commodity and energy prices).

It should be noted that the transferability of the results to other sectors or organizations is limited. The measured effects may also vary. Due to the data situation, no concrete, cross-company measures can be derived. There is therefore a need for research with regard to the consideration of individual companies and their comparison with each other, as well as with regard to a country comparison within the European Union.

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