



**Employer brand activities for effective responses to  
gig economies in South Africa**

**Kelebogile Makhafola**

**WITS Business School**

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**Consultancy Project**

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Business Administration to the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and  
Management, University of the Witwatersrand**

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## DECLARATION

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I Kelebogile Makhafola declare that this research report entitled ‘Employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa’ is my own unaided work. I have acknowledged, attributed, and referenced all ideas sourced elsewhere. I am hereby submitting it in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Business Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I have not submitted this report before for any other degree or examination to any other institution.

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Kelebogile Makhafola

Signed at Johannesburg on 25 November 2021

<b>Name of candidate</b>	<b>Kelebogile Makhafola</b>
<b>Student number</b>	<b>457432</b>
<b>Telephone numbers</b>	<b>0833769683</b>
<b>Email address</b>	<b><a href="mailto:kelebogile02@gmail.com">kelebogile02@gmail.com</a></b>
<b>First year of registration</b>	<b>2019</b>
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<b>Date of report submission</b>	25 November 2021
<b>Name of supervisor</b>	Dr Roselyne Koech

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## ABSTRACT

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**Author:** Kelebogile Makhafola    **Supervisor** Koech Roselyne

**Thesis title:** **Employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa**

This research paper aims to investigate employer brand activities that effectively respond to the engagement dynamics introduced into the working environment by gig economies. The focal points are elements which contribute to the sustenance of the organisations' brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage. The paper uses two frameworks to guide the process of investigating the employer brand activities which influence employer brand attractiveness, employee value contribution, and the organisational culture amongst other research attributes and variables within this paper. The first framework used to approach the analysis is the employer brand experience framework and the second framework is the framework on Human Resource Management (HRM) and platform ecosystems in the gig economy. The study follows a qualitative research method, introducing the use of semi-structured interviews.

Broadly, the findings communicate that effective employer branding that keeps the employees involved and valued will most likely enjoy a higher retention and productivity rate, further stimulating the organisational bottomline. Accessible research and material regarding employer brand effective in context to gig economies within South Africa is not popularly explored. Furthermore, the investigation of employer brand activities and programmes are limited to the traditional organisational structures which exclude the attributes introduced by nuances in gig economies (roles, responsibilities, productivity, brand loyalty, the measurement of value contribution and innovation). The key findings further elaborate that the participating organisations (employer brands) and their employees aren't confidently aware of the introduction of gig economies as a direct effect to their organisation. Through the findings, it further appears that they, the organisations, are not adequately prepared to embrace the new world of work in light of policies, Human Resource Management systems and work related structures.

Keywords: Employer brand; gig economy; gig economy, South Africa

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The employment sector in South Africa is in dire need of innovation and effective leadership. To further extend my acknowledgement, this paper is written as salutation to the entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs that continue to push the needle in South Africa.

Johannesburg 30th April, 2021

Kelebogile Makhafola

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## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

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1. **Brand citizenship:** is the strategic alignment of marketing, reputation management, corporate social responsibility, and community building efforts made by the brand.
2. **Brand equity:** is the value that a brand name adds to its' offering.
3. **Brand reputation:** is the views and opinions of a particular brand.
4. **Collective intelligence:** is the shared thinking and reasoning of a group that comes from people collaborating on and collecting ideas together.
5. **Competitive advantage:** the superior attributes that enables the brand to outperform its' competitors.
6. **Coopetition:** is the act of competition and collaboration between two parties.
7. **Employee Based Brand Equity (EBBE):** set of employment brand assets and liabilities linked to an employment brand.
8. **Employee value proposition (EVP):** are benefits that an employee receives for the experience and skills they bring to the company.
9. **Employer brand:** your organisations' reputation as an employer.
10. **Employer brand activities:** are tools used in order to run employer branding campaigns.
11. **Gig activities:** are projects undertaken within the gig economy and conditions.
12. **Gig economies:** a free market system in which temporary positions are common and organisations hire independent workers for short-term commitments.
13. **Human resource management:** is the organisational function that manages all of the issues related to the people in an organisation.
14. **Intrapreneurship:** is a system which allows an employee to act like an entrepreneur within an organisation
15. **Platform ecosystem:** The organisational structure that, in its' nature creates the common technical basis for the interaction of entities, parties and resources within the value chain.
16. **Socio-economic:** are dynamics that engage between social and economic nuances within a society.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

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**“If we are unable to tap into the talent that is locked within us... We will not be able to deal with many of the issues that the world is facing” - Phuti Mahanyele**

A product that seems to be in demand since the pandemic hit, is eucalyptus oil. Many outlets seem to run out of stock quite often. On one occasion, a dominant grocery store ran out of eucalyptus oil but the employee assisting me sold her bottles of the oil. She offered to sell them to me, right there, over the pharmaceutical counter. I thought to myself, employers are competing with their employees and it is due to the gig economy.

This scenario introduces the research consultancy project. To employers, the paper wants them to recognise that the gig economy has created an autonomous environment for employees. The paper further aims to encourage employers to collaborate with employees through effective employer brand activities in efforts to attract, satisfy and retain employees who could add value to the organisation. This in essence drives the increase in brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage.

This applied research consulting project investigates employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa. In section 1.1, in general, the terms and concepts are introduced. Thereafter, in section 1.2, the research conceptualisation is unpacked. Section 1.2.1 of the research conceptualisation section contains the research problem statement, which is followed by section 1.2.2, which contains the study purpose. Section 1.2.3 introduces the research questions. Section 1.3 concludes Chapter 1 with the research study's delimitations and assumptions. Section 1.4 discusses the significance of the research study, while Section 1.5 serves as an introduction to the research report. The study context is discussed in greater depth and detail in Chapter 2.

## **1.1. Background and context**

Taking the South African socio-economic landscape into consideration, having more than one source of income and skill set has become a bankable pursuit. Indeed, if this country's workforce does not leverage untapped economic opportunities, thus exercising diverse skillsets, many socio-economic issues will continue to nullify the economic stability, sustainability and competitive edge of our nation.

For those who are talented in more ways than one, the changes in technology, society, and business have created opportunities for them to have more than one option to make a living. South African employees are met with alternative ways of supporting themselves (essentially creating employment security, satisfaction, stimulation of skills and value for themselves). There is a rise in people selling products and services to supplement their primary income and/or employment. In other instances, these opportunities are identified by employees within their work environment. Opportunities of such a nature may have been fast-tracked and brought forth by the effectiveness of the pandemic on organisations and industries, therefore showing a need for change. For the future of talent and their management thereof, Claus (2019) state that In actuality, the future is already here for innovative businesses, and it is continually changing.

The study intends to internalise the competitive advantage within an organisation and therefore position the employees as potential resources that, if welcomed by employer brands, could shape the future of the organisation. In so doing, Solow and Wakefield (2016) state that HR could approach employee experiences with the same thoroughness that successful companies apply to customer experiences and how those experiences compare to those of their competitors. The study further expects to project the value of employer branding as a distinctive effort to reimagine how employees can effectively and economically contribute to the new world of work.

If effectively managed, the efforts to reposition employees in a way that involves their untapped value could propel the employer brand into extending the talent pool, as well as drive up profits and productivity. This can be an effective introduction of a cooperative culture within the organisation.

According to Katoen and Macioschek (2007) Employer branding, which has been in circulation in present-day, is a strategy for attracting and retaining qualified workers. They go on to add that the employer brand is a broad concept in marketing that encompasses strategic brand management. How these concepts are tied together in the study is by the involvement of the culture of cooperation with employees (instead of external forces) within organisations. The concept is defined by Peng et al, (2012, p.325) as a strategy for ‘cooperation and competition’ and for ‘cooperation with competitors’. The attraction of the right talent pool, which would be harnessed correctly to produce value and integrity could sustain the competitive edge of an organisation, the employer brand. This is specially if the talent is not seen just as an extension to the organisation or even competition but instead as an integral part of the workplace that reflects new dynamics.

The gig economy, in context, can be a considerable guide to further highlighting why it is important for organisations to develop effective employer branding activities in order to harness the talent pool efficiently enough to create a stimulating and dynamic internal employer brand environment for employees (well enough for employees to contribute within the organisation instead of leveraging their value outside of the organisation).

There are a number of definitions that categorise the concept of the gig economy into industry and socio-economic contexts. This study follows an inclusive interpretation for the benefit of inclusivity. The gig economy, according to Donovan, Bradley, and Shimabukuro (2016), is a collection of markets that connect providers and consumers on a gig (or work) basis in order to promote on-demand trading. In the basic model,

gig workers enter into legal agreements with on-demand enterprises to provide services to the companies' clients. This description appears to encompass a broad range of dynamics found in today's workplace. Scholars have used terms like "new world of work" and "gig economy" to describe changes in employment, corporate structures, and digital innovation over the years.

The intention of this study is to encourage employers to recognise their employee value proposition (EVP) so that they are able to attract and retain the right employee expertise that will increase the value of the organization and keep the brand competitive in South Africa as a means of effective responses to the gig economy. Pawar (2018) defines employee value proposition (EVP) as an effective spread of contributions and advantages supplied to the workers in exchange for their participation and work in the firm, which is the focus of this study. Employee value proposition provides clarity as well as a stronger platform for enhancing the internal brand and the experience workers get from the brand. Employee value proposition creates an all win circumstance for both the employer and the workers. Employee motivation and dedication, as well as the organization's return on investment, can demonstrate this. As a result, the relationship between the employer and the employee is more meaningful and gratifying.

EVP is what the employer are willing to reward for the value that can employee adds to the organisation. They are reasons why employees shouldn't pursue gig opportunities but instead harness those efforts internally to achieve organisational and brand growth.

In essence, the drive for this research consulting report is to recommend favourable insights and measures towards the increase in brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage for employer brands in response to the gig economies in South Africa. It is important to factor in brand equity as an element of consideration because, as elaborated by Katoen and Macioschek (2007) employees' willingness to

stay with their current employer is referred to as brand equity. It also encourages job seekers to apply for a specific role. For highly talented personnel and retaining highly trained individuals, the equity from employer branding can be associated with the difficulty to leave when it comes to.

This research consulting report focusses on provoking thought in light of organisational management styles, the valuation of tangible and intangible assets derived from employees in relation to employee loyalty, brand awareness and association. The perceived quality of an employer brand, just as the apparent nature of a business brand, is also considered.

### **Providing an overview of the study background / setting, as well as a summary of key concepts and phrases**

#### **1.1.1. Necessity is indeed the mother of invention: the effects of tough economic times on employer brands**

If great brands were born in bad economic times, this may mean that great employees were behind their success. In the times that organisations need their competitive advantages revitalised, a differentiation strategy in place or even their niche markets redefined, diligent employees were there to clarify their strength and improve their brand power. These are, however, employer brand stories that sought out the necessity for an effective employer brand strategy. The centralization of talent within the organization is a major component of the strategy, ensuring that the development of an effective talent pool is prioritized.. This will require a recruitment strategy that acknowledges socio-economic dynamics which affect the performance and contributions of employees within an organisation. It is a great necessity to have great investments in assets such as agile human capital to see the organisation and brand through tough economic times.

### **1.1.2. Your brand comes from within: future proofing organisational human capital**

Oftentimes, organisations concentrate on their corporate brand and their appeal towards their customers however, the employer brand (internal branding) is an afterthought. Erkmen (2018) says it is all about matching employee behaviour with the brand promise when it comes to internal employer brand. “The ultimate purpose of internal branding is to ensure emotional and intellectual staff buy-in” (Erkmen, 2018, pp 1-2). The success of any organisation (be it their contribution towards their profits, people or planet) is fostered from their brand promise to how they develop their brand expression. It is important to involve employees in ways that they can see a link between their efforts and behaviours and how that pivots the scales of success within the organisation. This approach also has a positive outcome on organisational culture.

### **1.1.3. Conveying the culture:**

The drive for effective organisational culture is to keep in mind that culture eats strategy for lunch. No matter how strong the business strategic plan is, its fruitfulness can be deterred by employees if they don't align with the organisational culture. Therefore it becomes important to live and convey the culture through various contact points experienced through the employee brand value points, ensuring that innovation becomes part of an organisational DNA when recruiting and hiring innovative thought leaders. Elaborately defining what to consider when unpacking what organisational culture is, Szymańska and Zarządzania (2014) state that is a collection of markets that connect providers and consumers on a gig (or work) basis in order to promote on-demand trading. In the basic model, gig workers enter into legal agreements with on-demand enterprises to provide services to the companies' clients. It is also worth noting that culture is conveyed diversely, in ways that magnify the way things are done within an organisation. Factors which employer brands should take heed of are systematic, structural, and processes driven nuances which also make up the culture of an organisation (consequently influencing the behaviour and attitude of employees towards the traditions and values of the organisation).s

#### **1.1.4. Gig economies: the turbulent economic value amongst careers, jobs and tasks**

Caza (2020) argues that The gig economy has far-reaching consequences for many aspects of management. Organizational structures and the connections between individuals are shifting, and we don't completely comprehend the ramifications of these shifts. This paper supports this thinking based on the shifting employment landscape in South Africa and the inadequate organisational support which causes economic inefficiencies and disruptions for employers and employees in context to the value of their careers, jobs and tasks (and or gigs). It is also worth noting that many scholars assimilate gig work and the gig economy to an unstructured and unstable practice which can expose risk to organisations if internalised. This therefore speaks to the need for managers to receive adequate exposure and management training to effectively embrace the transition through strategic and sustainable organisational design, brand engagement, talent management and a lived employee value proposition. Claus (2019) states that without a doubt, these changes in talent management are shaking up HR's old and established practices, as well as posing a hazard and/or chance for the management of management.

### **1.2. The Research conceptualisation:**

#### **1.2.1. Unpacking the conceptualised research problem statement:**

Organisations should invest in their employer brand activities more intentionally to attract and retain employees that co-create value for their brand equity and reputation, which may ultimately increase their competitive advantage.

Because systems are generally intended for stability rather than agility, organizations can fall into the trap of contributing to a negative organizational culture by being too sluggish to adapt to external/internal changes. The majority of employees are isolated from decision-making and thinking processes, resulting in a suffocating corporate culture. Contributing to a negative organisational culture is a trap induced by poor

management or leadership, low office engagement and ownership, as well as misplaced identity within the workplace. The introduction to the gig or sharing economy has created new dynamics in the world of employer branding which creates exponential competition for traditional organisational structures.

The research gap takes into account that the link between effective employer brand activities is not adequately explored in conjunction with the consideration of gig economies in South Africa. The research finds that it is further problematic for organisations that contribute significantly to employment across various sectors in South Africa to not recognise gig economies as a direct risk to their employer brand sustenance. Furthermore, the loss in value from employee contributions is not extensively measured through Human Resource Management systems. This, therefore, highlights a significant gap in the legal, systematic and policies thereof organisations to embrace and support attributes of the gig economies within their organisations as employer brands. This particular research, through the consulting project, recommends an employer brand programme to pursue these blind spots of risks and opportunities.

Progressive employer brands require leaders who are able to immerse the organisation into talent pools that embrace globalisation, further cutting the red-tape within organisational structures by deregulating the value-chain. To succeed in the developing ways within the world of work, managers are also encouraged embrace the innovations made by digital and technological advancements to bring employees closer to the creation of an organisations' competitive and distinctive advantage.

The lifeline for employer brands is to gear towards becoming flexible, agile and resilient. Recognising the need for this approach will redefine the value and perception of job security and satisfaction in how the workplace has changed.

Digitisation in gig economies have influence within the informal economy, putting traditional enterprises at risk, and therefore calls for urgent policy contributions and

changes. This heightens the emphasis for employer brands to incorporate flexibility, agility and resilience in their structures.

The phenomenon is experienced across industries and at different levels of the value chain. Success at work does not mean staying with the same company for years. Instead, it is about being more loyal to your career than to your employer. Prioritising the value of employment security and satisfaction will influence employer brand activities and therefore encourage human-centric organisational culture and therefore empowered employee engagement which leads to effective client brand experiences. This may lend insights into the importance of the mutual creation of value to satisfy the employer brand value proposition and brand equity by facilitating attitude and behavioural drivers, as well as rational / involved and emotional/distracted employee views. The problems addressed by the gig economies have direct consequences on the longevity and sustainability of organisations and the nature of entrepreneurship in South Africa.

### **1.2.2. The research purpose (aim and objectives) statement:**

The paper aims to inquire into employer brand activities that effectively respond to gig economies in South Africa. The findings will help South African employer brands to welcome the idea of sustainably bridging the gaps in employee productivity, loyalty and engagement due to the rise of gig economies. It also establishes employer brand experiences as forms of engagements that contribute to the sustenance of the organisations' brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage. Part of the aim is for the investigation to lead into a consultation report that critically analyses and recommends with deep context to the South African business landscapes, the variant brand and management dilemmas faced by targeted organisations. In this quest, project opportunities are to be presented through a discussion of a consultancy process, further identifying and assessing the feasibility of proposed solutions.

To achieve the research purpose, the paper looks into employer brand-related frameworks, such as Richard Mosley's (2007) employer brand experience framework (figure 4) and Jeroen Meijerink and Anne Keegan's framework on Human Resource Management (HRM) and platform ecosystems in the gig economy (figure 5) (2019). These frameworks have critical influences on the organisational proactiveness when it comes to efforts of sustaining employer brand relationships, responses, meaning and identity when faced with competitive rivalry such as the gig economy. Furthermore, qualitative methodologies such as open-ended semi-structured interviews were used in the study. This approach assisted the researcher in uncovering direct responses from stakeholders who are focal points in the discussion of employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa.

### **1.2.3. Unpacking the research questions:**

This paper draws towards research questions which serve to narrow down the research purpose with the aims to discover the problems and opportunities from respondents and the process of analysing the data.

#### **1.2.3.1. Question 1: What workplace factors influence job security and satisfaction?**

The research will bring out responses that give insights into what influences employees' job security and satisfaction. The question aims to understand the pain points experienced by employees which may lead them into participating in the gig economy. Them (the employees) investing in the gig economy while employed by the organisation may imply that the organisation is not getting the optimal value from the employee.

#### **1.2.3.2. Question 2: How do adjustments in the corporate brand message influence the essence of the employer brand?**

This research question aims to uncover how the organisations' corporate message is effectively translated into how the employer brand engages with its employees. How

the corporate message is rooted into the value chain may influence how employees add value to the organisation and therefore impact the brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage.

#### **1.2.3.3. Question 3: What effective value can employer brand offer that gig economies cannot?**

The paper is investigating how gig economies are affecting the engagement of employees with the employer brand. Therefore, this research question asks about the factors that, from the employees perspective, may optimise the organisations' employer brand appeal, satisfaction, security and value that is how else found in gig economies and activities.

#### **1.2.3.4. Question 4: What cooperation opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities?**

The paper further seeks to ensure that the consultation project finds appropriate recommendations that will ensure mutual benefits and the co-creation of value between the employer brands and employees. This question, therefore, unpacks the equality competitive and collaborative opportunities within the environment that considers both employer brands and gig activities.

### **1.3. Delimitations and assumptions of the research study**

Organisations may occasionally discover that they may have to reposition the brand because employees change preferences and new competitors enter the employer brand space. Employer brand attributes such as career advancements, learning and development cannot be studied in isolation when considering their impact on employer brand attractiveness. As a result, it's critical to integrate employer brand management outcomes into the organization's identity and culture, as well as employee loyalty, efficiency, participation, agility, and reputational capital.

Initially, the boundaries for this study are limited to the corporate and government brands in South Africa that have employer branding as a key factor for their organisational development and growth. The approach considers the employee and employer perceptions and experiences in their current work environment. The responses are used to generate insights and recommendations for the consultative report. The research is limited to the following attributes: the industries that are being researched are water and sanitation, television broadcasting, life insurance and advertising. Furthermore, the parameters for the organisations that are being observed is that their primary objectives or points of impact for their employer brand include their inclination to refrain from minimising staff retention, automate processes, retrench staff, avoiding company and brand expansion, and have a high dependence on a cost reduction strategies for the organisations' sustenance. The industry nuances that are limited are those who do not rely on human capital and knowledge work industries. The employees' employment level that the research is not looking at is the entry-level, junior-level employees or people close to retirement positions.

#### **1.4. Significance of the research study**

The new world of work is needs leaders who can identify and create opportunities that are granted by how the world is evolving in its' socio-economic nature. Those who will future proof their careers and therefore the provision of their organisations are deemed as effective leaders. In his findings and suggestions, Pawar (2018) reports that from the employee's perspective, the most important internal organizational characteristics are the pace of progress, thoughtfulness, and organizational stability. It is critical that organizations create opportunities for growth, respect people regardless of their titles, and ensure job and career security for their employees.

This research builds opportunities for employer brand agility, responses to environmental changes and operational sustenance therefore future-proofing employee involvement within the organisation, and possibly leading to business and brand innovation, productivity and profitability. Heedlessly, organisations adopt a negative corporate culture by disengaging and under-investing in proactive ways that can survive

external/internal changes. Leadership and poor management can be factors that contribute to the negative corporate culture further inducing a significant sense of distrust in the conventional methods of corporate brand leadership.

To combat this, it is significant for this paper to reposition employment dynamics, especially in the unpleasant reality of employment and unemployment dynamics in South Africa. In so doing, deriving value from the increase in performance through employer branding is helpful as part of taking strategic action. This would mean that organisational culture should have leverage of leadership and management within employer brands for the sake of developmental value, reputation value, and economic value.

### **1.5. Preface to the research report**

Chapter 1 was the introductory chapter. In Chapter 2, there is a literature review that covers the problem, previous investigations, the explanatory framework, and the conceptual framework. The research strategy, methodology, methodologies, reliability and validity measurements, as well as constraints, are all discussed in Chapter 3. Following that, in Chapters 4 and 5, the research findings are presented and discussed in relation to the research topics. The summary, consulting project recommendations and conclusion of the research are in Chapter 6.

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## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

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**“You have to value the people around you, mentor them, learn from them, be inspired by those below you, because that is part of the journey and that’s what should be more important than money, because when you have those values, you start appreciating different aspects of being an entrepreneur and a business person, and the business becomes more successful. The only part that you have to fixate on with regards to the money side of business is balancing the books.” -**

**Bonang Mohale**

The literature review chapter of this research paper addresses the research problem being organisations engaging in effective employer brand activities to maximise their competitive edge through the co-creation of value, brand equity and reputation with their employees. This chapter seeks to piece together the knowledge gaps in employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa. The frameworks that will be used to navigate the subject matter are derived from the principles and practices that constitute employer brand efficacies.

### **2.1. Research problem analysis: The approach and consequences of activities, internal branding and the engagement of employer brands with employees in context to gig economies and digitisation in South Africa**

#### **2.1.1. The employee lifecycle and turn over from the perspective of the employer brand**

There are a number of variables that affect Human Resources, central to these being the focus on business drivers. These are elements such as globalisation and emerging markets, the pressure expressed through business costs, talent development and the management thereof as well as the advancement of technological platforms, amongst others. These are some key aspects that affect the employee lifecycle and turn over within an organisation.

Cattermole (2019) argues that we frequently say that our people are our most valuable asset, so imagine the cost savings, skills, and experience that might be retained in an organization if we truly understood the employee life cycle. This paper draws further the aspects of internal branding as an effective way to attract and manage the talent pools within organisations well enough to limit the employee turn over rate and extend a satisfied and productive employee lifecycle within an organisation.

At the centre of all employer brand efforts, should be the strive to co-create value with employees. Advice from The World Economic Forum (2020) states that Companies would benefit from an approach that regards talent as a critical asset that contributes to an organization's continuous value generation as they try to reset for the new world of work that emerges from the epidemic. In that, the first people to buy into the business and brand are its' employees (before the customers and suppliers). Therefore what matters is how an organisation empowers its' people to actively contribute towards its growth. Employees are the face of any organisation, it is hence crucial for organisations to employ and train people with adequate skills and knowledge to present competitively towards external stakeholders such as clients and investors. Equally, the contributions of employees should be seen as important to the organisational growth and progressiveness. A concepts that embraces this fittingly is collective intelligence, which is defined by Segaran (2007) as building new conclusions from independent contributors. Broadly extending this definition, Heylighen (1999) defines the concept by saying that the core premise is that a group of people (or insects, robots, or software agents) may be smart in a way that none of its members can be in isolation. For the consideration of this paper, employer brands can embrace the collective and cooperative culture of including employees into the fold in order to evoke deeper value and a sense of integrity and sustainability within the organisation. Such efforts would not be individualised nor the rewards be exclusive. The efforts would grant employees a more distinctive employee value proposition, increasing the quality of employee life cycles and shortening the employee turn over.

### **2.1.2. The treatment of the organisations' internal branding in relation to the corporate brand**

It is not often that an organisation focuses on the internal brand, the employer brand. Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) break organisational internal branding into areas that acknowledge that employees must be convinced of the brand's appropriateness and value, and every line of work in the organization must be successfully linked to the delivery of the brand quintessence. For this paper, the treatment of the organisations' internal branding focuses on the creation of new channels that will explore new contributive mechanisms and innovations for employees and employers. Through internal branding, directly affecting the employee performance against the brand promise and employee value proposition is the employee brand building behaviours. If the internal brand dynamics were communicated succinctly and effectively to employees, employee brand building behaviours which contribute to the organisations' growth efforts would be prioritised and harnessed by both the employer and employees across the value-chain. Piehler (2018) argues that the internal alignment with the brand's core values helps employees to be passionate about what they are working toward. Internal branding enables the internal stakeholder to grasp the brand direction and promise vividly and to reflect on whether or not they are sustaining the brand philosophy in every decision they take.

The focus on employee engagement and satisfaction are far and few in-between. Sengupta, Bamel, and Sing (2015) attribute the outward employer brand selling point to image and fundamental values, values associated to the line of work, organisational culture values, transfer values, and satisfaction values are all examples of image and fundamental values. Some attributes will reveal further context in the literature review. This research paper is interested in the internal investment of employee engagement with employer brand activities, particularly in how they fare with the contention of gig activities as alternatives forms of employment.

The internal branding of an organisation assists significantly in building greater levels of employee motivation and has magnified effects on customer-related outcomes for an organisation. Taking heed of this, it is becoming notable that corporate reputation is a significant factor in organisational growth and sustenance. Therefore, this literature review contextualises the corporate brand in relation to internal branding. Internal branding gives agency to the corporate brand in relation to its' structure and culture. For an employer brand, the aim is to transfer the employee experience through its' brand promise and Human Resource Management efforts.

### **2.1.3. Employer brand activities in efforts to stimulate employer brand engagement**

This paper refers to employer brand activities as the commitments that consistently serve towards the employee value proposition. These are branded experiences that cater to the organisational culture and further recognise the employees' needs and performances. The paper is interested in the internal stability, socio-economic progressiveness and management of dynamic cooperative measures within an employer brand.

In the process of attracting and retaining personnel, one of the most important anchors for employer branding is the employment of marketing strategies. Backhaus (2016) extends that employer branding is an entity's identity as seen from the perspective of its employees. To contextualise its effectiveness, employer brand (internal branding) activities and engagement with employees, it is worth noting if the efforts made by the employer brand is in alignment with those of the employees'. These include weighing the value systems, policies, and behaviours of both the employer brand and employees. These attributes, as Backhaus (2016) elaborates, coincide with an organization's goals of attracting, engaging, and retaining current personnel. In extension, this further stimulates employer brand attractiveness which competes with gig economies.

The extent of the employer brand is bone-deep. Szymańska and Zarządzania (2014) states that the notion of employer branding is an widening of relationship marketing concepts, which recognize the necessity to develop acquisition and retention strategies across a variety of key stakeholder markets through deeper partnerships. This paper further explores the dynamics of employee engagement and relationship marketing to employer brand activities that are conducive to stimulate a sustainable and meaningful internal experience. Biswas & Suar (2016) state that because of the knowledge that workplace branding can improve retention, perhaps raise performance, and lower pay costs, there is a determined effort to promote company branding.

#### **2.1.4. Disruption of the gig economy and digitisation on traditional employer brand structures in the African context**

Malinga and Mungadze (2021) report that the latest Labour Force Survey from Stats SA for the second quarter offers a bleak picture of unemployment in the country, with 7.8 million jobless South Africans accounting for 34.4 percent of the population. This paper aligns to the recognition that something needs to shift in the structures of employer brands within the country. A considerable amount of literature about the state of employment and unemployment in South African mentions the gig economy as a possible solution to socio-economic difficulties. Booth (2021) writes that the gig economy — a labor market that consists of freelance, short-term, on-demand work or side hustles – is reshaping the way businesses hire and altering people's career paths. In this breath, we are seeing an increase of skilled talent in South Africa signing up for online job markets where they can transfer and or sell their services and products digitally. There is also a rise in social media engagement to find gig-clients and promote gig services to ones' followers and online communities. To push it further, we see online users collaborating on digital and social platforms to address common problems, pitch work, and produce solutions to local and global issues.

The gig economy disrupts the traditional trajectory of employment and job structures. There are terms and new developments in the world of work such as the war for talent, gig economy, remote work and side hustles. These phenomena are a reflection of how industries and brands are shifting their employee value proposition to meet and sustain organisational needs and employee expectations. More and more, organisations will have to start redefining themselves, more so in relation to their talent pools, their human capital assets and the value derived thereof. When enough people are turning to online marketplaces, selling their skills through digital and gig platforms, loyalty to companies will be subsequently have new meaning.

The power is in the process of shifting from employers to employees. Chambers, Foulon, Handheld-Jones, Hankin and Michaels III (1998) had predicted that the make-or-break for organisations in relation to the ability to attract, develop, and retain talent over the next two decades will be critical. That future is now.

Fairwork (2021) reports in South Africa, unemployment and inequality are at an all-time high, and digital labor platforms have the ability to help. The yearly South African Fairwork ratings, on the other hand, show that platform workers, like those in so many other nations, continue to experience unfair working circumstances and lack the perks and protections that employees enjoy. This means that the pandemic has left gig workers unreasonably excluded in relation to income security and institutional policies. In efforts to capture the possible value that lies within the digital labour markets, employer brands will have to embrace the blind spots and pain points felt by employees and gig workers in relation to the satisfaction, security and the productivity of cooperative work together. Therefore, attracting, developing and retaining talent in South Africa, business will need take into consideration the a blended and agile workforce.

Much of the revolutions in the world of work has been highly influenced by economic performances. Malinga and Mungadze (2021) report that in South Africa, the gig economy is already assisting with unemployment in a variety of industries.

## **2.2. Methods, data, findings, and conclusions of studies and evaluations of employer brand initiatives in South Africa that take into consideration the gig economy**

The study of the empirical research knowledge gap on employer brand engagement is covered in this section. This is particularly in light of issues regarding employer brand attractiveness and reputation management with current employees. It is primarily in context to the value and benefits presented by gig economies. The research knowledge gap analysis also looks at how there is an important aspect of showing how participants in the gig economy can internally help organisations.

As direction, for the new world of work, employer brands have an opportunity to realise that they are competing to create environments conducive for gigs and not necessarily to attract traditional employee. Furthermore, much efforts will need to be driven towards the creation and protection of policies that recognise and support gig economies across public and private sector channels. Barnabas (2021) states that in order to cover the areas that fall between an employee and an independent contractor, legislation would need to be written. Businesses must comply with a variety of regulations, including pertinent labor legislation such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Labour Relations Act.

The knowledge gap addresses the following research questions: What workplace factors influence job security and satisfaction?, How do changes in the corporate brand message affect the employer brand's essence?, What effective value can employer brand offer that gig economies cannot?, And what cooperation opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities?. A scholar within a similar subject matter, Kheswa (2015) pursues the following questions that were further researched: What factors or ideals are at the root of employer branding in general? What variables influence employer branding in generation "X"? , What are the employer branding variables that influence generation "Y" talent attraction? What are the employer branding variables that influence generation "X" talent retention?

In their study, Daqar, Smoudy and Constantinovits (2019) investigate employer branding from the point of creating a sustainable recruitment plan in large corporates. Their approach is different to this research project because they look at potential employees and recruitment efforts, while this research project applies similar theme but only for current employees of a corporate and government South African organisation. The similarity comes in through the form of investigating how to maintain and sustainably outline a continuous demand and attraction from employees.

Other scholars such as Kheswa and Pawar use quantitative approaches to analyse the value for employer branding within organisations. Kheswa (2015) mentions that a structured survey of employees working for the greatest firms to work for was utilized to acquire insights into what drives employer branding in talent attraction and retention in South Africa, as well as to better define the concepts and impacts anticipated from the literature. This is while, Pawar (2018) states that users descriptive research, structured questionnaire, a scatter diagram to display the relationship between organisational elements and employee value proposition and lastly analyses the mean ranking for organisational elements through tables.

The factors contributing towards internal brand management according to Gilani's (2017) Human Resource activities, brand communication, brand management, corporate culture, how the brand is seen, brand commitment, and brand citizenship are all areas of inquiry. Wilden, Lings and Gudergan (2010) report on their findings by stating that their respondents stated that, in most situations, with larger companies, the general company's brand values and propositions are quite obvious, but job descriptions and individual employer brand values are ambiguous and opaque. It is for that reason that this research project further acknowledges other factors that will ensure sustainability and a more human-centric approach in employer brand and Human Resource activities.

In the South African context, Sevel, Abratt and Kleyn (2018) explored large-scaled employer brands such as Tsogo Sun. The descriptive findings show that corporate

branding has the primary driver which is brand equity. All internal branding activities are focused on building strong employee brand equity. This research paper objectively looks at corporate and government organisations to explore the approach to employer brand equity. The difference in the approach aims at highlighting that the employer brand equity development between human resources and internal branding or marketing should not only be about employees within a gig economy who may be seen as mere recipients of human resource management. Employees should also be actively involved in, and required for, the execution of human resource management and employer branding efforts. In light of fair representation, Fairwork (2021) reported that in most nations, the ability to freely organize under recognized collective bodies is a crucial workplace right. There is still more that can be done to enhance conditions in the South African gig economy, both in terms of organization and recognition. What this consultation project further drives towards is formulating recommendations that satisfy the employees economic, social, and psychological desires so that they do not pursue it outside of the organisation.

Scholars have attributed internal company brand values to career potential elements, employee engagement, issues of justice, attributes of comfort, and a sense of esteem in their research. Wilden, Lings and Gudergan (2010) reported their findings by claiming that well experienced employees were more inclined to regard a company's contribution to their professional profile and opportunities for advancement, whilst inexperienced employees were more likely to prioritize short-term phenomena such as money. This particular research aims to signify an inclusive approach by acknowledging the dynamic nuances introduced into workplace landscapes and how the introduction of the dynamic gig work is in relation to different kind of employees.

Szymańska and Zarządzania (2014) examines the impact of organizational culture on employer branding from the employer's viewpoint. This is similar to other scholars who have discussed employer branding as topic of their research. This is different to what this research paper emphasises, which is the perspective and involvement of employee. Both approaches are related since they both state that organizations that

use organizational support systems as an employer branding strategy thrive in keeping and retaining their talent for extended periods of time - this includes gig workers, requesters, and intermediate platform firms. In essence this ensures value co-creation. Szymańska and Zarządzania (2014) concludes, for the employer, by stating that organizations must describe the desired results in order to design their employer brands to achieve effectiveness and efficiency, as different components of the employer have varying impacts on determinants of organizational performance. However, from the perspective of the employee, Pawar (2018) looks at the internal and external organisational elements from the perspective of an employee to measure factors that are most important to them. These are factors organizational stability, diversity, risk taking, technology level, respect, empowerment, employment recognition, market positioning reputation, and brand responsibility, amongst others.

When contrasting the available literature on the subject matter, it is evident that employer brands may find favour in clearly defining talent management to internal stakeholder in support and alignment with the strategies and culture (for employees to adopt and live it continuously). They also need to attract the right workers to the organisation, and further, put the right people in the right seats. It can also be helpful to understand how they can retain their high performers and encourage the growth and development of other employees. Lastly, employer brands need to seek and implement the evolving benefits of good talent management.

Venn and Berg (2012) state that new capabilities are needed to rethink existing cost structures and value propositions when building a competitive advantage for organisations. Therefore what this research does differently is to incorporate employee value proposition into the strategic goals of achieving favour in brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage. This is done through the emphasis in employee investment, the development of unique employee benefits that are derived from the innovative use of skills, capabilities, and differentiating experience that they sustain within the organisation.

What this research paper does, in addition, is introduce the consultation project as a tool to identify the value proposition that recommends sustainable brand activities that mitigate risks in relation to the gig economy. This research project expands on the top-down perspective by using the consultation process as a way to fit the co-creation of value by the employee throughout the value chain. Arasanmi and Krishna's (2019) research does not look into employee value proposition but rather employer value proposition.

In this breath, employer branding activities as a subject matter, in context to the gig economy has not yet been effectively covered by researchers or industry practitioners. This research paper investigates employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa.

### **2.3. Qualitative attributes that are key to the research**

Employees are not just driven or attracted to money anymore. They are influenced by complex nuances and above that, they want purpose. Employees are driven by culture and kept stimulated by innovation. In the process of learning and developing, the employer brand should encompass all these attributes as things that make the organisation attractive to employees while driving value and equity.

The gig economy has revealed that the talent management agility within most organisations in South Africa can be improved and become more inclusive. The gig economy is based on skills rather than roles, a phenomenon that traditional Human Resource and organisational structures do not recognise. Woodcock and Graham (2020) remind us by despite the fact that the gig economy has altered many workplace practices, it still entails the buying and selling of workers' time. The gig economy, therefore, creates new expectations for employees within a work environment. The introduction of such an approach to the traditional organisational structures affects the internal brand equity, which is the employee based brand equity. Tuominen (1999) argues that brand equity management can be viewed as a constant, planned, and long-term strategy aimed at developing brand confidence.

According to King and Grace (2010), the benefits of internal brand management, as encapsulated in employee-based brand equity, must be recognized (EBBE). This type of investment helps to build consumer-based brand equity, which in turn helps to build financial-based brand equity. Employee based brand equity (EBBE) is defined by Tavassoli, Sorescu, and Chandy (2014) as the value a brand offers to a corporation as a result of its influence on the attitudes and behaviors of its employees. They also discuss some of the consequences for marketing, management, and economics.

Potgieter and Doubell (2020) claim that employees' behavior in delivering the organization's brand promise influences and shapes stakeholders' brand experiences since people deliver the brand's functional and emotional values. Everyone in the organization is responsible for the aims and business impact of employer branding. The participation of all internal stakeholders boosts its value and, as a result, brand equity. The gig economy affects the extensions of the EBBE by shifting focus on brand citizenship behaviours, employee satisfaction, and positive employee word-of-mouth. The gig economy would force traditional organisations and management to respond effectively by identifying the skills gaps, reflecting on the tasks to be done instead of the job descriptions, educating stakeholders in the value chain about the agile approach to solving problems.

The consultancy project aspect of this research plugs the employee into all aspects of the business to optimise their input and involvement in the organisational growth. This paper is interested in attributes that juxtapose the variations in employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa in order to attract and retain employees that co-create value for their brand equity and reputation, which may ultimately increase their competitive advantage.

Potgieter and Doubell (2020) support Kapferer (2012) and Huang and Sarigöllü (2014) in their assertions that corporate branding is more than just a tool for expressing an organization's voice, as it facilitates a distinction value for the organization,

resulting in brand equity. Though these attributes are important, this research paper makes use of internal variations which foster the value and impact of employer brand attractiveness and brand equity on brand-centered HR operations, brand communication, brand leadership, corporate culture, brand perception, brand commitment, and brand citizenship. To this effect, the gig economy in the paper is introduced as a trigger for employer brands to co-create together with their employees in efforts to produce an internal environment that connects to the desired culture, for employees to collaborate in adding value across the value chain, and in return be recognised and rewarded for their contribution.

In order to effectively optimise this approach, the employer brand needs to close the employee experience gaps (which are the challenges that first created and or maintained the existence of the gig economy). This can be done through measurable efforts and programmes that evaluate what is important for organisational and personal growth for the employees. Furthermore, employer brands can account for the end-to-end employee experience which can be measure by looking into desirable organisational cultures and practices, employee experiences, digital interaction and technology as well a the visibility and business impact of employees across the value chain.

In the research conducted by Itam, Misra and Anjum (2019) it is clear that effective employer branding has a positive impact on an organization's internal management. Similarly, the strategic roots of such a practice is felt and experienced throughout all contact points of the organisation. According to Wilden, Lings, and Gudergan (2010), businesses must adopt strategies to ensure that their human resource base is sufficient to meet the challenges of doing business.

## **2.4. Framework(s) for interpreting research findings: Established frameworks that interpret effective employer brand activities that are a conducive response to gig economies**

The framework(s) for interpreting these particular research findings are used as blueprints that guide the attributes of the subject matter more vividly as to report on measures of effective employer brand management. These frameworks are important because they are instruments used to particularly shape the observation and analysis of the consultative report. They further give guidance on how South African employer brands can close the gaps caused by the attractiveness of gig economies in the internal perceptions of the current employee experiences, productivity levels and the impact of the internal employer brand messages.

Gilani (2017) addresses the conceptual framework for positioning employer branding as an integrated process within an organisation. The field of employer branding has developed several frameworks to navigate the complexities of internal and external organisational branding as discussed below.

### **2.4.1. The framework for the link between the attractiveness of an employer and employee response**

In their study paper titled "*The influence of the employer brand on employee attitudes important for service branding: an empirical examination*" Maas and Cachelin (2011) developed the framework for the relationship between employer attractiveness and employee reaction (Figure 1).

There are four quadrants in the framework that examines the relationship between employer attractiveness and employee reaction. We look at perceived employer brands that have economic, development, social, diversity, and reputation value under the heading of employer attractiveness. The second quadrant is an expected employer brand, which carries economic, development, social, diversity and reputational value. Potgieter and Doubell (2020) recommend that more research be done on

additional branding variables, such as the integrity of the people behind the brand in transmitting an organization's attractiveness to other stakeholders. Perceived employer brand is linked to current employees as it carries satisfaction and identification variables. Expected employer brand is linked to prospective employees as it only carries identification variables.

The framework supports the following ideas: present employee happiness is positively influenced by economic, social, development, diversity, and reputation value. Second, present employee identification is positively influenced by economic, social, development, diversity, and reputation value. Finally, the value of economic, social, development, diversity, and reputation effects prospective employee identification positively.

#### **2.4.2. Employer branding framework**

The employer branding framework (Figure 2) was presented by Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo (2004) in their research paper titled *Conceptualising and researching employer branding*. Szymańska and Zarządzania (2014) present the concept by stating that employer branding begins with the development of an employer brand image, which is represented by a set of benefits provided by the company and articulated as an employee value proposition (symbolic and instrumental attributes). The framework filters into three streams. The first is employer brand associations, leading into employer image, and employer attraction. The second strand is the organisational identity and thirdly the organisational culture. They both lead into employer brand loyalty which leads to employee productivity. Through the employer branding framework, Pawar (2016) conveys that the value proposition ought to distinguish the exceptional individual's strategies, procedures and projects that show the organization's dedication to i.e., employee development, administration improvement, continuous employee acknowledgment, group administration, and so on.

### **2.4.3. Employer brand pyramid framework**

Kevin Keller (2001) in his book *Strategic brand management*, developed the customer brand pyramid. It is also known as the Customer based Brand equity pyramid. The employer brand pyramid was adopted from his framework (Figure 3). The employer brand pyramid was thereafter applied in research studies by various researchers such as Neerja Kashive and Dr Vandana Khanna in their research study titled “*Conceptualizing Employer-Based Brand Equity and Employer Brand Pyramid*” (2017). It looks at the hierarchy of brand citizen behaviour, judgement, experiential, functional association, symbolic association and employer brand awareness. The function of this framework unpacks the employer brand relationship, asking the question: what connections do we share?. It further probes employer brand responses, asking the question: what do I feel about you?. Furthermore, its unpack employer brand meaning, asking: what are you? And lastly, it unpacks employer brand identity, asking who are you?.

The frameworks used in this paper though are two. One is the employer brand experience framework (figure 4). The other is about the framework (figure 5) on Human Resource Management and that of platform ecosystems within the gig economy.

### **2.4.4. Employer brand experience framework**

The employer brand experience framework (Figure 4) was presented by Richard Mosley in his (2007) research titled “*Customer experience, organisational culture and the employer brand*”. The framework was also used in several other employer brand-related studies. The framework is a circular layer that puts employer brand experience in the centre. The layer directly outside it covers the values, leadership competencies, management competencies and everyday behaviours. The third and last layer covers recruitment, orientation, process touch-points, rewards and recondition, measurements, shared services, communication and performance & development.

The framework seeks to evoke functional, emotional benefits, together with the reason to believe in the employer brand through lived and shared experiences. The reputation of the employer brand is measured up against the attributes within the framework, which provide a basis for engagement and the employee value proposition.

The reason for using this framework is because the employer brand is responsible for the consistent and healthy physical, emotional and mental experience of those who work within the organisation. Therefore, the employer brand promises functional and emotional benefits to an employees' experience within the organisation, further granting them an experience that determines the organisations' professional experience. The gig economy has shaken the constructs of a happy employee. In sourcing the competitive advantage of any organisation or employer brand, it is worth noting that much of the insights are found in its people and the value they create. Understanding and effectively using these insights will influence the reasons why employees go over and beyond for the organisation. The framework will effectively assist in creating a concise consulting report for this research project.

#### **2.4.5. Framework on Human Resource Management in relation to the platform ecosystems within the context of the gig economy**

The framework on (HRM) Human Resource Management and its relation to platform ecosystems within the gig economy (Figure 5) was developed by Meijerink and Keegan (2019) in their research paper titled "*Conceptualising human resource management in the gig economy: Toward a platform ecosystem perspective*". Meijerink and Keegan proposed that employer brand activities, through HRM, can be comprehended as measures for managing the efforts of workers and all ecosystem actors within the gig economy.

This framework further investigates the involvement in light of HRM in the gig economy. The reason for using this framework is that it merges the concept of people

and strategy. It further changes the agility of human resources within an organisation to validate its capabilities and skillfulness in changing the culture, programmes, processes, and policies to adapt to the new of work and encompass a greater ecosystem introduced by the gig economy. In context to the gig economy, workforce strategy is essential for HRM because workforce planning corresponds with the demand and supply for labour, it, therefore, means redefining roles, evaluating the impact of gig work, updating traditional layout policies, deconstruct the jobs and roles within the organisation, and build measurement systems that aid in analysing impact and growth.

Liberty Holdings Limited (2016) expresses that a workforce that reflects the diversity of our customers and communities enables us to perform effectively in our chosen markets. Employee retention is higher when employees' beliefs, attitudes, and values match and are aligned with the company's fundamental principles, according to Gilani (2017), since they identify with the organization and its culture. This framework then encourages employer brands to manage the sense of leadership in alignment with the changing operating models, while striking for effective capabilities towards the execution of strategies. Furthermore, it also encourages them to plan for and effectively integrate tools that can support the readiness of employees for the changing workplace dynamics and its' internal opportunities in relation to cooptation.

The proposed frameworks answer the research questions and further elaborate on the research topic as they address the strategic goals of employer brands achieving favour in brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage while navigating the nuances introduced by gig economies.

## **2.5. The summary and conclusion**

### **2.5.1. Th summary for the literature reviewed**

These research problems are analysed in a way that runs a golden thread across the nuances that employer brands are affected by in the South African context. In the literature, it is mentioned that work culture values, reference values, image and core

values, job structure values, and pride values are all linked to the external employer brand values. Furthermore, employer brand activities in this paper also look into how the gig economy disrupts the traditional trajectory of employment and job structures. Specifically in Africa, the digital era brings job opportunities to parts of the world that were and still are experiencing low incomes and high unemployment rates. In a South African context, the literature argues that the organization's resource-based vision should see both product and corporate brands as precious, uncommon, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. As a result, organizations that use organizational support systems as part of their employer branding strategy have a better chance of retaining employees for longer (including gig workers that ensures value co-creation).

In light of the Qualitative attributes explored in the literature review, Employee based brand equity gives a foundation to the instrumental employment context that drives value, job security and satisfaction. The attributes were selected to investigate what attracts and retains employees that co-create value for organisational brand equity and reputation, which may ultimately increase their competitive advantage. Workplace features were found to fall into six subcategories in the literature: work environment, workforce, type of work, management style, employee rewards, and management workforce interactions.

To support all the theories, and later give structure to the research analysis and consulting report, two frameworks were used. The first is a framework for employer brand experience, and the second is a framework for HRM and platform ecosystems in the gig economy. The two frameworks add value to the research process as they lead the research analysis into conversations that prompt organisations to adapt and remodel their operations to involve the growing segment of workers. They will also encourage the inclusion of specialised skills and well-rounded skill sets to build a competitive advantage, further optimising the involvement of employees across the value chain. The efforts are directed towards encouraging employer brands to treat

their relationships with employees as strategic rather than transactional, to ultimately building an employer brand that is perceived and trusted as the employer of choice.

### **2.5.2. Proposed research strategy, design, procedure and methods arising from the literature reviewed**

Based on the literature review discussed earlier, the proposed research strategy, design, procedure and methods are as follows. The study follows a qualitative approach. This approach enables the respondents to describe and qualify their experiences, thoughts and actions through interviews.

The research observed the respondents and stakeholders in their settings with the backdrop of a changing world of work and the nuances thereof. Through this, the research paper describes the nature of what exists and how it is experienced by those who are within the value chain of employer brand activities and gig activities. The methods applied and further detailed in Chapter 3 enable the research to measure and justify employee and employer engagements as well as their expectations, therefore, capturing changing attitudes within a target group. The qualitative approach afford the research process a much more flexible approach since the subject matter is not yet fully explored by previous literature.

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### **3. RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN, PROCEDURE AND METHODS**

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**“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe” - Abraham Lincoln**

The paper so far has raised the questions: what workplace factors influence job security and satisfaction, then how do the adjustments within the corporate brand message influence the essence of the employer brand, then what is derived as the value of an effective employer brand, and what cooperation opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities?. This is all to investigate employer brand engagements that offer an effective value proposition to employees as an innovative response to gig economies in South Africa while proving to sustain the organisations’ brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage.

In this chapter, the objective is to underline the research strategy, looking into the approach, design and other methods used to analyse the empirical evidence.

#### **3.1. The Research strategy**

In light of the research, the strategy which is applied to is simply defined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) as The overall plan of how the researcher plans to solve the research questions. In the various options for a research strategy (qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method approach), the research strategy for this paper follows a qualitative structure. According to Quinlan (2011), qualitative research is utilized to acquire data by focusing on the meanings of words rather than figures. A quantitative approach to research, according to Greener and Martelli (2015), is likely to be associated with a deductive approach to testing hypothesis, typically using numbers or facts, and hence a positivist or natural science model, as well as an objective view of the things researched. Robson (2011) defines the mixed method research strategy as the use of a qualitative and quantitative data collection component in the same research investigation.

The research problem indicates that the value proposition, job satisfaction and employment security within employer brand structures aren't conducive enough to retain employees against the competition brought by the gig economic activities in South Africa. This thus requires such a research strategy that is humanistic in order to read and interpret employer brand nuances that inform the brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage. Therefore the research strategy will take on a qualitative approach.

Scholars working in similar fields choose between quantitative and qualitative approaches as research strategies. Sithole (2018) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the emergence of brand co-creation across multiple stakeholder environments, as well as the implications for corporate brand management. The study will attempt to construct meaning by focusing on the phenomenon's occurrence and the depth of its implications on brand management. Dlodla (2016) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the relationship between brand orientation, brand commitment, brand trust, and brand loyalty.

### **3.2. The research design**

Research design, according to Greener and Martelli (2015), is a broad strategy for approaching a research issue. Furthermore, according to Bryman (2012), there are cross-disciplinary research designs which include case study, cross-sectional, comparative, longitudinal, and experimental.

The major function of a research design, according to Creswell (2014), is to explain how you will obtain answers to your research questions because it is a tool that allows you to arrive at meaningful findings, comparisons, and conclusions. This paper is organized in the form of a series of case studies.

According to Greener and Martelli (2015), case study research will involve more than one method of obtaining data regarding the case, organization, or unit under investigation. According to a similar paper by Xaba (2015), because the research ques-

tion seeks to explain how and why by looking at past and current events inside an organization, case studies are appropriate for explanatory or causal case studies, descriptive case studies, and exploratory case studies.

Adopting Xaba's approach, this research design assists this paper by providing a cohesive look into the particular organisation, industries or fields of interest by giving a clear picture of the situation and position that key stakeholders and resources find themselves in context to employer brand activities.

### **3.3. The research procedure and methods**

The research processes and methods are detailed in this portion of the report to detail the numerous tools used to address the research issues. This section also looks at how the information gathered is processed, stored, and secured, as well as the ethical considerations of conducting this type of research. Study methods, according to Quinlan (2011), are a way that researchers use to collect data for a research topic.s The tools used to collect the research data are paramount to the success and limitations of the research process as well as the results.

#### **3.3.1. Research data and information collection instrument(s)**

Semi-structured interviews were employed as research data collection instruments. The information was collected through semi-structured interviews between employer brands and their employees from an innovation and business savviness perspective. The semi-structured interviews were scheduled with strategic key players within the value chain (internal and external to the employer brand). Questions on the state of employer involvement, the effects on the bottom line, competitive advantage, digitisation, the gig economy, employer brand management, employer brand value, and employer brand activities were all part of the interview agenda. The research methodologies involve semi-structured interviews with present and potential employees in order to uncover the employer brand qualitative aspects that shape development value, social value, economic value, interest value, and application value.

The research and consultancy project's structure is based on the procedure that follows the observation, interview and documentation flow. Those insights drive the questions that drove the semi-structured interviews. According to Sithole (2018), the main benefit of a qualitative study, as evidenced by the studies mentioned above, is that it allows the researcher to better understand the phenomenon through interviews with participants, allowing for a better understanding of the underlying issues and opportunities.

The inspiration for the questioning of this paper is derived from the empirical studies, brand reports and the human resource movements and activities within specific sectors or influential companies. These dynamics are what inform the curiosity and in-depth seeking of related insights. The prominent reports include the Deloitte Global Business Coalition for Education (2018) titled "*Preparing tomorrow's workforce for the Fourth Industrial Revolution For business: A framework for action*". To that aim, the research sparked ideas about aligning stakeholders' goals and approaches, engaging in public policy, developing promising talent strategies, and strategically investing in workforce training. A report that further drew inspiration was the World Economic Forum's white paper on "*HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*" (2019). This white paper discussed how to develop new leadership capabilities for the 4IR, how to manage technology integration in the workplace, how to improve employee experience, how to build an agile and personalized learning culture, how to establish metrics for valuing human capital, and how to embed diversity and inclusion. The case studies used were Unilever, PwC, IBM, Major Energy Company, and MTN Group. A global event titled the World employer branding day (2020) has a report on the Voices of the industry which give room for expert insights to be presented by global leading employer branding partners. Lastly, the *Employer Branding towards black students - The case of Western Cape, South Africa* (2013) by Larsson and Pettersson inspired the treatment of employer branding in South Africa.

These references apply to the chosen frameworks for this research paper as they amalgamate concepts of workforce readiness, soft skills, technical skills and entrepreneurship. They are also helpful in that they address areas such as performance and development, shared services, rewards and recognition, workforce planning, leadership competencies and values which are incorporated in the frameworks used in this research paper.

The research design has certain properties which in turn determines the appropriateness for the use of what comes out of the research process. Since the research follows a qualitative approach the forms of measurements were through the attributes and variables being researched, in this case being the brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage. For this, a comparative scale was applied to understand the relationship and dynamics between the variables and attributes

Testing of research instruments was applied throughout the contact point of the research process. For quality content and useable data, the research procedure tests for context, biases and use a rating system to structure the feedback. The interviews were based on one interviewee and one interviewer to observe more critically without other factors or distractions. Part of the preparation was to unpack the input and expectations for each interview.

Xaba just as in this research paper applies semi-structured interviews as a schematic presentation of the research questions and topic. It also allows the respondent to lead the findings into diverse routes that will uncover more insights and probe further questions. Semi-structured interviews, according to Greener and Martelli (2015), will be based on a question guide, the contents of which will always be asked of respondents. Xaba's use of semi-structured interviews has inspired an approach that would be more personal and empathetic with introspective value while creating room for a systematic approach to gathering data for the research questions.

### **3.3.2. Research of the target population and selection of the respondents**

This section of the research paper looks at the target population and the selection process of the respondents. Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) further substantiate to give understanding that cases are selected to represent a population, and in such instances, more formal sampling is required.

#### **3.3.2.1. Research target population**

Zikmund (2003) defines population as a complete set of individuals that have some common characteristic. In support, The population, according to Greener and Martelli (2015), is the entire universe of people or objects from which the sample is drawn. This study intends to thoroughly immerse the technique by using an inclusive strategy to investigate and acquire important data with a varied research community. A target population, according to Zikmund (2003), is the entire group of specified population elements important to the study topic - the group to whom the researcher wishes to generalize the findings.

The research paper follows a purposive sampling strategy, looking at a diverse sample, with the opinions of various stakeholders. The gig economy opens the net to wider sample ranges therefore may cause a snowball sampling approach.

The population that is included here are corporate and government brands, that have a significant contribution to the employment culture within their industries and thus have a significant influence on employer brand nuances. The traits we want people in our sample to have are known as inclusion criteria. Participants were chosen from organizations that employ youth, who account for a major portion of the workforce, within the corporate space in South Africa and therefore may require to future proof the employment culture for a sustainable workforce. The government brands that were identified are State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) and are an interesting subject matter because they are losing the young workforce at a fast and significant rate to gig economies and competitors. Employees in the commercial and governmental sec-

tors both have a considerable number of positions open in a variety of departments. This, therefore, gives an objective view of the research topic and questions.

For this research, the inclusion criteria are employer brands that have a significant interest in raising the employment levels in South Africa while contributing significantly towards the standards of innovation, human resource management, employee risk management, job satisfaction and security within the country. The corporate brand is also multinational organisations with a local footprint. In the context of gig economies within the South African landscape, the research process identifies employer brands and employees that are directly affected by labour practices that are insecure, unsatisfactory and exploitative. As such, the gig economy becomes more attractive and a professional surplus of much-needed economic opportunities, further promoting flexible labour, learning opportunities and the professionalisation of skills.

Exclusion criteria, according to Kumar (2011), are qualities that a participant may have that could impair the accuracy of the results. This research paper excludes small businesses and startups (employer brands) as the criteria that do not fit into the research structure and outcome base. The research is also not looking at entry-level, junior-level employees, prospective employees or people close to retirement. In a similar study, Karwowski and Rédey (2013) expand that the analysis will focus on five employer brands that are regarded best-practice examples and are recognized on Universum's Global Top 50 Business list from 2012.

This is a beneficial approach for this study because it enables the research process to use the programmes and systems within the employer brand structures, therefore, setting up useful tools and measurements for the research report.

### **3.3.2.2. Sampling or selecting respondents from the target population**

The sample, as defined by Greener and Martelli (2015), is the subset of the population chosen for research. Bryman (2012) defines a target population as a collection of people, cities, regions, and businesses from which the researcher will choose a sam-

ple. To elaborate, Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) define sampling as the selection of people who will be asked questions via interview or questionnaire.

The sectors which are considered are television broadcasting, life insurance, advertising, water and sanitation, and real estate. The sample of these five employer brands includes interviewing the managers and the employees within the organisation. The criteria are particularly looking at one of the departments per organisation. The participants are as follows: six corporate brand managers (employer brands), thirty corporate brand current employees, three human resource professionals, and one corporate brand strategists. This approach is based on the need to precisely have a local and African perspective on the performance and impact of employer brands in the realm of job satisfaction and security in South Africa. This research paper must have insightful perspectives of key stakeholders who are part and parcel of the future world of work.

### **3.3.3. The ethical considerations when collecting the research data**

Quinlan (2011) defines ethics in business research as "the application of ethical principles as well as defined standards based on the ability to distinguish between the right and wrong ways of conducting research." Greener and Martelli (2015) associate ethics with moral decisions, standards, and behaviors. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2007), ethical considerations are also linked to the researcher's 'power relationship' with those who offer access, as well as the researcher's function (as external researcher, internal researcher or internal consultant).

My interest as a researcher and a brand strategist is in highlighting the value of internal marketing as a powerful tool to use in building sustenance and competitive advantage. My interests further go into educating respective stakeholders on the important measures and attributes considered for such a subject matter within organisations. The research poses a minimal risk because no sensitive questions or topics are going to be addressed. Furthermore, there are no vulnerable categories or privileged information are shared. The research project data has undergone due to formal per-

mission, obtaining the corresponding permission for the data collection process. The research participants must explicitly grant informed consent for the participation information sheet to promote the research process' transparency. In the process, participants were informed that anonymity cannot be guaranteed however the confidentiality is treated in such a way that respondents do not feel or become vulnerable against employment biases and brand jeopardy.

Due to the data collection process which is unpacked below, the protection of data is paramount thus the raw identity or personal data of research participants is included, must be safeguarded. The information is kept safe in a digital cloud and on a secure computer.

#### **3.3.4. The process of collecting the research data and information**

The study design must determine which data processing and analysis procedures are most suited to particular sorts of data and research topics. According to Greener and Martelli (2015), the business research process assists business professionals in gathering relevant data and converting it into knowledge, information, and power.

This research collected interviews and data virtually. The process was through email, and phone calls. The phone calls and emails were used as a form of introducing the researcher, the research topic and the process thereof. They were also used in instances that needed clarity during the process. The semi-structured interviews happened over the Zoom platform. Each participant was meant to be accommodated by making the processes convenient and as safe as possible. Their responses were sent back to them to ensure that the data has been captured correctly and that there are no discrepancies with how their answers have been captured. It is important to do this because this influences the quality of analysing the data at a later stage.

It also assists this particular research paper to be vigilant of digital ethical practices and balance the power and usefulness of observation.

### **3.3.5. The processing and analysing of the research data and information**

#### **3.3.5.1. The processing research of data and information**

Some terminology are a systematic element of the progress in data and information processing and analysis. Information processing is defined by Das, Naglieri, and Kirby (1994) as a set of cognitive processes that describe how an individual approaches a task or problem, as well as the tactics and plans he employs to arrive at a solution. The researcher modifies the data obtained into relevant and contextualized cohesive groups through data coding. The data entry onto the computer is the method in which the researcher uploads data and keep it safe and orderly fashion. The interviews (data collected) are going to be transcribed. The transcription happens through digital apps that take voice and video recordings into scripts. This then is categorised into themes, which are points made for argument sake or guidance for the research paper itself. These were used to analyse the research. The process of doing so makes it easier to fragment the data. Data fragmentation is the deepened process of taking the research themes and further dissecting them into sub-sections and categories.

This research follows data and information processing and analysis structure that separates employer brand data from employee data. An analysis plan was structured, statements of the critical lens were used to critique or analyse the data. Furthermore, the process unpacks the validity and reliability of the data, detailing assumptions, scope and limitations. It also separates each organisation into its folder, ensuring that the data isn't initially diluted. The categories were broken down into the research attributes which speak back to the organisations' brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage. The transcription process happened through Google docs voice transcription where the voice and videos were being played so that the app can transcribe the sound. Based on the content, the different points were be broken down thematically and further fragmented to answer the research questions.

### **3.3.5.2. Research data and information analysis**

When analysing qualitative data and information, Greener and Martelli (2015) expand on the key operations required such as taking into consideration where data is derived from, how to develop and collate themes, comparing categories and contexts, as well as understanding the role and nuances of language and ideas.

The research data and information analysis aspect of the paper is positioned in such a way that addresses the outcomes which generate responses to the research examinations and effectively employed using resources that are available to the respondents and the research itself. The most important factor are those which are generally acceptable in the discipline or field (contextualised to the organisation and employer brands in question).

This approach is beneficial to the research paper because it enables the application to become more open minded in the process of analysing. After all, analysis can change the research method periodically. It will also set the research paper up well enough to display that analysis makes the paper a living and unfinished body of work. Therefore there are future studies to look into.

### **3.3.6. Description of the research respondents**

The research respondents (who are managers and employees within the selected organisations) were sourced from medium to large-sized public and private sector organisations that value employer brand equity. Both the employer and employees are interested or are already pursuing intrapreneurial programmes. The employees are unit or departmental heads. The external stakeholders are brand managers, business leaders, senior managers, HR consultants and practitioners. The respondents are qualified to be high performing professionals. The areas of involvement include corporate communications, marketing department, coaches, talent managers, recruitment specialists.

### **3.4. The research strengthens— based on reliability and validity measures applied**

According to Malhotra and Birks (2007), the degree to which a measurement gives consistent results when repeated is referred to as dependability. Reliability is important because it measures whether or not the instruments and process used to collect data will present acute and ethical results. Therefore it reinforces the key concept consistency because the research paper needs to measure if the results can be replicated. Validity is a term coined by Creswell and Maietta (2002) to describe the process of ensuring that study findings are applicable not only to the population from which the sample was chosen, but also across time, people, and locations. Internal validity is defined by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) as the validity of inferred and discovered links between parts of the research design and outcomes. Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) however shows the concerns about external validity in saying that generalisability is a concern with the external validity of research findings. Validity is important because it strengthens the research question itself by qualifying the larger, generally more abstract goal of the research paper as well as the instruments used to answer the research questions.

Middleton (2020) states that the validity applied in this research monitors credibility to make sure the process aligns with generally accepted natural laws and phenomenon, standards, and observations. The dependability of the research process is open to the fluctuations which would occur during the interview and analysis period, what would be the focal point are the trends that are outlined in these instances. This approach benefits this research paper by empowering efforts that inform how and when to observe through a strong qualitative approach. This paper approached reliability and validity measures by looking into the reproduction of frameworks within organisational departments and industry. Furthermore, the paper looks into the consistency of results by measures of brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage, job security and satisfaction thus being effectively captured and facilitated.

The benefits of the research paper regarding this approach enables a clear balance between the realities of the respondents and the expectation of the research paper and purpose.

### **3.5. Research weaknesses—technical and administrative limitations**

According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018), a study's limits include potential flaws that are usually outside the researcher's control and are strongly linked to the research design, statistical model constraints, financial constraints, or other variables.

Thus far, due to COVID 19 regulations, the limitations on respondent engagements and confirmations have been restrained. The effects have been on confirming employer brand initiatives, availability of respondents, and the systematic approach to their employer brand issues which may be relevant to the research paper. The findings from the respondents could not always be generalised due to the uniqueness of each brand and their environments.

It must be stated that the research does not intend to explore employer-related issues such as extortion and underemployment, the maintenance of industry standards and accreditation or certification, the observation of restriction, competition and practice clauses for organisations.

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## 4. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

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### **“I need to listen well so that I hear what is not said” - Thuli Madonsela**

In this chapter, the results from the engagement with the respondents are herein presented. The respondents were engaged through a diverse range of questions which were anchored by the research questions, namely being: what influences the insecurity and unsatisfactory working environments which lead people to leave their jobs, what is the value of an employer brand, and how can changes in the corporate brand messaging affect the employer brand and what cooperation opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities?

The significance of identifying and further discussing the findings is to encapsulate the relationships of the underlying constructs in light of effective employer brand activities within an environment that factors in influences of the gig economy. The reason for discussion further elaborates on presenting organisational attractiveness and identity nuances that articulate possible solutions for job security and satisfaction as valued by the employer brand as well as employees.

The findings are discussed through a set of themes. The themes that were identified in the process of gathering the data are employer brand engagement, competitive advantage, digital influence, gig economies, employer brand management, employer brand activities, employer brand value, organisational bottom-line. Furthermore, the presented findings were extracted from the conversations which unearthed the perspectives of an employer, an employee, as well as the perceptions and influences that drive employer brand activities.

#### **4.1. Factors within working environments that influence job security and satisfaction.**

The participants were encouraged to explore and thereafter explain their and their peers' positions on job satisfaction and security as derived by the treatment and value of employer brand management. It was important to set this research question as to

the first anchor as it draws the premises of employer brand attractiveness as well as the employee response to the management of the employer brand. The participants were vocal about the afflictions within South African working environments as experienced by employers, employees and prospective employees, which are often coupled with socio-economic dynamics.

#### **4.1.1. Presentation of results**

##### **4.1.1.1. Discussion of key themes**

###### **Responses to issues of job insecurity and dissatisfaction**

The employers and managers who were interviewed communicated that the employer engagements with their employees can result in more positive responses to issues of job insecurity and dissatisfaction if they (the employers and managers) become more transparent and consistent with how they handle discourse within the organisation. The results show that communication is central to a healthy organisational culture therefore climate and brand resonance is aligned to employee expectations.

*“Transparency about the status of the company financial performance is something that can assist in mitigating issues of security and satisfaction amongst employees. Transparency about where the resources of the company are invested or allocated can assist the employees to understand and empathise with the performance and abilities of the company. This will take consistency and fairness in dealing with such issues”.*

Furthermore, the participants further emphasised the importance of sharing growth strategies with employees to exercise transparency and effective employee engagement that may reduce job insecurity and dissatisfaction.

*“Creating an environment of vertical and horizontal internal communication is an integral step. Feedback is important in understanding the climate of your staff and as a result, the organisation. It's important to listen”.*

Principles and values are components that come out vividly in the responses as the participants are equating the employee experience to the treatment and forthcoming nature of their employer. The underlying tone and climate thereof is what seems to create the distinct factors of the working environment.

*“The employer has to be honest and upfront with the employee, stay ahead of rumours, address them head-on before they cause speculation. Offer honest and regular business updates and lastly share growth strategies to be inclusive. The employer needs to open communication and engage employees about their view on possible solutions to their challenges by making sure that employer and employee expectations are aligned”.*

### **Employee perspective on activities that can keep them engaged, secured and satisfied**

In the observation of how employers responded to the issues of job insecurity and dissatisfaction, they addressed concerns about how employer brands can do more in creating activities that keep employees internally engaged, secured and satisfied. By this, participants approached it with a sense of collectivism and inclusion. The approach to engagement was more emphasised in the responses rather than identifying the activities themselves.

*“Team building and workshops once every 3 to 6 months will keep employees engaged. Encourage training, not just for what they want to achieve but what the employees would also want to achieve. Ensure that the goal is more or less the same. Seek continuous feedback from the employees and implement those activities with potential benefits to both employer and employees”.*

### **Brand loyalty and productivity concerning brand activities**

The employers have human resource management attributes signifying the correlation between brand loyalty and employee productivity. However, when the employees were asked about this, they responded with a values centric approach.

Employers articulated that *“with customers, brands usually prepare a loyalty programme. Whereas employee productivity seems to be linked to employee freedom in terms of their time and creativity. When you afford them more freedom, they are prone to become more loyal to abiding with organisational demands”*. This is supported by the employees' response in saying that *“giving the employees what they want and capitalizing on industry trends, encourages the employees to be more productive and loyal and hopefully adding to their job satisfaction”*.

Another approach from employees addressed the notion of empowerment and effective leadership. Ensuring that the employees are acknowledged and further involved empowers the employees and builds a sustainable team and performance base. *“Check-ins and connections that are beyond just the job at hand are a way of igniting that engagement. It is important to engage staff beyond that. This fosters better connections with the business and also make people feel that they matter”*. To further support and substantiate, *“Effective & empowered Leadership programs are what employers should use as tools to get around issues of job insecurity and dissatisfaction. Continued employee engagement is an effective two-way communication channel creation. This should be supported by quick communication turnaround times - reverting to employees quickly post the engagement sessions, surveys, etc”*. The participants further elaborated that *“trust and integrity are central to how employees invest for the long term with their chosen employer brands. Less micro-management is effective for productivity and confidence building. As an overall sentiment, it is essential to embody brand values as the employer. Encourage participation and alignment to organisational objectives”*.

What came up significantly was the order of employee recognition and rewards. *“Rewards and Recognition (both financial and acknowledgement of performance and contribution) are essential to brand loyalty and productivity concerning brand activities. Use this opportunity to delight and surprise employees. Stretch*

*it by leveraging team building and performance-based incentives as well”.*

In response, the employees agree that yes, employee productivity is a result of employer brand loyalty. All respondents agreed in unison. *“Loyalty and trust go hand in hand. If I'm being micromanaged I could never apply myself fully. Disengaged employees are less likely to operate at optimum productivity”.* This was further supported by the observation on the impact on the organisational value chain. *“The more an employee is being productive the more the consumers/users are most likely to enjoy services that are offered”.*

### **How employees are made to feel involved and valued**

Both the employees and employer participants are aligned regarding their responses to the involvement and value of employees concerning the contributions of the employer brand activities to the organisational engagements. The employees comprehensibly stated that *“employees should be involved in the idea generation for new projects and consultation on major decisions that affect them”.* This was further elaborated by saying, *“one on one engagements are a form of recognition practices. Beyond that resides the recognition of opportunities for employees to lead projects and engage with stakeholders at all levels by involving them and valuing them”.* Furthermore, the results support the notion that *“one on one sessions with leadership is a significant attribute to employer brand activities. This can also be seen as a form of a rewards and recognition programs”.* Employers and managers further coherently said that *“openness, sharing details of the organisation that help employees understand the state of the business at any given time, is a step in the right direction. Encouraging people to be whom they are, creating a warm and fun environment is as essential”.*

This was complemented by the employees' responses as they said that how employers can make employees feel more involved and valued are by *“having an employee of the month initiatives, communicate nuances of the business and organisation more clearly and often, and anchor that with encouraging efforts more consistently (en-*

*couraging the voice to be heard through formal platforms). Have one-on-one sessions. Ask for their input on certain tasks”.*

#### **4.1.1.2. Response to the research question: what influences the insecurity and unsatisfactory working environments which lead people to leaving their jobs?**

The first research question asks: what influences the insecurity and unsatisfactory working environments which lead people to leave their jobs? Both the employee and employer participants responded by engaging on issues of transparency and inclusive communication as part of the challenges faced by stakeholders and the organisation as a whole.

The employee respondents are open to an approach of inclusion and collectivism in efforts to mitigate nuances of satisfaction and security within their jobs. As part of the influences, employers show that they are faced with degrees of brand loyalty and productivity challenges due to gaps in providing what employees want and need from their jobs and working environments.

The responses showed that job satisfaction and security is blended by interactive effects and levels of the working environment. The responses included fair policies and practices, as well as the intention to empower and lead while promoting a sense of belonging and responsibility. This is supported by the participants’ responses which acknowledge respect and flexibility as central values that measure performance and self-expression. Supporting the nature of work as part of the influences, there is great concern around creativity and innovation in the changing world of work.

#### **4.1.2. Comparison of research results to similar studies**

According to Geldenhuys (2017), primary sector employment are largely formal sector positions with high wages and salary, good benefits, and a lot of job security, while secondary sector jobs are mostly informal sector occupations with poor pay, few or no benefits, and limited job security. When Maleka et al (2019) investigated

employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment in SADC, they discovered that when compared to their counterparts in Namibia and Zimbabwe, South African companies' job security enhanced employee engagement, dedication, and satisfaction. Scholtz et al (2019) show that job satisfaction, perceived job (in)security, and learning opportunities are the three most important discriminators in investigations of the intents of turnover and turn-away factors pertaining to job satisfaction in IT staff in South Africa. Reports on the effectiveness of leadership styles in affecting employee work satisfaction vary with time and place, according to Mefi-Hawkins (2021). This means that ongoing research into these phenomena is necessary to guarantee that any existing methods are appropriate for the time and place.

#### **4.2. The alignment of the corporate brand message to the essence of the employer brand**

The corporate message is a way for an employer brand to establish its identity or reputation and not necessarily promote its products or services. Fundamentally, from an internal marketing perspective, the participants understood that the corporate brand message is founded on pillars that are sourced from the brand promise, business and brand positioning statement, the organisational mission and is essentially delivered through a consistent and relevant tone of voice. The corporate message expresses the main organisational ideas and at this point, this is where the organisational culture is driven from. The participants identified messages that were formally presented by their organisations however at times not consistently lived up to or effectively promoted by the employer brand.

##### **4.2.1. Presentation of empirical results**

###### **4.2.1.1. Discussion of key themes**

###### **Translating the corporate brand message to the connection and effectiveness of employer branding**

The employer respondents are split between knowing their corporate message, aligning the message and not being aware of their corporate message at all. However the components of the employer brand corporate message were understood by some em-

ployers as *“the messaging which describes the intent of the organisation, the employees read the messages as the intention of the employer and then align their actions according to the messages”*.

The results show that participants are aware of the corporate intention to create and live the brand promise. For employees to believe in and be advocates for the employer brand, the corporate brand message should not be disconnected from how the organisation is run, how leadership engagements employees and what opportunities are available within the organisation for employees.

*“Only when there is a strong element of walking the talk can the message and effectiveness come true. The focus is to never make promises you cannot deliver. Values, statements etc must be true. Those adjustments must be understood and lived out internally - especially in businesses that offer services. Brand and employee integration must take place by making sure that the corporate lives up to their brand promise and value propositions”*.

The employers showed, in their responses, that the corporate message does not live in isolation. *“Employees are the ambassadors of the brand. They enable the organisations to deliver or exceed the customer promise. If there's a disconnect customer satisfaction will be compromised”*.

### **Articulation of employee concerns within the corporate brand message**

In light of the employee responses, their perspectives seem aligned as they are not too confident about the cooperation between employer engagements, the acknowledgement of their concerns and the resonance of the corporate brand message.

When asked if the brand message considers their concerns, suggestions and input within the organisation, the employees showed great discomfort and grievances. How their employers engaged with them was reported as one-sided and seemingly the corporate brand message was coming from the organisation and not necessarily taking heed of the employee concerns, suggestions and input.

*“Anxiety! “Employer is right and never wrong” No it doesn't consider my concerns as it only makes me anxious about seeing them on a daily. Each email carries with it fear”. Some responses weren't as passionate but still carried the same sentiments, “No it does not. The communicated message is that of bureaucracy and does not consider my voice as an employee”.*

### **Attracting prospective employees through the brand message**

Prospective employees are mentioned far and few in-between. In consideration that this paper does not specifically look at prospective employees, the participants who responded as employers mentioned how their companies engage prospective employees on their platforms to create an attractive employer brand.

*“Companies engage through the marketing of specific projects that may be viewed as aspirational - these projects then create a favourable brand for the employer”. Beyond the marketing and advertising material, comes the internal employee power and influence. The participants, as employers observe that the prospective employees take note of what existing employees say about the brand and therefore their efforts to evoke the brand message is superseded by what employers are saying about the brand. “Our people become major advocates for the brand and that becomes attractive for prospective employees. We also believe that winning awards and having a profile of excellence and great working space is a way to attract prospective employees”.*

The employers also show a sense of a strategic approach to attracting prospective employees, they work from a sense of analysing what the market wants, what are people being attracted to and somehow find a way to serve towards that. *“We preempt what the prospects want, aim to give that to them. We offer a realistic glimpse of the organisation, share updated job descriptor, and engage in: career fairs, applicant tracking systems, and other C/ERM systems”.* It is evident that employers have a significant dependency on how they project a human-centric approach to their brand message and how that resonates with the internal state of affairs. *“There is a*

*heavy dependence or reliance on a positive human to human experience (HR to potential employees and digital application portals to potential employees) different companies would do this differently”.*

### **Intention to sell the corporate brand to employees**

All participants were asked to state their experience with how their organisations sell their corporate brand to employees. The emphasis was on how often does the organisation intentionally sell their brand to employees (current or prospective) and if it is an afterthought or not.

*“Not all companies are deliberate about their brand but where this is done deliberately it becomes part of the way of their being as an organisation”.* For those organisations who do deliberately engage their employees and prospective employees, some of the responses showed that culture eats strategy and planning for lunch, *“every single week and in our monthly catch-ups. We cannot rely on one presentation per year. Culture is built daily. It's the detail that matter when it comes to employee sentiment”.* In other organisations, it was further elaborated that *“for current employees, the intentions and efforts are ongoing and constant however with the prospective employees, this is only done through recruitment stages although this should not be the case it is an afterthought”.* In essence, the reports show that differs for each organisation. As one responded stated that *“it happens at every consumer touchpoint as employees often experience the brand as a customer/client first and often have a perception of the brand from that point”.*

When juxtaposing this theme with that of the perspective of the current employees themselves, the participants said *“it had become an afterthought for their organisation, with all that they have been experiencing as an employee so far”.* It was further supported as more employees believe that it wasn't prioritised or well managed. *“To many, it is an afterthought. It is sold from the interview stage. From reading the job spec. To the culture that's carried out. It is always an afterthought, usually at times when reputational damage is a threat”.*

In context to corporate brand messaging, in order of importance, the employers and managers responded to their perception of how important employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance is in its receptiveness. What came out prevalently is employee relationship marketing, followed by the corporate reputation and lastly the corporate social performance

### **The alignment of employee beliefs, attitudes and values with the organisation and its' culture**

Once again the data, the employers and employees hold similar sentiments. As such, they both believe in the human-centricity of organisations. The reports show that the participants associate the employer brand activities with the values derived from the organisation. It is all facilitated by effective leadership and supported and driven by the employees who cultivate the culture within the working environments.

*“This is because when values are not aligned - employees find themselves not being able to be effective in their roles. There is a disconnect in terms of action expected against the employees' beliefs. The alternative will not be conducive to building a successful business. How people feel about the organisation will influence the culture of the organisation. Values and beliefs of the employees shape the culture of the organisation - and if they are not aligned, the organisation will be pulled into different directions rather than where it is intended to go”. Further substantiating, the employers continue to add that “if it's misaligned it will be evident in the ‘moment of truth’ when consumers come in contact with your brand. Therefore you need that alignment to achieve maximum output from the employee and visa versa”.*

On the other hand, the employee participants said *“they should align because employees will most likely work in synergy with what the employer offers and the image of the brand will reflect one. This is further articulated by a participant saying “What I bring to the organisation is what I'll leave with if I don't align myself with its quali-*

*ties. For sustainable output, alignment is required. Alignment of beliefs, attitudes and values drives employee motivation and motivated employees are more likely to be productive in their work”.*

### **Human resource management functions in resonance with the corporate image**

When asked to consider their organisational human resource management functions, the participants who are employees were split between agreeing and disagreeing that their organisations’ corporate image matched what was being communicated by the employer brand and human resource management functions of the organisation.

Those who agreed with the sentiments warranted their response to the treatment they are receiving as an employee with the human resource department. *“Our organisation has a few different brands within the organisation. For every channel or station, it has an identity of its own. I believe the corporate image is being represented well by the HR department”.* For those who disagree and said no, there is no alignment warranted. the notion is that the brand values are not aligned with the company structure. *“No, to a large extent, the human resource management functions are there for the employer and not the employees. The corporate image is not communicated to the employees, only to the outside world. The brand values encourage equity however, this is misaligned in the company structure”.*

#### **4.2.1.2. Response to the research question: how do adjustments in the corporate brand message influence the essence of the employer brand?**

The second research question is: how do changes in the corporate brand messaging affect the employer brand's essence? The participants distinguished the linkage and efficacy of employer branding from the translation of the corporate brand message. There is a split in responses of employers and employees knowing what the corporate brand message is within their organisation. What is articulated clearly is the dubious translation of the brand message to the actual daily operations and leadership management within organisations. The results state a keen interest by the employee

respondents for their organisations to leverage employees to humanise the employer brand message and experience within the working environments. This was packaged comprehensively in the articulation of employee concerns within the corporate brand message.

The efforts by employer brands to attract prospective employees through the brand message is challenged as results show that it most often is an afterthought. In responding, employee participants indicate that employees are more often the mouthpieces for drawing the perception of the internal brand experience for prospective employees. This has been supported by responses that articulate their experience of the employer brand intention to present the corporate brand to employees enough for them to believe in it. The responses therefore overstated the concerns factoring culture as a central aspect to the brand and organisational experience.

As such, the paper ties the above themes to the alignment of employee beliefs, attitudes and values with the organisation and its' culture. Employees and employers both agree that these values are the cornerstones of effective employer brand activities and healthy brand engagements. The respondents bind the adaptation of organisational culture and the corporate brand message to the human resource management functions in resonance with the corporate image. The binding is articulated as a form of living the brand and ensuring that all functions of the employer brand are coherent with what the employer is selling and what the employee is attracted to.

#### **4.2.2. Comparison of research results to similar studies**

Swart (2018) adds that, in contrast to what academics in similar studies have written, organizations appear to understand the need of aligning their communications with their corporate brand values to demonstrate what stakeholders can anticipate from them. According to Cullinan, Abratt, and Mingione (2021), the CEO of a state-owned business (SEO) is responsible for developing the corporate brand, which is then executed and disseminated by the CMO or Chief Brand Officer (CBO). The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) is the company brand's driver, implementer, guardian, and cus-

todian. Because the corporate brand message is connected with storytelling, Nyagadza, Kadembo, and Makasi (2020) argue that corporate management should actively involve internal stakeholders in producing corporate tales for branding in order to create favorable corporate brand perceptions. Furthermore, Nyagadza, Kadembo, and Makasi (2020) state that employees become corporate brand advocates or ambassadors, who can deliver services and products with a positive perception of their organization, in their other study that looked into strengthening emotional attachment for employees through the corporate brand. According to Graham and Cascio (2017), by engaging and encouraging employees to embody organizational values, the organization helps them feel a sense of pride and ownership, allowing them to become more involved in spreading the organization's positive messages.

### **4.3. The importance of an effective employer branding**

It is quite evident that the participants are hardly aware of the nuances defining employer branding. This is seen in how some participants did not know the term(s) but instead knew or have experienced the dynamics of employer brand activities. The participants presented the common understanding that business and brands often invest more efforts in attracting, engaging and delighting external stakeholders such as customers and distributors rather than investing that value internally through their employee engagements. This part of the research question embraces the tough recruitment market in South Africa in context to skills shortages and increasing competition for talent, therefore the participants responded from a context of effective employer branding that promotes organisational culture, values, and further strengthens the corporate message.

#### **4.3.1. Presentation of empirical results**

##### **4.3.1.1. Discussion of key themes**

##### **Values and brand offerings represented in a preferred employer brand**

The first theme of effective employer branding is attributed to the employees' perception of an ideal employer brand of choice. This is backed up by the employer and manager perceptions of a demonstrable difference between a firm with a strong employer brand and one that doesn't.

The employees articulated that “ *the employer brand must be able to offer a clear message about the organisation and what they stand for. This should be strongly supported by honesty, integrity, loyalty, and accountability*” In support of this notion, sentiments echoed by the participants mentioned that the “*promotion of equity in the workplace must be prioritised. Flexibility in working conditions is where the world is moving, the employer brand must account for this. Adopting a strong focus in talent management is central to the sustainability of employer brand relationship management as a whole. Lastly, incentivising the team and encouraging collaborative efforts must be revoked at and challenged at an aggressive level*”.

To this, the paper looks at how employers and managers are faring with the above sentiments as shared by employees. The employers discuss the measurable differences between a company with a strong employer brand and a company without one to support the concept. The aim is to contrast the performance or benchmarks levels of the organisations. The employer participants pointed out the following attributes as what they consider as strong employer branding: the loyalty of employees, quality of clients and quality of employees, performance and communication channels, reputation and awareness. Lastly, the bottom line and employee satisfaction.

The employer and management participants measured the value of their employer brand as follows: As measured by the best company to work for surveys; measured by the staff retention, climate survey results, quality of the work, awards in the industry, inquiries for jobs, invitation to bids/pitches. Furthermore, the number of resignation and frequency; reputations amongst peer companies and colleagues; rating organisation which resemble the perception of the best company to work for. Lastly, the measurements can come in terms of the brand equity reports, internal question-

naires and fruitfulness of internal engagements. It is worth noting that there were employees who did not know how their employer brand is measured or valued.

### **Effective employer branding concerning employee productivity**

The extent and value to which an effective employer brand contributes to the level of employee productivity in visible and measurable ways are articulated at length by the employers and managers who were interviewed.

*“When employees believe in the cause of what the company is doing they tend to go an extra mile to support its initiatives - this is seen through extra hours of work or willingness to work without pay. It contributes immensely - when employees are proud of the organisation they work for (passion) and they believe in the work that they do (purpose). There is a positive impact on productivity”.* The participants continue to say that *“the success of our business is the quality of the product and service we give. That means a staff complement that delivers on this. We use measurements such as awards, quality, client feedback to gauge that level of employee impact and productivity”.* In consideration of culture, the participants articulate that *“it affects the morale of the employees which shapes or translates into the culture of the organisation. Good leadership allows for decision making and rewards. This means taking initiative is not punitive. Again it's in the alignment of what the company does”.*

### **The distinction of effective employer branding to employee loyalty**

The employee respondents stated that *“should the branding stand strong and not be tainted by competitors or outside spectators as well as stakeholders, employees will most likely not jump ship and will show loyalty”.* Supporting this, *“employer branding directly drives engagement through the pride of association. It encourages employees to conduct themselves professionally. It encourages employees to put the interests of the organisation first at all times. Through this, the brand grows! As an individual grows, they remember who and what influenced the growth. They remain loyal to honesty and integrity”*

### **Employer brand management dilemmas faced by employers and managers**

No two businesses are the same. The participants responded by showing their internal affairs and outlooks on how their brand is being challenged. Amongst the concerns that arose, the participants made mention of *“the challenge of employees wanting to define themselves as brands that may be directly in competition with their employer”*, second to that, was the macro perspective and effects of the pandemic on employer and employee engagements. *“During COVID-19 lockdowns, managing employee engagement while surrounded by a challenging time across our communities and the economy was a dilemma”*. What resonated across the board was the notion of resource management and lack of. *“Limited funds interrupts plans and strategies. It is tough when the organisation is sensitive to economic changes. Usually employees do not understand these organisational dynamics”*.

### **The organisational bottom line concerning effective employer branding**

The subject of how employer brand nuances affect the bottom line of the organization is at the center of all the discussion. Participants reacted by emphasizing the need of promoting a strong employer brand that benefits the organization's bottom line.

*“A well-defined employer brand gives employees a sense of purpose which often translates into profit. When those employees are treated right, magic happens. The good brand will likely have the goodwill of customers - this increase is likely to improve the volumes of sales, ultimately resulting in profitability. Employees will feel they are recognised for their efforts”*.

The reports have a significant correlation between employee recognition, their involvement in strategic areas and the output seen as productivity. The participants allude to this being showcased on platforms that present the organisations' ability to optimise their results and achievements. *“It is paramount that as a business you have*

*a profile to gain clients. It is also equally important that your reputation is attractive to clients. The result is a constant influx of inquiries”.*

### **Competitive organisational culture**

The participants responded by saying that the aspects of organisational culture that are intrinsically tied to their organisations’ competitive advantage are: the openness and freedom of thought, which can be linked to innovation; the values of an organisation which determines its approach and generally, that approach becomes the way that the company shows up, therefore the result is the perceived value that the company would have therefore gained. That leads to a competitive advantage. Rewards and Recognition system are also an edge that organisations can effectively adapt. Another aspect is how an organisation measures its success components which tie into both the company’s mission and values.

In response to that, the employee participants share what encompasses a sustainable organisational culture. They stated that *“a strong and sustainable culture exists if people share common beliefs and emphasis what constitutes sustainability as a matter of importance and therefore strive to behave in ways that support it”.*

To further support this theme, mention of *clear and honest communication*, a non-silo working environment and a clear intention of transparency between portfolios, divisions and departments was common amongst responses from the participants.

The employee participants further elaborated on how this affects the organisations’ reputation in retrospect. The effects are dependent on the organisation and industry landscape thereof. Some of the pointers mentioned by the participants are reputational effects which are drawn from public or external depictions of how the organisation handles its products and services, therefore directly revealing what the employees would have direct involvement in.

In relations to broadcasting, *“the news that is being reported, should be independent and impartial. How this is handled has a direct effect on how the public and different*

*stakeholders engage, trust and depend on our organisation, employees, and its' competencies". In the private sector, from a production lines' perspective, "honesty! Honesty and consistency thereof determine your reputation. It is further true in realising that without the employees, there wouldn't be much growth for the organisation and that impacts the reputation tremendously". For those who are in the public sector departments, they made mention of political and socio-economic factors being a significant determination for how reputation is accounted for. "Political interferences (external) affects how we can move forward as an organisation. Issues like Misconduct in supply chain processes affect the reputation of the organisation and our entire value chain thereof. This can lead to perceptions and associations of fruitless, wasteful expenditure".*

### **Preferred employer brand activities**

The employee participants respond to their preference for employer brand activities. It can be reported that rewarding employees with out-of-the-office perks are preferred firstly above others, followed by internal entrepreneurship opportunities (Intrapreneurship) and a mixture of preferences that follow, being office events and behind the scenes recognitions.

### **Maintenance of employer brand distinctiveness over time**

The employers responded by emphasising that employer distinctiveness is relative to various attributes. The goal of this research is to see if employer brands retain their uniqueness over time, or if they imitate external pressures and lose their uniqueness.

The responses articulate that *"they (employer brands) do maintain their distinctiveness over time if these are linked to processes as a unique competitive edge. I believe, that this can be attained over time, as you fine-tune what makes you unique as an organisation while the business grows"*. To further substantiate, a participant responded by saying that *"employer brands maintain their distinctiveness through the current leadership style of the organisations. This has the biggest effect of this change"*. In observation to what the organisation needs, *"I believe it does so over*

*time - an organisation needs time to build a reputation which is often its distinctiveness - too much change makes it hard to measure or define what the company stands for. This also differs for each company”.*

### **Influence of external forces in the uniqueness of the employer brand**

The participants were further asked about the external forces that interfere with their unique employer brand experience. They were asked if organizations can keep their own employer brand image while responding to external influences that threaten institutional similarities.

*“Yes - if the unique employer brand is linked to people that the firm employs - no one can replicate the individual talent that is within a specific firm. Your competitive advantage is your reason for your brand or company’s existence, so it must be upheld. The job of an institution is to differentiate itself from everyone else. This USP becomes the reason for attracting clients and employees. It is paramount that there is a USP otherwise it’s risky”.*

### **Order of importance: employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance**

In order of importance, the employers and managers responded to their perception of how important employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance is important to the effectiveness of an employer brand. What came up prevalently is employee relationship marketing as the number one attribute, followed by corporate reputation and lastly the corporate social performance.

Employers and managers said that corporate social performance is significant in terms of receptiveness to the corporate brand message, in order of significance, followed by corporate reputation and lastly employee relationship marketing as the least important attribute.

In contrast to this, the employee participants were asked similar questions to distinguish their conviction with regards to the nuances of effective employer branding. In order of importance and relation to the corporate brand message, the participants recorded that all three aspects are as important: employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance.

This was supported by the participants surveying that they do care about the work and investment that their organisation does for the society or communities around them. *“Yes I do. While my department is not so active, I wish we were. Corporate Social Responsibility is incorporated in every work package executed by the organisation”*.

### **Value add of employer brands towards professional development**

Besides, the value that an effective employer brand adds to employees professionally was investigated. Empowerment comes up as a common thread amongst employees. The value proposition of the employer brand also factored in aspects of organisational culture, brand association, and corporate reputation as a form of professional value add towards employees.

The employee participants reported that in order of importance, the aggregate value of organisational identity is the highest consideration of value add for an employer brand, followed by brand association. The organisational culture was rated the least important from the group. This was judged concerning the desirability and the value proposition of an employer brand.

Professionally, the respondents further stated that *“the ability to learn and grow in most cases offer more to me professionally. An effective employer brand gives credibility to my professional standing. It allows me to view myself as competitive as my peers in the industry. It gives meaning to my professional efforts”*. In context to organisational values, *“you carry with you the organisations’ true values as you grow*

*professionally. You carry with you the brand, not just for the employer but for you as an individual. You remember what it is embedded in you”.*

In order of importance, employee participants continued to voice that, with the corporate brand message, corporate reputation was prioritised over corporate social performance and lastly employee relationship marketing.

#### **4.3.1.2. Response to the research question: what is the value of an effective employer brand?**

The third research question amalgamates the distinctions of the first question relating to job satisfaction and security as well as the second question that relates to the corporate brand message. The particular research question asking what the value of an effective employer brand is.

In context to the values and brand offerings embodied in an employer brand of choice, the respondents consider the competitive, economic constraints of the business and organisational environment as factors. The value of an effective employer brand has been measured against the alliance and commitment of employees to the organisation and that of employers when it comes to their (employees) development or empowerment. The employer brand reputation and awareness rank significantly high in the order of preference to the value of an effective brand. This is what was reiterated by the reports derived from the job satisfaction and security theme as well.

Concerning employee productivity and loyalty, the respondents qualified this with an observation on how each of their needs is and aren't met. Productivity was correlated with the level of inclusion, empowerment and freedom that the employees are given to add value and insights to their roles within the organisation. The extension to this is the theme concerning the organisational bottom line in relation to being an effective employer branding. The loyalty and productivity of employees have a direct effect on the organisational bottom line. The consistent application to this approach assimilates the preferred employer brand activities and organisational culture. What

has been emphasised as the external influences affecting the uniqueness of the employer brand also supports the professional and personal properties that evoke employer brand distinctiveness over time thus the maintenance thereof is what culminates employer brand management dilemmas faced by employers and managers. As such, employer brands cater to employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance to maintain their distinctiveness and effectiveness.

#### **4.3.2. Comparison of research results to similar studies**

Hadi and Ahmed (2018) discovered that employer branding is regarded strategically important to gain employee retention in the context of employer branding. Employer branding allows a company to create an impression in the minds of its employees that the company is a fantastic place to work. Some detractors of the concept of employer branding, according to Aldousari, Robertson, Yajid, and Ahmed (2017), argue that certain organizations are highly attractive to job searchers despite the lack of well-developed strategies. Employees are taken into account. According to Morokane et al. (2016), employees who want to promote their employer's brand and its products and services should be encouraged and guided to do so in a way that allows them to communicate authentically while also being mindful of communicating inappropriately, thereby reducing brand risk. According to Bussin and Mouton (2019), increased views of company branding are associated with higher employee retention and lower compensation expectations. According to Kheswa (2015), a strong employer brand will provide a company a competitive edge, and elements like as salary, values, culture, training, and leadership have a direct impact on the employer brand that a company develops.

#### **4.4. Cooperation solutions that mitigate risk incurred by employer brands due to digital and gig activities.**

Through the data collected, it is observed that the culture of cooperation can be further embraced by South African brands. A phenomenon that is further interesting is

the competition between employers and employees (in contexts to gig economies). The source of competition and unrest is due to the unattractive levels of job security and satisfaction in South Africa. Participants show an invested interest in pursuing external gig entrepreneurial ventures to support what they believe lacks in their professional and personal pursuits. It is thought-provoking to see employees having solutions to problems faced by their organisations however offering solutions outside of their organisations, sometimes on a consultation format or offerings completely unrelated. Participants share how if employer brands were effective enough, these innovative solutions could be presented internally, adding more value back into the organisation, increasing the bottom line and most importantly, satisfying the employees professional and personal goals.

#### **4.4.1. Presentation of empirical results**

##### **4.4.1.1. Discussion of key themes**

###### **The important factors for employee engagement in the digital era**

The research paper aims to investigate gig activities in context to work-related nuances and the inclusion of digital influences can further articulate what is important to ignite an effective employee engagement strategy.

The employers reported that *"the understanding of how freedom of thought translates into innovation, leads to employees who are better engaged with their work. The ease and flow of communication through digital platforms should be used to the advantage of the employees or employer (and not seen as a stumbling block)"*.

This is read against what employees reported as concerns for them when engaging digitally with employers. The first being how the employees represent themselves online and on social media platforms. The participants record that there are sometimes discrepancies in the organisational or employer brand and that of their personal brand. Furthermore, employee participants want more freedom to engage and reach the organisations' targeted audience digitally without having to depend on organisational processes and protocols. The underlying responses want to see more being

done in the use of digital platforms to communicate directly with employees about the core brand values and benefits.

Employers and managers echo these sentiments as they share that it is important for employer brands to *“make it personal, respect the personal, make it simple, make it fun. Furthermore, connecting with employees, especially with those working from home, means learning how to engage on the right platforms and at the right time”*.

### **Effects of the gig economy on human capital investments**

The following theme looks at how the gig economy has caused employer brands to look beyond their current human capital investments *“because many skilled employees prefer the diversity of experiences offered by the freedom of the gig economy. This has meant that many companies now rely on these highly skilled individuals”*.

The employer participants say that *“the sustainability of the business relies heavily on the continuity of the culture that differentiates and give your business a competitive advantage. It's a no brainer that focus is here (at our organisation)”*. Furthermore, more comments target the enrichment and highlighting each employees' unique proposition. *“We shifted from upskilling employees to focus on the right hire getting the rights skills upfront. we are also more selective about sharing employees IP with all employees”*.

In the South African landscape, common responses highlighted that the effects are not yet significant due to the slow integration of technology and digital innovation in many spheres. *“I don't think it's had that much of a significant impact yet - but probably has contributed to the rise 'consultants'. You can see that it has slowly opened up the market. Now if you are a writer you do not have to write just for one sector”*.

The perspective of the employee participants is like available employment and the security thereof. *“They (employers) are able to employ gig workers and not more permanent workers. They'd rather get consultants than to hire permanent positions”*. In retrospect, the reports indicate that employees are aware and worried about the

creation of employment policies and protection when the rise of gig work becomes popular. *“It has led to policy review at board level pertaining to incentive payments to encourage vested interest by employees and loyalty to the employer rather than seeking satisfaction externally”*.

### **Employer brands taking advantage of the gig economy**

When asked how employer brands can take advantage of the gig economy, employers and managers responded by suggesting that organisations *“build a database of highly skilled personnel of gig economy players - and then tap into that from time to time. They can also create a work culture that connects with the individual and gives them purpose in the work they do. To take it further, it an employer brand can offer a different perspective outside of the norm and allow for innovative thinking to offer new practical solutions outside of the corporate world - which in essence opens up the market”*. In the responses, there was also an admission that organisations *“spend less money up-skilling employees as they are selected based on having the right skills as it offers a diverse pool of workers. The latter helps the business to scale up or down more easily”*.

The employee respondents said that the employer brands can take advantage of the gig economy by *“being able to employ gig workers as they have more industry knowledge. They can further create more learnerships with the aim of introducing individuals to the brand. The brands can also offer employees the flexibility to work from wherever they are, provided deliverables are met. By making work more adaptable to the demand patterns thus allowing for employee flexibility”*

### **Gig activities that are in conflict with traditional organisational structures in or outside of the organisation or industry**

The rationalisations presented here from the perspective of employers was a mixture as some employers believed that *“there are none, all gigs support the needs of the business”*, while some respondents believed that *“working from home while maintaining creativity and collaboration has been a challenge. Giving staff a sense of to-*

*getherness, considering that they have been apart, has shunned light gig activities as competition to the organisation. What I also see is the challenge of fostering relationships with short term thinking on the part of employees".* The employees however responded by saying that *"in our industry, we're forced to be consultants. They are able to employ gig workers and not more permanent workers"*. The employees further engage on the ethics and contractual implications of gig work as they mention that *"internal policies state that there is to be no external conflict of interest displayed by any employee. Any gigs that are similar to an employee's direct line of work are prohibited"*.

### **How employers can discourage employees from having side gigs**

Employers and managers approached this theme by focussing on the competitive nature and entrepreneurial edge of their organisation and employee. *"The main one is the issue of paying them very well, secondly is whether there is any competitive information that may result in a conflict of interest for the employees. Thirdly, recognising flexible hours and compensation for extra time"*. Furthermore, other perspectives are that *"one cannot discourage side gigs as an employer has no control over that. What you can do however is to be open to employees using their entrepreneurial edge for the work they are contracted to do. I don't think employers should discourage side gigs, having side gigs offers people who are multi-skilled the ability to create exponentially"*.

The employees however responded by saying that employer brands should *"incentivise employees in the most appropriate ways. Side gigs are a way of ensuring you can make ends meet without depending on your next paycheck. It's the work hard and play hard motto"*. Further perspectives highlight that employers can discourage employees from having side gigs by offering *"full-time employment and or ensuring that they always look forward to their opportunity in the office. This is coupled by having market-related remuneration packages, focusing on how stimulated and satisfied employees are in their daily work and lastly if there is adequate work flexibility"*

### **Challenges finding good competitive employees**

Competitive advantage came up considerably throughout the interviews. The employers and management participants way in on some of the obstacles they have come across in finding good competitive employees. *“Not all employees have a vision. Many feel very comfortable in BIG established organisations than in small organisations going places”*. Issues of remuneration came up a lot in contrast to the value that the employees offer. *“Inflated compensation is a huge problem for us. Sometimes, it is not worth paying so much for little effort in return. Furthermore, Employees don’t often show loyalty to their organisations and this may become a long term hindrance to the growth and competitive edge of the company”*. On the softer side, *“EQ is a challenge, it's hard to find soft skills such as emotional intelligence. Employees often lead with their achievements but struggle with their style of engaging with the teams more effectively which can create daily challenges within projects”*.

### **Coopetition opportunities for employer brands**

The employee participants were asked to mention what (if their organisations offer these) coopetition opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities. The results showed that the organisations that were interviewed do not engage or celebrate cooperative opportunities. The responses showed a poor understanding of the concept/ *“We do not know what that is, and we also do not collaborate with our competitors much if at all”*. Another respondent said that *“opportunities such as external (market) data sourcing and analyzing for improvements in the business solution can be one way that organisations can cooperate with others”*.

### **Intrapreneurship opportunities within employer brands**

Employers in the group of respondents were asked if they offer intrapreneurship opportunities within their organisation (an employee who is tasked with developing innovative ideas or project within a company, behaving like an entrepreneur while

working within a large organisation). 80% of the organisations said no. The rest of the 20% said *“Yes we do. We have expanded our business that way based on the interest of certain employees in certain disciplines”*. Those who said no said, *“no, we run a very traditional company no room, does not believe too much in financing innovation”*.

They were further asked how can intrapreneurship be used to encourage employees to invest more time and innovative efforts towards the organisational goals. The highlighted responses are *“to allow employees to work within their passion areas, by introducing incentives, and by making employees see that you value them”*. They further substantiate to say that *“when entrepreneurs are used to working toward company goals, this will have the objective of advancing the achievements of company goals while developing the individual”*. Structural observation and critique from employers is to have intrapreneurship *“as a consultative division that doesn’t sit internally for it to be effective”*.

The employee participants insist that *“intrapreneurship drives high levels of innovation which indirectly drive higher levels of employee engagement. Therefore being given tasks outside of the daily job description is a start. Having competition amongst internal peers can be best suited to ensure that employees invest more time with organisational activities”*.

When asked if they (the employees) had the opportunity to be an intrapreneur, how would they add value to their organisation, the participants stated that they would *“increase the productivity of the business by focusing on the operations of the company, come up with solutions to motivate teams within the organisation to become driven and goal orientated”*. Mental health issues came up as a cause for concern amongst employees as work-life balance solutions came up considerably across the responses. *“Therapy. Occupational therapy is of utmost importance, we as employees have endured complex dynamics within our organisations and industries”*. The last bit of concepts has to do with mitigating internal risks to the organisation. *“ I would*

*identify the three biggest corporate risks which have the potential of denting the brand image and create innovative solutions for these, complete with associated implementation timelines and required budget”.*

The employee participants were asked to rate in the order of preference, which employer brand activities are more attractive to employees. The aggregate results showed that employees regard rewarding employees with out-of-the-office perks as highly preferred, followed by internal entrepreneurship opportunities (Intrapreneurship), then pairing employees with industry mentors.

#### **4.4.1.2. Response to the research question: what coopetition opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities?**

The paper aims to draw the focus towards the uncomfortable changes within the traditional world of work which are brought upon by the digital and technological advancements around the world. The last research question brings together the ideas of the digital era, the gig economy and the relationship with the culture of coopetition. The question is: what coopetition opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities?

The research participants responded to the important factors for employee engagement in the digital era further pointing to the decline in job security as it is escalated by the introduction of automation.

The levels of engagements that the participants are not able to articulate at length is the willingness of the organisation to invest in employee engagements such as training for the digitised tools that are yet to be implemented. The important factors for employee engagement in the digital era are at their core driven by improved and intentional methods of transparent communication which boosts organisational morale. If done right, employer brands can achieve strategic advantages. The essence of the response to the research question articulated by the participants argues that authentic employee engagement is more likely to be achieved effectively when employees and

employers consider and respect the values of trust in their relationship. The participants did not focus on digital engagement channels such as internal collaboration platforms and enterprise social network. The extends of which may be effects of the gig economy on human capital investments. The employee respondents drive points that seek out employer brand efforts that use digital and technological platforms to increase professional opportunities to create an environment for meaningful work as an extended value add.

In light of gig economies, the responses show that both employees and employers have not optimally taken advantage of the refinements that came with the effects of active gig economies. In context to employers, their responses did not extend to the rationalisation that the organisation will be able to employ or hire experts for services as of when they need, further extracting value from a cost and automation perspective (in light of digital processes and application). Part of the dilemmas mentioned by employer and manager participants alluded to the promotion of the workforce and their attraction of salary and resources costs. What they didn't include in their comments was the flexibility of fast scaling up and down their staff to suit company demand, resulting in lower workspace and expenses.

There is a culmination of gig activities that are in conflict with traditional organisational structures in or outside of the organisation or industry. What came out briefly in the responses was the policy-related issues regarding employees doing work outside the organisation that is similar to what they are being employed for. Though the participants did not further engage on this, it would have been beneficial for the research to have them expand on the implications of legal challenges which may lead to accreditation, financial and credible repercussions. The participants also did not elaborate on the implication of less employee engagement with the rise of gig activities. Further questions that may investigate the correlation would be to gauge the delink of employees in the organisational structures as a result of the scattered and sporadic relationships, inconsistent organisational culture and shared resources.

The results unequivocally show that employers cannot completely discourage employees from having side gigs. The response shows that employer brands can introduce incentives, inclusivity and more freedom however the respondents articulate that the South African organisations that were interviewed are not remotely ready for this kind of transformation. There is no conclusive strategy in place to effectively mitigate the rise of interest in employee respondents being economically and professional activities outside of the organisations that they are formally employed in.

Coupled with the sentiments shared above, the results from the investigation articulate that employer brands have a challenge with attracting, engaging and delighting good competitive employees. Added to this comes the challenge of developing the employees into effective leaders within the organisation which brings along with it the culture of continuous learning. Competitive respondents show a sense of being purpose-driven and focused on how the employer brand can add value professionally to their lives. They want career development opportunities that aren't just training programmes but effective and agile approaches to their personal and professional well being (and the sustainability thereof).

The fourth research question drivers towards co-opetition opportunities that are conducive for employer brands and gig activities. The responses show a strong unfamiliarity with the concept of co-opetition within their organisations. Though the employee participants are open to such opportunities, some employer and manager participants believe that this will ignite lower barriers to entry for entrepreneurs within the organisations and outside the organisation. This may also cause chaos for business processes and structures for specific organisations. The potential brought on by co-opetition for the organization to obtain market penetration, market development, product development, and diversification were especially missing from the responses. However, the employee respondents gave neat ideas on how they would add value to their organisation if allowed to co-opete with them or become intrapreneurs. The ideas resonate with the pain points found by employees when engaging their employer brands. These included topics such as mental health issues and support systems.

#### **4.4.2. Comparison of research results to similar studies**

In comparing the findings of research into the relationship between digitisation and gig economies in the context of employer branding, the paper draws on the work of scholars such as Green et al (2018), who claim that in the face of fierce competition in all industries, businesses are looking for advantages. Senior executives who grasp the importance of handling the gig economy have a strong chance of long-term success. Ghosh, et al., (2021) advocate a comprehensive mapping of the gig economy from a gender lens to understand the many models that exist and the implications of the same for women workers, based on socio-economic dynamics and concerns of gender inside workplaces. Connelly et al. (2020) conclude that datafication and gamification are becoming increasingly popular tools for managing a workforce that is in danger of falling into two camps: one that is highly valuable to platforms and corporations, and the other that is marked by commodification and potential alienation. Strategically, Ashford, Caza, and Reid (2018) go even farther, suggesting that understanding individuals' agency geared at altering the system, rather than that centered on their personal prospering in this new world of work, is a crucial study agenda.

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## 5. THE CONSULTANCY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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**“There is nothing more important than an environment and a culture that says everybody is needed and wanted. The farmer doesn’t spend 80% of his time massaging the individual seeds; he spends 80% of his time preparing the soil; the environment” - Bonang Mohale**

### 5.1. Introduction to the consulting project

This area in the research project is attributed to consulting, through the assignment project, which forms part of the research process that aims to understand variant management dilemmas concerning the employer brand activities faced by South Africa employer brands. The objective hereon is to conceptualise feasible project opportunities that look into the research problem presented in the paper and therefore integrate the questions further in the application of theoretical frameworks underpinning the investigation of gig economic influences in the spaces of effective employer brand engagements.

On the subject of efficient employer brand strategies, it is vital to consult because these set of actions are what distinctively gives an organisation a unique and competitive advantage over time. More contextually, for the revival of the South African economy, this route of consultation is called for as the country needs an innovative approach to mitigating risks in the areas of employment and job security across sectors and economically active communities.

How the consultation report and recommendations had been collated was through an interactive consultation process that involved the humanistic and introspective approach to qualitatively negotiate employer brand nuances that can create conducive and innovative organisational opportunities for sustainable brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage. The case studies used in the process of the consultation were from different industries with varying employer brand dilemmas however sharing common sustainability objectives. The true value of the consultation process

has been steadfast in unpacking the causation attributes that will inform the report and recommendations.

The comprehensive elaboration on the discussions is found as covered in the previous chapters, the below report is the integrated consultative discussion of the research findings, research proposition, knowledge gaps and the interpretative framework (amongst the confusion in a form of recommendations).

## **5.2. About the project**

How often does the organisation intentionally sell their brand to employees (current or potential)? Is it an afterthought?

This research paper is inspired by the challenges faced by employer brands. There is an opportunity to capturing greater value by trusting and supporting employees in the production and sustenance of an organisations' competitive edge. Often times, managers do not realise the missed opportunities of harnessing and appealing to the skillset and untapped knowledge that employees carry. This often results in employees contributing more fruitfully outside the organisation through channels such as the gig economy.

The process of employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa takes the route of unearthing influences and literature on employer brand activities that contribute to the sustenance of the organisations' brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage through the involvement and investment in its employees. The gig economy has thrown a curveball, making the frameworks of employer brands more fluid because of constant changes in the workplace dynamics.

Through a qualitative research process, this paper takes a human-centric approach to realising value in employee-based brand equity, employer attractiveness, employment, organisational success, construed and external employer brand image.

**Title of project:** Employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa

**Project objectives:** The consultation assignment project is about employer brand activities for effective responses to gig economies in South Africa. This is a take on effective employer brand engagements and strategies aimed at the revitalisation and sustenance of an organisations' brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage.

**Expectations:** The consultative process can be expected to identify possible approaches for employer brands to actively embrace the gig economy and alternative work arrangements to introduce effective cooperation employer brand activities for intrapreneurs within the organisation. The final expectation is to create a package, programme or quantifiable employer brand activity that can be adopted and applied by organisations. The skills of an MBA candidate would be particularly useful for this project due to the comprehension of corporate entrepreneurship practices, strategic foresight, scenario planning, and the approach to future innovation which is all focused on high-impact. This is all an essential aspect of applying best-practice methods in business forecasting and planning.

**Project location:** The consultation process takes place virtually through digital communication and presentation. Further resources are managed through digital systems, supported by virtual communication. The duration of the consultation process is estimated at 30 days starting from 08-02-2021 - 10-03-2021. The special competencies required for this consultation process is the prescriptive management consulting style. Supported by that, it would be beneficial to apply introspective approaches to the investigation and implementation of interactive planning and ideal redesign processes.

**Data and company information:** The chosen company to consult for is We Work, a flexible real estate platform that is reimagining the workplace. The immediate focus for the consultation process is We Works' offering that primarily establishes satellite offices for organisations that are based their your employees' locations to shorten their commutes, provide added spaces and resources while nurturing space for collaboration. They have efficacies in providing enterprise solutions for the workplace of tomorrow. We Work is selected because they have a global footprint, with trusted experience in supporting and partnering with trusted employer brands in a wide selection of sectors. For the objectives of this research paper and consultation process, it is further conducive to utilise their datasets, resources and project management skills to empower employer brands in becoming competitive and sustainable. The researcher has no affiliations with the company.

### **5.3. Establishing the engagement contract**

**The problems defined in this regard to the consulting report are:**

- The difficulty in finding and keeping competitive employees who can contribute or co-create value for their employer brands' and organisations' brand equity and reputation, which may ultimately increase the organisations' bottom line and competitive advantage.
- The best and brightest people are leaving to become small-business entrepreneurs, consultants or worse, work for a competitor due to the levels of job dissatisfaction and insecurity.
- The gig economy has come with immeasurable effects on the organisational structure and culture of employer brands. Added to this, there are international competitors which are diminishing the geographical and sectoral boundaries further creating lucrative spaces for gig activities.
- That there is a continuous downsizing of major corporations, rises in unemployment in South Africa. The gruelling battle on creating and sustain employment has been a growing concern for the country's economy.

- That lastly, there is a constant demand to improve efficiencies and productivity levels for organisational agility and longevity amongst the problems listed above.

The research paper's Chapters 1 and 4 go over the research problem statement and research questions in further detail.

**The objective in resolving client problems is:**

Before we get into the client issue, it's important to note that We Work isn't the direct client (or employer brand) in this situation. Instead, the research paper proposes We Work as the solution to addressing the employer brand challenges faced by organisations. The objective is therefore to position We Work as a trusted partner in leveraging and facilitating effective employer brand activities to bridge dissatisfaction and insecurity between employers and employees through effective employer brand strategies, programmes, and digital integration efforts.

**The purpose for establishing these objectives through the consultation process is to:**

- Acknowledge: how employer brands may need We Work to assist them in facilitating and integrating cooperative employer brand activities such as intrapreneurship to empowerment and engage sustainability with their employees.
- Examine: existing organisational values and projects that can be leveraged by the employer brand to effectively get the right people on board with great initiative and skill.
- Recommend: a quantified method to plan for growth and untapped areas of the organisation while involving distinctive and differentiating strategies, developing an impactful value proposition and facilitating strategic management efforts that embrace entrepreneurship and cooperation with employees.

**The values and benefits for We Work in achieving the consultative goals are:**

1. To be positioned as a thought leader and pioneer in the discourse of competitive and intrapreneurship programmes for employer brands in South Africa.
2. The technical, resource and research and development facilities at We Work will have the opportunity to produce further insights and leverage holistic support for the commercialisation efforts across industries and their value chains.
3. Subsequently mine and map the collection of data that can be added as an asset to We Works' brand equity through intellectual property.
4. A more lucrative and profitable benefit is the revenue generation for when We Work creates programmes, systems and organisational support for employer brands to adopt and gain added value from.

**The process of the consultation and the methods used are within the following scope of work:**

- The management advisory and consultative involvement to establish an employer brand programme for We Work as an offering to organisational employer brands. This is to be packaged as a value add towards employer relationship management efforts.
- Analyze employer brand interaction points to identify sources of incremental revenue, a sustainable and repeatable strategy to take small, incremental risks and get access to new growth and improved service alignments.
- Review and report on the needs of the market and therefore that of We Work. Consolidate the research and insight findings to establish a business offering and brand position for We Work.
- Review the internal We Work data and stakeholder engagements for context and current opportunities within the organisation.
- Engage with key stakeholders to establish a relationship throughout the consultative period.
- Develop a strategic document to achieve We Work objectives.
- Feasibility study and the development of choices.

- Prepare and workshop an implementation plan with key stakeholders.
- Support the team with the ongoing findings and recommendations, clear communication or training.
- Inspire We Work and the prospective employer brands to adopt and advocate for the buy-in and application of the findings.
- Prepare and submit a report of all the points in the consultative process.
- Collate an implementation document, detailing the expected participation of internal and external stakeholders.
- Follow dashboards to measure significant ongoing changes in metrics and efforts by the research and consultation process - Project process mapping.
- Post engagement phase: to measure the usefulness of the deliverables and opportunity for We Work internal growth.

**Measurements for success for this engagement:**

- **We Work**
  - Effective and Sustainable business development funnel.
  - Constructive stakeholder engagement plan.
  - A rise in revenue and development of new streams.
  - Employer brand (client) satisfaction.
  - An increase in client or employer brand - intrapreneur retention rate due to the Employer brand programme initiated by We Work.
  - Improvement of the technical and intellectual capacity of We Work internal structures and personnel.
  - A positive shift in the We Work brand awareness, credibility and trust regarding their proficiencies in gig work, intrapreneurship and cooperative facilitations and solutions.
  - Increases in leads generated through the employer brands and key stakeholders.
  - We Work gains strategic partnerships with institutions and organisations that want to leverage employer brand activities through the We

Work programme.

- **Prospective Employer brand**
  - Increase in secured and satisfied employees.
  - Regarded as an effective employer brand.
  - Rise in digital integration and technologies for employer engagement and empowerment.
  - Long term sustained cost savings through the We Work project.
  - Redefined and impactful value proposition and differentiation strategy for the employer brand.
  - Increase in employee engagement and skills development for employees within the organisation.
  - Effective change management and leadership within departments and projects.
  - Coopetition and intrapreneurship engagement plan.
  - Risk reduction regarding human resource management and employee involvement.
  
- **Research or research paper**
  - Elevated and clear education in the primary knowledge of gig activities for effective employer brand engagements in South Africa.
  - Greater consideration of the importance of employer brands in South African beyond the aesthetics and tactics.
  - Increased influence and motivation to invest economic and equitable employer brand benefits for the promotion of intrapreneurship and skills development across South African sectors.

### **5.3. Discussion and developing insights for the report**

**The discussion based on the consultancy report explores the research propositions being that:**

- Employer brands can do more in creating activities that keep employees engaged, secure and satisfied
- The corporate brand message can be more aligned and effective when the employer brand takes into consideration the honest views transcending from employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance activities
- Employee productivity is the result of employer brand loyalty, which is commanded from an alignment with the organisational identity and culture.
- There is benefit in employer brands cooperating with employees on opportunities afforded by gig activities

#### **Discussing research findings:**

The research discussion is anchored on the approach for a talent management strategy that incorporates employees as gig workers to provide gig economy and alternative work arrangements within an organisation for a competitive, effective and agile employer brand experience. An extension of the knowledge gaps that are identified in the research, this corporate report intends to stimulate trust, confidence and loyalty by employees for the employer brand and organisational structures. The research has stated that effective employer branding that keeps the employees involved and valued will most likely enjoy a higher retention and productivity rate, further stimulating the organisational bottom line. Furthermore, the knowledge gap highlights that the employees who have aspirations of becoming leaders should develop skills and capability that will leverage opportunities and ensure that they turn those opportunities into growth strategies for their organisations. Organisations need to embrace and effectively manage organisational resources to position themselves as inimitable, valuable and build strong processes and systems which are all supported and driven

by their internal human capital, the employees who have the support of becoming intrapreneurs.

Concerning the research results, sharing growth strategies and involving the employees within the decision making processes of the organisation improves communication, trust and ensures that employees become empathetic towards internal decisions that are made with them in consideration. This in the long run becomes transferable as it becomes a value add for employee towards their professional development.

The involvement of employees encourages them to take ownership of the business and brand. This encouragement is conducive to a healthier brand and organisational culture. In so doing, employees become thought leaders, contributors, and explore innovative trajectories with the freedom to express themselves professionally and tap into vocational competencies. This is a direct value proposition in the intentionality of selling the employer brand of the organisation to employees. Benefits that are aligned to the human resource management functions should resonate with the corporate image and thus leverage the sustenance of a competitive and agile employer brand experience. The maintenance of an employer brand distinctiveness over time can effectively be carried through the embrace of digital transformation and employer brands taking advantage of the rise in gig activities and economies. Employers report that they cannot directly compete nor fully satisfy the benefits of gig economic activities and the influences thereof. Therefore, embracing the nature of cooptation and introduction of intrapreneurship into the organisational structure can be a distinctive value proposition and tool to attract and retain employees within the organisation.

#### **Ethical issues and dilemmas:**

The ethical issues to consider in the process of consulting are the issues of the South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act. The treatment of a traditional employee and the translative nuances of an intrapreneur will have to be clearly considered and monitored fairly. Furthermore, human resource policies which govern organisa-

tional rules and regulations are mostly relative to each organisation, as such, will need to be considered in the configuration of an employer brand programme designed by We Work. Some organisation take complete ownership and intellectual property rights for all work done by employees, as intrapreneurial opportunities arise, the recommendations will have to make room to satisfy and protect the freedom and innovation of employees and their contribution to the organisation and the industries that they represent.

**Sustainability dilemma:**

The sustainability of the subject matter requires employer brands to be flexible, agile and resilient. Effective employer branding requires all internal stakeholder to uplift and maintain the value and impact of the internal brand. Since the consultation process is for We Work, the sustainability concerns will be on the managements' willingness to invest in an employer brand programme. This is because, without management support, the intimate and strategic attributes of effective employer brand activities may not be able to be enforced. This can be an expensive and long term commitment from the organisations that would choose to buy into the employer brand programme. Therefore, the issues of sustainability will consider budgets, employee loyalty (as an employer would not want to spend money and time on an employee who will use these new skills elsewhere). We Work will be faced with periods of sustainability and performance measurements which will determine the aggregated value on return on investment by their client, the employer brand, the organisations which choose to participate.

**Discussion of Framework 1: Employer brand experience framework (figure 4):**

The first framework to be examined in context to the research findings is the employer brand experience framework. In essence, the research outcomes show the little confidence for leadership and management competencies to roll out an effective and engaging response to the gig economy within the organisations. The organisations do not have the extensive appetite or the ability to implement an employer brand programme or intrapreneurship structure. The everyday behaviours and values

are a representation of the lack of innovation and response to the changing world of work. Though some participants (both employees and managers) showed interest in building a sustainable employer brand in response to the gig economy, they highlight that their organisations do not have structures, resources, policies or personnel in place to take on such an opportunity. The process touchpoint is what the programme such as the We Work employer brand programme could establish a golden thread in aligning the shared value and shared services to what the business is aiming to achieve. This is while it tailors rewards and recognitions that are effectively competing with the gig economy. Central to this The responses highlight a dire request for performance and development initiatives that measure and encourage employee engagement and loyalty.

What further came out in the data is that the centre of the employer brand structure and experience lies the employer brand value proposition as well as the employer relationship management strategy. The combination of the organisational identity and culture culminates in the brand association and loyalty of an employee towards the organisation. Effective employer brand activates to stimulate employee satisfaction and involvement are: catering to the employee value proposition perceptions and effectiveness of the channels, this can be done through audit and analysis methods that may be carried out by internal focus groups, interviews and surveys. This is packaged as an audit report or gap analysis that will aid in developing an alignment and communications strategy for internal engagement and employer brand management or key performance indicators reporting. The results show that the value proposition pillars for the employer brand framework consider the employees' career stability (addressing issues of job security and satisfaction as well as retention rates), the external and internal workforces (professional and personal development of the employee through core functional projects and educational assistance) and the efforts to make an impact (through performance-based composition and direct access to decision-makers and processes). In essence, rewarding the work and value created by the employees internally. All of these characteristics are linked to the employer's brand

image, reputation, and so attractiveness, which is related to the employee's productivity.

**Discussion of Framework 2: Framework for the relationship between employer attractiveness and employee response (figure 5):**

The second framework intends to look at how HRM and platform ecosystems are effectively maximised by organisations within a gig economy. The responses recognise that there is a gap in workforce planning within their organisations. So long, workforce planning measures have been treated in a traditional fashion, ignoring the gig economy and gig workers who are joining workforces at various stages and bounds of organizational activities. As reflected in the lower brand experience framework, the responses reflected that the training and development aspect of the multilateral exchanges shaping the HRM activities can be further explored by South African employer brand to empower the workforce into a position that enables them to co-create value and reshape their employment and innovative standards. Performance management as an attribute showed that respondents agree that the platform ecosystem (one which takes heed of the gig economy) should orchestrate rather than managed. It should be customised for each working environment, organisational needs and human capital developmental needs. There is an underlying exchange in that the emphasis and nurturing of internal interactions to co-create value and build brand equity from within has shifted in value from the organization's products and services to the emphasis and nurturing of internal interactions to co-create value and build brand equity from within. The attribute of compensation and benefits further support the sentiments mentioned in the employer brand experience framework. The employees are cautious of overextending their contributions and not get rewarded accordingly. There is a strict awareness of fair recognition and rewards, therefore ensuring that the intrapreneurship programme will compensate equitably and sustainably.

### **Identifying consulting opportunities in a changing world:**

The consultation deciphering the consultation process through the VUCA approach, looking at the opportunities from a perspective of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. The COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly contributed to the overwhelming paralysis of decision making and diluted organisational cultures. The strategic engagement framework for the consulting opportunities are derived as follows:

- **Todays' competitive environment:** We Work is known as a real estate shared working space with business operational added value. The competitive advantage that We Work has the database, resources, processes and systems to integrate entrepreneurial competencies within larger organisations. They are not extending their core and distinct competencies which go unrecognised and unchallenged if they do not engage effectively with external value chains.
- **Future - vision:** The strategic intention is for We Work to become the trusted and efficient employer brand partner for multinationals and local organisations to effectively build their employer-based brand equity. This is further supported by We Work becoming a recognised and trusted thought leader in the space of gig work, employee cooperation and intrapreneurship.
- **Options for strategic objectives:** There are opportunities for We Work to manage the laborious integration and facilitation of an employer brand programme amongst the departments and human resource management efficacies within organisations. They can ensure the successful adaptation of the programme and the effective maintenance of the employee engagements for an effective employer brand experience. This will position We Work strategically across all organisational contact points and value chains, giving them access to further insights and data points (on top of the revenue generated from the programme).
- **Actions:** The impact for a successful process will mean that We Work becomes the first organisation to implement a sustainable programme that supports and protects gig activities within the frameworks of traditional organisa-

tional structures for the professional and skills development of employees through coopetition and intrapreneurship. It is also pertinent for We Work to be inclusive in addressing all key stakeholders who will be involved or affected by implementing new employer brand activities within organisations.

**Adaptation of the Radar Screen consultative process:**

- **Diminishing:** The attributes that are diminishing are in how organisations use and populate their office spaces, trust in management and organisational change, quality leadership, sustainable and competitive organisations, office and employee engagement.
- **Constant:** Increase in unemployment and underemployment, dissatisfaction and insecurity in jobs, employee exclusion from decision-making processes, slow reaction to internal and external changes and influences, legacy systems, bureaucracy, retrenchments, suffocating corporate culture, and misplaced identity.
- **Emerging:** Communication interventions are being introduced, alternative employment and revenue streams are being explored, competitive employees, and professional development platforms

**Orientating Porters' five forces: Employer brand programme:**

The discussion of the Porter five forces is from the context of the employer brand programme and not looking into We Work as an organisation or assessing the employer brand in question (who would be adopting the employer brand programme).

- **Competitive rivalry:** Skilled and innovative workforce is becoming more independent, the gig economy is gaining traction, project-based outputs that have higher budgets, diverse recruitment channels, a stimulation in authentic employer brand value propositions, and policy development that supports the new world of work.
- **Supplier power:** In this case, the providers would be the organization's leadership, which is in charge of good employer branding. The buy-in of leadership and management is critical to the success of the employer brand initia-

tives and consequently the program. The leadership in the organisation (employer brand) will aid We Work to successfully facilitate all aspects of the employer brand programme by making resources and project details available for the intrapreneurs to engage with. Furthermore, they, the leaders are responsible for creating policies that will aid in the integration of such an idea or practice into the workplace.

- **Bargaining power:** The employees have a significant influence in light of bargaining for the quality and consistency in support and inclusion within their organisation. The employees directly affect the organisational bottom-line and therefore have a great influence on voicing out what their interests and demands are. They, the employees also have the options of going elsewhere to fulfil what their current employer brand may not be fulfilling. This can come in a form of gig work, alternative work arrangements, consulting, or going to work for a competitor. Employees can even express their power on social media and other platforms that may hurt the reputation of the employer brand.
- **Threats of substitution:** The replacement of existing employer brand activities are: engagements with the corporate brand, solitary recruitment, preference of talent branding, repositioning of employee value proposition, prioritisation of customer brand proposition, the eminence of internal retention, innovation of external talents acquisition, as well as the experiential and competitive employer brand engagements of competitors.
- **Threats of new entry:** Gig workers, project-based recruitment, digital vocational platforms, working from home is a new way for organisations to forget their organisational culture and identity, there is a rise of consultants and entrepreneurs offering solutions to organisations and employer brands, e-commerce, artificial intelligence, and automation.

### **Applying the Pareto effect and FERMI estimate to show why the We Work employer brand programme objective matters:**

To further contextualise the frameworks and management theories, this research consultation discussion articulates that an effective employer brand programme that integrates cooperation and intrapreneurship at the core of their employee engagement can cause a positive Pareto effect in the organisations' sustainability of their brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage.

The consultation process attempted to apply the FERMI technique on the research questions, hypothesis and research proposition and could not successfully qualify the variants. This is because the FERMI technique quantifies and aggregates the process of guesstimating variables, requiring numerical reasoning. This is a qualitative research and consultation process which investigates the *Why* as opposed to the scientific and technical *How much* aspects of effective employer branding activities. Furthermore, it was difficult to further gauge as organisations, employer brands and respective employees have a subjective and relative approach to their decision making processes and therefore will result in varying outputs.

In light of the Pareto effect and the results from the research paper, it can be deduced that 80% of the organisational innovation and competitive advantage can be attributed to the 20% of employees who contribute towards the co-creation of value to the organisation. It takes 20% of the employees to have the freedom and involvement within the organisation to influence the organisational culture and further contributes ideas that sustain the brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage of the firm.

### **Unpacking client issue in a logic tree:**

The problem statement is: organisations should invest in their employer brand activities more intentionally to attract and retain employees that co-create value for their brand equity and reputation, which may ultimately increase their competitive advantage. Please look at figure 6 for the logic tree. The logic tree presented unpacks the

variables that outline the reasoning and thought process that assists the consultative process in outlining possible sources for the research problems and further gives insights into the organisational nuances that trigger issues that may influence We Works' efforts.

### **Formulating the SCQA framework:**

The formulation of the SCQA framework for the use of employer brand activities will assist in consulting an effective employer brand message in a clear, attractive and narrative way for all stakeholders to understand and buy into.

The approach is as follows:

- **Situation:** We Work has the technical skills to assist organisations in leveraging an effective employer brand by offering a programme for their employees to cooperate with the organisation by becoming intrapreneurs.
- **Complications:**
  - Organisations do not have the capabilities, resources and leadership competence to successfully invest this much quality into their employer brand activities and experiences.
  - There are not sufficient policies drawn to support and invest in cooperation and intrapreneurship in most organisations
  - The introduction of an employer brand programme can become costly, will need long term investment and management support
- **Questions:**
  1. What capabilities, resources and leadership styles are needed for effective employer brand activities management?
  2. What parameters need to be considered in the formulation of employer brand, cooperation and intrapreneurship policies?
    1. Who needs to be involved in the formulation of these policies?
  3. How is the return on investment on the employer brand programme quantified?
  4. How long will the programme need to be to complement or improve the employee life cycle of the organisation?

5. How can the programme be structured in a conducive way and employer for leaders within an organisation to support?

- **Answers:**

6. Strategic intelligence, integrated systems and processes, product and service knowledge, cost leadership, transformational leadership, results value-driven, employee value proposition management, clarity in the organisational offering, stakeholder engagement plan, value chain change management, amongst other aspects.

7. South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act, legalities in resource management, Intellectual property, output or outcome ownership, freedom of time and expression, dividends sharing, amongst other aspects.

8. Low turnover rate, longer employee life cycles, increase in profits, increase in leadership growth and transformation within departments and the organisation, increase in brand equity, increase in positive employer brand reputation, and esteemed competitive advantage.

9. Increase the employee lifecycle by at least 35%.

10. Outsource the heavy lifting, compliment and integrate into human resource management practices, train the employees, and facilitate intrapreneurship activities.

The action points derived from the SCQA framework are, therefore:

- We Work to conduct a skills audit, organisation structure planning and an employee relationship management map to design a programme that will meet the employer brand dilemmas while using employees in a way that will co-create value through intrapreneurship.
- Once they gain the buy-in from the employer brand, We Work should maintain a stockholder engagement report that assesses the performance of the programme to the organisational KPI's and ROI's.

### **Using RASCI to affect the management of the consultation process:**

In the successful implementation of an effective employer brand programme, the following stakeholders need to be involved and communicated with to ensure successful integration into the value chain.

- **Responsible:**
  - We Work: business development unit and project manager.
  - Client/organisation / Employer brand: Managing director, Human Resources.
- **Accountable:**
  - We Work: Project manager, execution team.
  - Client/organisation / Employer brand: Human Resources, department heads, procurement, skills development department.
- **Supporting:**
  - We Work: Legal department, Research and Development, marketing, and technical division.
  - Client/organisation / Employer brand: Human Resources, department heads, procurement, skills development department, employee representatives.
- **Consulted:**
  - We Work: Partners, internal team and employees, and legislation.
  - Client/organisation / Employer brand: Clients or customers, service providers, investors, partners, internal team and employees, and legislation.
- **Informed:**
  - We Work: External society through marketing.
  - Client/organisation / Employer brand: Human Resources, department heads, procurement, skills development department, employee representatives, training institutions, and industry.

In this regard, the consultation cycle would be used to establish a way for We Work and the respective employer brands to create uncontested market spaces, invest in

innovation, attract effective stakeholder engagements and investments, make the current competition irrelevant, differentiate the employer brand, and lastly create and capture new demand.

#### **4. Summary of the report or presentation**

**Formulation of effective employer brand programme as a response to gig economies in South Africa:**

**The argument in favour of the selected consulting approach: Employer brand programme:**

- The approach pits the contributions to corporate competitiveness at the centre: – Commitment – Loyalty – Corporate culture – Organisational learning – Corporate trustfulness – Cost-effectiveness – Competencies – Piled up knowledge and experience – Adjustment of corporate and individual purposes.
- This is a corporate venture that incorporates intrapreneurship to ensure growth, sustain reputation, accountability, future-proofing, and leadership.

**Implementation approach, action plan and Recommendations:**

- **Employer brand programme: coopetition and intrapreneurship model:** speed boat, sprint, entrepreneurship in residence, time off, speed lane, and or tool centred model.
- **Model and structure emphasis:** Develop new, innovative products or services, improve internal processes, position employer brand as an innovative organisation, improve internal culture, and or significant time needed to achieve a return on investment.
- **Assistance in human resource management:** efficacies around recruitment and retention, intentional strategies to boost organisational and revenue growth
- **Processes involved in the employer brand programme:** Ideation, innovation maturity, core programme structure, sponsorships, team selection, workflow structure, internal budgeting, training, management of risks

### **Financial model (cost and benefits) of the recommendations:**

It is also worth mentioning:

- The financial plan and financial model presents a dependency on the intrapreneurship model, size of the organisation, involvement of the employee/intrapreneur, the level and distribution of the outcome, amongst other factors relative to the industry and eco-system.
- Each project will need its' budget.
- Due to the much-needed support and willingness of the management team to provide resources and freedom, the budget and financial model of the programme is dependent on enthusiasm and trust.
- It should be stipulated how remuneration or dividends will be handled.

### **The underlying meaning of the research and consultation project:**

In essence, this research attempts to build more economically viable and secure employer brands in South Africa that will retain if not increase the level of employment and value creation in the county. This is done by unpacking all nuances that will enable brand salience in the digital era as well as gig economy well enough to form sustainable brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage.

### **The possible unintended consequences of the project**

The employer brand programme aims to reposition employer brand activities in reflection of gig work. This research consultancy project may redirect the primary business of the organisation, this may also change the course of leadership management within organisations. Furthermore, the outcomes of the project may redirect the traditional forms of industries and thought leadership. This may also affect management approaches within organisations because intrapreneurs require different leadership and management styles. Furthermore, intrapreneurs know how the organisational rules and therefore know how to break them effectively.

**Implications in other areas of study:**

The implications of what has been discussed in this paper may spill over into these areas:

- Rewards and recognition culture within organisations.
- Salary benchmarking.
- Competition and rivalry employment.
- Management of corporate, product and internal branding.

**Possible improvements that can be made to further develop the research concerns:**

The further improvements on employer branding can be towards shortening time-to-market for product, process and services for organisations, breeding talent, elevating the top-line. Further improvements can be in how organisations are slow to supporting innovation, therefore improvements may be seen in avoidance of the familiarity, maturity and propinquity trap.

**Recommendations on topics for academic research and issues requiring consulting interventions:**

The following areas of future studies and consultation are:

- The use of large data by employer brands to make their internal efficacies more brand salient.
- Competitive drive for employer brand experience through results value brand equity.
- Changes in the South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act due to the gig economy.

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## 6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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**“Brains, like hearts, go where they are appreciated” - Robert McNamara**

### 6.1. Summary

We live in a competitive world that requires agility from all aspects of the value chain to keep brands salient. This stands true organisations need to fight to retain their competitive employees and their employees, in the same breath need to fight to keep their organisation competitive, profitable and sustainable.

The research underpins the problem for organisations to invest more intentionally and consistently in their employer brand activities to attract and retain competitive employees that can contribute towards the co-creation of value for the organisational brand equity and reputation, which may ultimately increase their competitive advantage. Furthermore, the research subjects the discourse to the introduction of the gig, alternative working arrangements or sharing economy. This dimension has created exponential competition for traditional organisational structures.

To investigate effectively, the research questions posed are: What workplace factors influence job security and satisfaction? How do adjustments in the corporate brand message influence the essence of the employer brand? What is the value of an effective employer brand? And what cooperation opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities?. Supporting these questions are propositions that articulate that employer brands can do more in creating activities that keep employees engaged, secure and satisfied. Secondly, the corporate brand message can be more aligned and effective when the employer brand takes into consideration the honest views transcending from employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance activities. Thirdly, employee productivity is the result of employer brand loyalty, which is commanded from an alignment with the organisational identity and culture. This is while employer attraction is derived from employer image, which is influenced by employer brand association. All of which gives

value to the employer brand. Lastly, There is benefit in employer brands cooperating with employees on opportunities afforded by gig activities.

A significant takeaway from the knowledge gaps is that employees are a key part of the organisations' stakeholder group and therefore resemble the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organisational value chain. The efforts are aimed at heightening the commitment and loyalty to the employer brand, further ensuring a longer employee lifecycle and a decrease in employee turn over. The golden nugget hereon is that the employees who have aspirations of leadership should start engaging in opportunities that stimulate their skills, develop further professional skills, and add value to the growth and profitability of their organisations.

The research has a strategic branding take on the pertinent issues that drive corporate branding, and that is building healthy and sustainable employer brands that are aligned to the changes brought forth by gig economic activities in South Africa. This is as a means for employment support and also the innovative customer and corporate brands that are driven by effective human capital.

The frameworks used as to anchor the research is the employer brand experience framework as well as the framework on Human Resource Management (HRM) and platform ecosystems in the gig economy that expresses multilateral exchanges shaping the HRM activities as well as the HRM for upholding multilateral exchanges. The attributes derived from the frameworks are that of everyday behaviours, management competencies, leadership competencies, values, shared services, communication, orientation, recruitment, process touchpoint, rewards and recognition, measurement, and performance and development. These frameworks are complemented by the approach to the employer brand pyramid which incorporates that research questions by addressing brand citizen behaviour, judgement, experiential, functional association, symbolic association and employer brand awareness. Further complimenting the research frameworks is the take on the framework for the relationship between employer attractiveness and employee response. It addresses employer attractiveness in

light of the perceived employer brand, thereafter lining it to the employee responses. The perceived employer brand carries the economic, development, social, diversity, and repetitional value. These are then aligned to the current employees' satisfaction and identification.

The research methodology included the research strategy for this paper which is qualitative. The structure borrowed from interviews, a mixture of case studies and longitudinal design. As an extension of the research strategy, a humanistic and introspective approach was taken to read and interpret employer brand nuances. The research does not follow the hypothesis testing, numerical data, or the 'procedural objectivity'. The data was collected is through observations between employer brands and their employees. This was complemented by the use of semi-structured has inspired an approach that would be more personal and empathetic with introspective value

As part of the consultation process, the framework of the logic tree was applied to further recommend suitable strategies and processes for the research consultation intervention. The logic tree commences with asking why should organisations invest in their employer brand activities. As the tiers drop down, the attributes considered are that of the attraction and retention of employees, brand equity, brand reputation, and competitive advantage. Added to this, the extension of attraction and retention of employees include organisational identity, perceived employer brand, expected employer brand, and organisational culture. Brand management, employer brand strategy, employer brand experience, employer perception, positive and negative effects, outcomes value, employee value proposition, and employer brand attractiveness are all characteristics of brand extension. Brand reputation extensions include the corporate brand, internal brand and employer brand. Which further probes the antecedents, brand value, brand promise and consequences of employer branding. The last tiers for competitive advantage include cost, differentiation, scope, parity, marketing advantage and sustainability attributes.

According to the Pareto framework, 80% of the organisational innovation and competitive advantage can be attributed to the 20% of employees who contribute towards the co-creation of value to the organisation. This means that it is worth the investment to cooperate with the innovative and diligent employees who can mobilise 80% of the organisations' growth, equity and competitive advantage.

## **6.2. Conclusions**

The research key points are that results accounted for the factors within working environments that influence job security and satisfaction. Part of this was the discussion concerning the responses to issues of job insecurity and dissatisfaction, employee perspective on activities that can keep them engaged, secured and satisfied, brand loyalty and productivity concerning brand activities, and how employees are made to feel involved and valued. The second research issue was approached by aligning the corporate brand messaging with the employer brand's essence. To this point, the discussions were eminent in considering the translation of the corporate brand message to the connection and effectiveness of employer branding, articulating of employee concerns within the corporate brand message, attracting prospective employees through the brand message, the intention to effectively present to the employees the corporate brand, the alignment with employee beliefs, attitudes and values with the organisation and its' culture and the human resource management functions in resonance with the corporate image. The third research question was addressed and resulted in discussions regarding the importance of effective employer branding. This further unpacked insights into the values and brand offerings embodied in an employer brand of choice, effective employer branding concerning employee productivity, the distinction of effective employer branding to employee loyalty, employer brand management dilemmas faced by employers and managers, the organisational bottom line concerning effective employer branding, the competitive organisational culture, the preferred employer brand activities, the maintenance of employer brand distinctiveness over time, influence of external forces in the uniqueness of the employer brand, the value add of employer brands towards professional development and lastly the preference in order of importance: employee relationship marketing,

corporate reputation and corporate social performance. The last research question considered cooptation solutions that mitigate risk incurred by employer brands due to digital and gig activities. The results unpacked the important factors for employee engagement in the digital era, the effects of the gig economy on human capital investments, how employer brands are taking advantage of the gig economy, what gig activities are in conflict with traditional organisational structures in or outside of the organisation or industry, how can employers discourage employees from having side gigs, the challenges in finding good competitive employees, identifying cooptation opportunities for employer brands, and lastly identifying intrapreneurship opportunities within employer brands.

Past research infers that the future is now, better and more innovative talent is worth fighting for. The increase in versatility is rising, flexible workforce strategies have been adopted. In the African context, there is an issue of growth in the urban population and urban workforce however it is met with a staggering slower increase in employment opportunities. In South Africa, the dynamics of employment and organisational substances is a diverse and dense discourse. In the context of this paper, supported by previous literature, internal branding and marketing efforts should be directed to create effective and competitive brand equity for employees

The consultation project serves to meet the expectation of creating a package, programme or quantifiable employer brand activity that can be adopted and applied by organisations to leverage and facilitate effective an employer brand programme to bridge dissatisfaction and insecurity between employers and employees through effective employer brand strategies, intrapreneurship, cooptation and digital integration efforts. In so doing, the process takes the head of the ethical issues and dilemmas found in such a project as well as the sustainable issues that may arise.

In the context of viability, the consultation process applied the VUCA analysis to position the employer brand programme in alignment with today's competitive envi-

ronment, future vision, options for strategic objectives as well as the action needed to gain the success of such an employer brand activity.

This was also supported by the application of the Radar Screen which assisted the consultation process by identifying trends that influence the performance and positioning of the employer brand. The three catalogues which were observed are the diminishing, constant and emerging trends that affect the employer brand attraction and employee response.

The risks were observed and planned for through the implementation of the Porter's 5 forces. This gave clarity and insights into forms of mitigating risks for the stakeholders involved. That being, We Work, organisations/employer brands/managers, as well as the employees involved.

### **6.3. The limitations**

The willingness of participants to share strategic information about their organisations was determined to be one of the study's weaknesses. The participants know that both employers (managers) and employees will be interviewed and therefore didn't want to have that kind of cross-pollination of information through discussions that aren't facilitated by the organisation.

This also refers to the level of engagement with the participants, further limitations were experienced through the participants' familiarity with internal structures and human resource management systems. The participants are more familiar with the customer and corporate brand of their organisation and therefore had limited opinions on certain concepts and employer brand and internal marketing methods. This meant the interview had to probe intrusively into levels of engagement and intention within their organisations.

The age of data and therefore context made it difficult to use and reference specific literature and content. Recent material does not have strong structural frameworks,

whereas older research materials established initial employer brand frameworks and those relating to the subject matter. It can also be further noted that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the world of work has altered and what may have applied before 2020 is no longer relevant or within context.

The inability to sit and engage with the participants was limited due to the fact that the research was dependent on virtual and digital communication. Most of the verbal and non-verbal cues were identified through assessing the online engagement of the participants.

The time constraints limited the process of research engagement with participants as well as the process of the consulting project. The depth of the consulting intervention could have done further in investigation, plotting and recommendation, involving key stakeholder engagement. Due to the time limitation, all influenced by the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, the consultation project leveraged the data and material available.

In light of the research's qualitative character, during the consulting process, it was restricted to apply the FERMI framework because this kind of technique requires numerical reasoning and a quantitative proposition. As an alternative, a Pareto framework was utilised.

The employer brand programme financial limitations are that the budget and financial model for the programme is dependent on organisational and management support. The financial injection and economic standing of the organisation will limit the implementation and management of the programme. This also significantly contributed to the difficulty in quantifying the financial model for the consulting project.

#### **6.4. Recommendations**

The research consultation project recommends that an enterprise development entity, with in depth experience in reimagining the workplace and therefore managing effi-

cacies that provide enterprise solutions for the workplace of tomorrow be the one that spread heads employer brand activities on behalf of organisations. In so saying, We Work is the entity in which the research consulting process recommends an integrated employer brand programme that leverages coopetition and intrapreneurship to involve employees in co-creating opportunities that increase organisational brand equity, brand reputation and competitive advantage. The consultation process recommends to do this through intrapreneurs being involved in developing new, innovative products or services, improving internal processes, positioning the employer brand as an innovative organisation, improving internal culture, and or working towards significant timeframes needed to achieve a return on investment.

Organisations should support the gig economy by creating policies that enable employees to become intrapreneurs, further creating policies that support the gig economy within organisations. The paper recommends that the South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act challenges the inclusion of the gig economy from an ethical, practical, legal and sustainable context.

The recommendations for future studies and consultation interventions are towards:

- The use of large data by employer brands to make their internal efficacies more brand salient,
- The competitive drive for employer brand experience through results value brand equity
- The changes in the South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act due to the gig economy.
- The trust and reliability that a gig worker gains from selling their gig work within their employed organisation and the impact thereof on the organisation.

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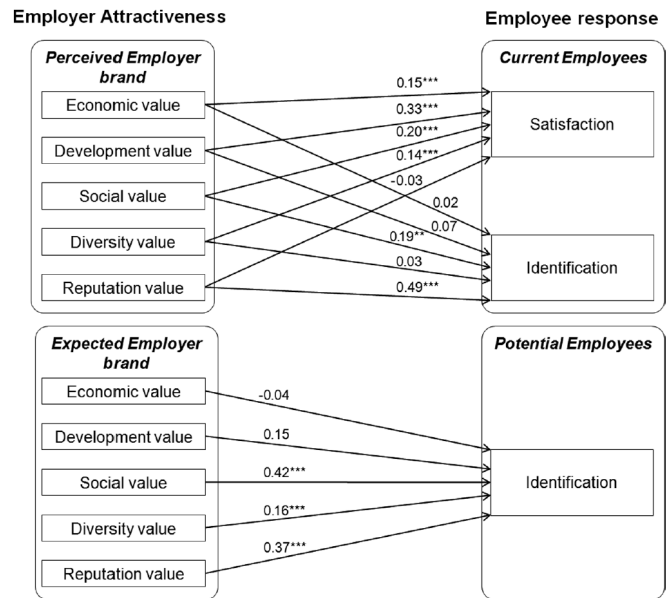
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# APPENDICES

## Figures

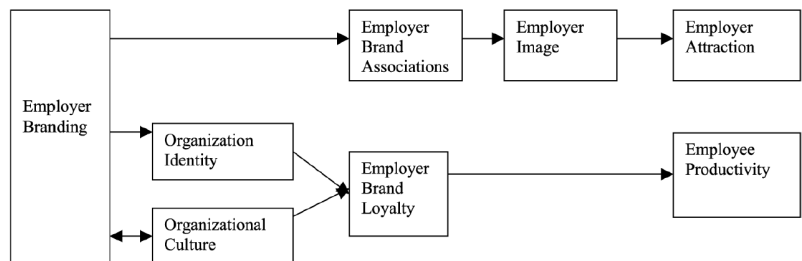
**Figure 1**

**Figure 1** Framework for the relationship between employer attractiveness and employee response



**Figure 2**

**Figure 2** Employer branding framework



**Figure 3**

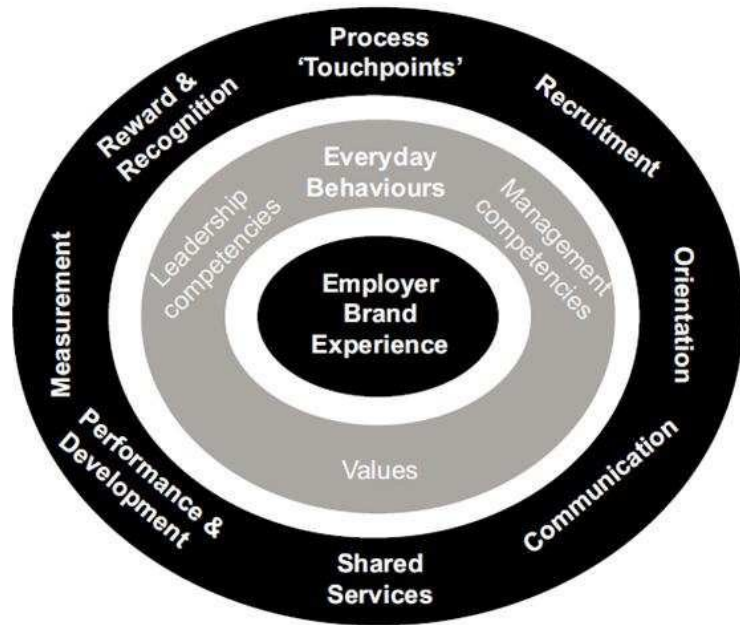
**Figure 3** Employer brand pyramid framework

## Employer Brand Pyramid



**Figure 4**

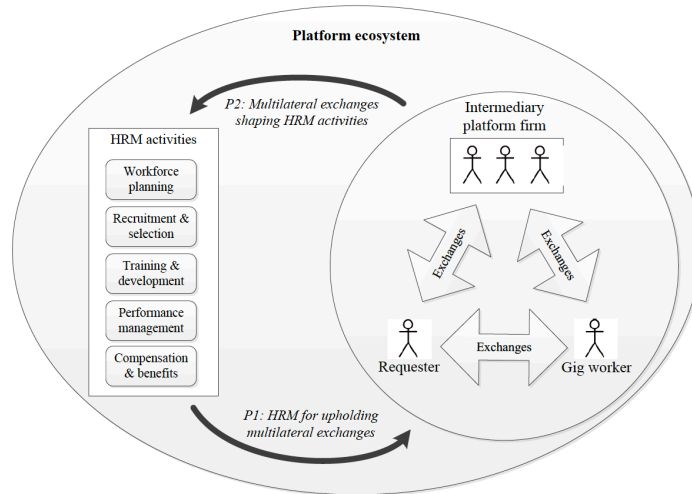
**Figure 4** Employer brand experience framework



**Figure 5**

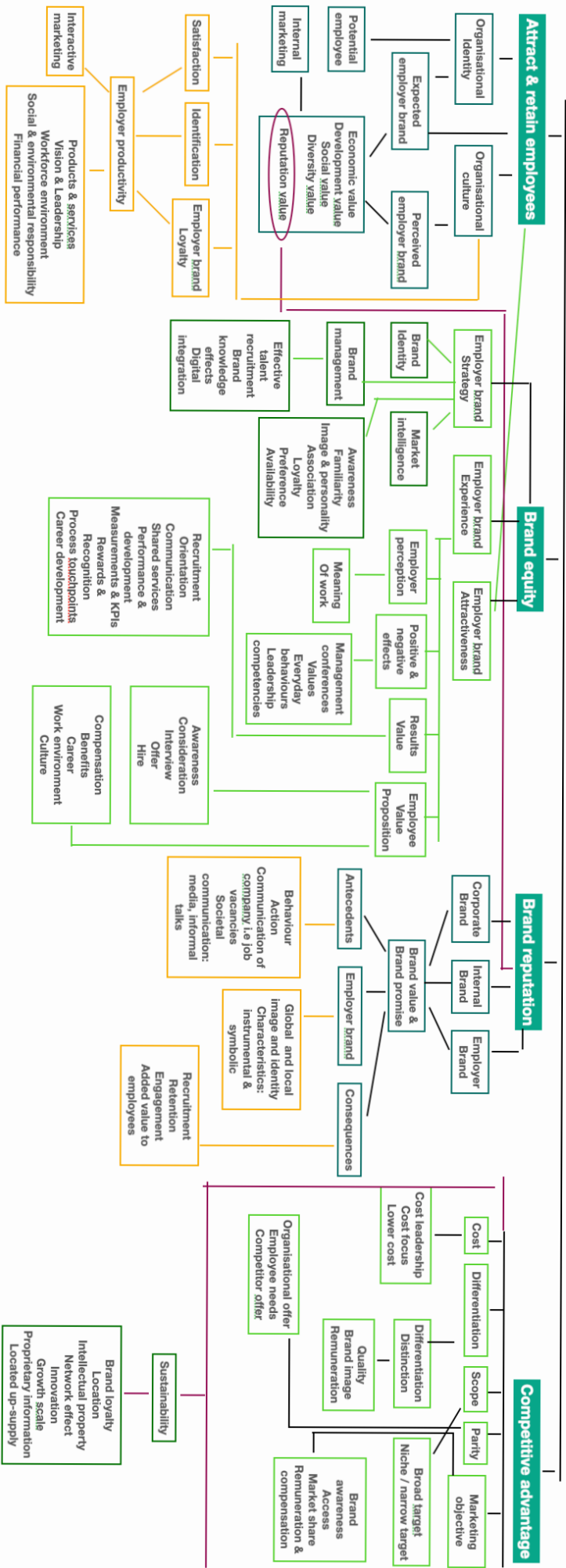
FRAMEWORK ON HRM AND PLATFORM ECOSYSTEMS IN THE GIG ECONOMY

**Figure 5** Framework on Human Resource Management (HRM) and platform ecosystems in the gig economy



**KELEBOGILE MAKHAFOLA: CONSULTING REPORT RESEARCH LOGIC TREE**

**WHY SHOULD ORGANISATIONS INVEST IN THERE EMPLOYER BRAND ACTIVITIES?**



**Figure 6**

**Figure 6** Research consultation project: Logic Tree

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## **APPENDIX 1.1: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT(S)**

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### **Questionnaires**

#### **Employers / managers questions:**

##### **Employer engagement**

1. What employer brand activities are effective for realising employer brand loyalty and employee productivity?
2. How can employer engagement with their employees result in more positive response to issues of job insecurity and dissatisfaction?
3. How do adjustments in the corporate brand message translate to the connection and effectiveness of employer branding?
4. How do companies engage prospective employees on their platforms in order to create an attractive employer brand?
5. To what extent and value does a strong employer brand contribute to employee productivity in visible and measurable ways?
6. How often does the organisation intentionally sell their brand to employees (current or prospective)? Is it an afterthought?
7. In order of importance, how important is employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance to the receptiveness of the corporate brand message?
8. Why should the beliefs, attitudes and values of employees be aligned with that of the organisation and its' culture?
9. How else do you make your employees feel involved and valued?

##### **Bottomline**

10. How can the promotion of a compelling employer brand feed the company bottom line?
11. How is the value of your employer brand measured?

##### **Competitive advantage**

12. Can firms maintain their unique employer brand image while responding to external forces that pose institutional similarity?

13. Do employer brands maintain their distinctiveness over time, or do mimetic forces eventually eliminate their distinctiveness?
14. What is the measurable difference between a company with a strong employer brand and a company without one?
15. What aspects of organisational culture is intrinsically tied to competitive advantage?

### **Digital**

16. What is more important for employer brands in the digital era with regard to employee engagement?

### **Gig economy**

17. How has the gig economy caused employer brands to look beyond their current human capital investments?
18. How can employer brands take advantage of the gig economy?
19. What gig activities opposed or conflicted with traditional organisational structures in or outside of your organisation or industry?

### **Employer brand management**

20. What employer brand management dilemmas are you facing?
21. What are some of the obstacles you have come across in finding good competitive employees?

### **Employer brand activities**

22. Do you offer intrapreneurship opportunities (an employee who is tasked with developing innovative ideas or project within a company, behaving like an entrepreneur while working within a large organisation)? Please provide the reason.
23. How can Intrapreneurship be used to encourage employees to invest more time and innovative efforts towards the organisational goals?
24. What factors would need to be considered by employers if they wanted to discourage employees from having side gigs?

## **Employees questions:**

### **Employer engagement**

1. What employer brand activities are effective for realising employer brand loyalty and employee productivity?
2. How can employer brands do more in creating activities that keep employees internally engaged, secured and satisfied?
3. Does your organisations' corporate image match what is being communicated by the employer brand and Human Resource Management function of the organisation? Please elaborate
4. What encompasses a sustainable organisational culture?
5. What ideal values and offerings do employer brands have to embody to be an employer brand of choice?
6. How does an effective employer brand add value to you professionally?
7. How distinctively does effective employer branding contribute to employee loyalty?
8. How often does the organisation intentionally sell their brand to employees? Is it an afterthought?
9. Based on how your employer engages with you as an employee, what employer brand message is being communicated to you as an employee? Does this brand message consider your concerns, suggestions and input within the organisation?
10. What factors influence your organisations' reputation?
11. Do you care about the work and investment that your organisation does for the society or communities around you?
12. Is employee productivity a result of employer brand loyalty? please elaborate
13. Why should the beliefs, attitudes and values of employees be aligned with that of the organisation and its' culture?

### **Digital**

14. What is more important for employer brands in the digital era with regard to employee engagement?

### **Gig economy**

15. How can employer brands take advantage of the gig economy?
16. How has the gig economy caused your employer to look at how they approach human capital investments?

17. What gig activities opposed or conflicted with traditional organisational structures in or outside of your organisation or industry?
18. What cooperation opportunities are conducive for employer brands and gig activities?

### **Employer brand value**

19. In order of importance, how important is the aggregate value of brand association, organisational identity and organisational culture in relation to the desirability and the value proposition of an employer brand?
20. In order of importance, how important is employee relationship marketing, corporate reputation and corporate social performance in relation to the corporate brand message?

### **Employer brand activities**

21. In order of preference, which employer brand activities are more attractive to employees: Office events, sharing and promoting behind-the-scenes footage of work the team getting work done, reward employees with out-of-the-office perks, pairing employees with industry mentors, internal entrepreneurship opportunities (Intrapreneurship)?
22. How else can an employer make an employee feel involved and valued?
23. If you had the opportunity to be an intrapreneur (an employee who is tasked with developing innovative ideas or project within a company, behaving like an entrepreneur while working within a large organisation), how would you add value to your organisation?
24. How can Intrapreneurship encourage employees to invest more time and innovative efforts towards the organisational goals?
25. What factors would need to be considered by employers if they wanted to discourage employees from having side gigs?

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## **APPENDIX 2.1: ONE-PAGE BIO OF THE RESEARCHER INCLUDING DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN THE RESEARCH AND FUNDERS, IF ANY**

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Kelebogile Makhafola is a brand strategist and Founder of Maruapula Brand, an integrated brand strategy consultancy that builds brand experiences with socio-economic benefits. As an award winning business woman, WITS Business School MBA candidate, 2019 Mandela Washington Fellow, and a 2021 EY Winning Woman candidate, her work seeks to evoke the value merged between business and art - a way to put up a mirror to society by curating impactful brand engagements that turn brand strategies into meaningful human-centric experiences. Her current research studies investigate employer brand activities that may be introduced as effective responses to gig economies within the South African landscape.

## APPENDIX 3.1: DULLY FILLED IN DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT(S)

Below are extracts from the responses from both the employees and the employers / managers / leaders of the organisations that were interviewed and questioned.

**Table 1: Some of the employer / managers / leaders responses:**

Q19	Q18	Q17	Q16
What gig activities opposed or conflicted with traditional organisational structures in or outside of your organisation or industry?	How can employer brands take advantage of the gig economy?	How has the gig economy caused employer brands to look beyond their current human capital investments?	What is more important for employer brands in the digital era with regard to employee engagement?
None - all gigs support the needs of the business	Build a database of highly skilled of gig economy players - and then tap into that from time to time	Because many skilled employees prefer the diversity of experiences offered by the freedom of gig economy - this has meant that many companies now rely on these highly skilled individuals.	The understanding of how freedom of thought translates into innovation, leads to employees who are better engaged with their work
Working from home while maintaining creativity and collaboration. Giving staff a sense of togetherness while they are apart. Fostering relationships with short term thinking.	Create a work culture that connects with the individual and gives them purpose in the work they do.	The sustainability of the business relies heavily on the continuity of the culture that differentiates and give your business a competitive advantage. It's a no brainer that focus is here.	Make it personal, respect the personal, make it simple, make it fun.
NONE	we spend less money upskilling employees as they are selected based on having the right skills. It offers a diverse pool of workers The business is easier to scale up or down	We shifted from upskilling employees to focusing on the right hire getting the rights skills upfront.  we are also more selective about sharing employees IP with all employees.	Connectivity of employees - especial with those working from home
None that I am aware of	It offers a Different perspective outside and offers practical solutions outside of the corporate world	I don't think it's had that much of a significant impact yet - but probably has contributed to the rise "consultants"	Ease and flow of communication through digital  Digital should be used to the advantage of the employees/employer it shouldn't be a stumbling block
9-5	opened up the market. Now if you are a writer you do not have to write just for one sector.	opened up the market. Now if you are a writer you do not have to write just for one sector.	Right space and time to engage

**Table 2: Some of the employer / managers / leaders responses:**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q24	Q23	Q22
What employer brand activities are effective for realising employer brand loyalty and employee productivity?	How can employer engagement with their employees result in more positive response to issues of job insecurity and dissatisfaction?	How do adjustments in the corporate brand message translate to the connection and effectiveness of employer branding?	What factors would need to be considered by employers if they wanted to discourage employees from having side gigs?	How can Intrapreneurship be used to encourage employees to invest more time and innovative efforts towards the organisational goals?	Do you offer intrapreneurship opportunities (an employee who is tasked with developing innovative ideas or project within a company, behaving like an entrepreneur while working within a large organisation)? Please provide the reason.
Loyalty programme to the customers Employee productivity seems to be linked programmes linked to employee freedom in terms of their time and creativity	Transparency about the status of the company financial performance Transparency about where the resources of the company are invested or allocated Consistency and Fairness in dealing any issues	The messaging describes the intent of the organization, the employees read the messages as the intention of the employer and then align their actions according to the messages	The main one is the issue of paying them very well - secondly is whether there is any competitive information that may result in conflict of interest for the employees	When entrepreneurs are used to work toward company goals - this has the objective of advancing the achievements of company goals - while developing the individual	No - we run a very traditional company no room, does not believe too much on financing innovation
Check ins and connections that are beyond just the job at hand. It is important to engage staff beyond that. This fosters better connection with the business and also make people feel that they matter	Creating an environment of vertical and horizontal internal communication. Feedback is important in understanding the climate of your staff and as a result, the organisation. It's important to listen.	Only when there is a strong element of walking the talk can the message and effectiveness come true. The focus is to never make promises you cannot deliver. Values, statements etc must be true	One cannot discourage side gigs as an employer has no control over that. What you can do however is to be open to employees using their entrepreneurial edge in the work they are contracted to do.	Allow employees to work within their passion areas.	Yes we do. We have expanded our business that way based on the interest of certain employees in certain disciplines.
Effective & empowered Leadership programs Continues Employee engagement Effective 2way communication channel creation Quick communication turnaround - reverting to employees quickly post surveys et	The employer has to be honest and upfront with the employee, stay ahead of rumours, address them head on before they cause speculation Offer honest and regular business updates. Share growth strategy	Employees are the ambassadors of the brand. They enable the organisations to deliver or exceed the customer promise. If there's a disconnect customer satisfactions will be compromised.	Flexi hours Compensation for extra time	By introducing incentives	no
- Rewards & Recognition (both financial and acknowledgment of performance and contribution) - Delight and surprise employees	Open communication and engaging with employees about their view on possible solutions to their challenges	It's important that those adjustments are understood and lived out internally - especially in businesses that offer services  Brand and employee integration must take place	I don't think employers should discourage side gigs- having side gigs offers people who are skilled in more areas to the organization	I think it needs to be a consultative division that doesn't sit internally for it to be effective	Unfortunately not at this point
team building and performance based incentives	by making sure that employer and employee expectations are aligned	by making sure that the corporate lives up to their brand promise and value propositions	Dividing focus and attention of employees	By making employees see that you value them	no

**Table 3: Some of the employee responses:**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q25	Q24	Q23	Q22	Q17	Q15	Q13
What employer brand activities are effective for realising employer brand loyalty and employee productivity?	How can employer brands do more in creating activities that keep employees internally engaged, secured and satisfied?	Does your organisations' corporate image match what is being communicated by the employer brand and Human Resource Management function of the organisation? Please elaborate	What factors would need to be considered by employers if they wanted to discourage employees from having side gigs?	How can Intrapreneurship encourage employees to invest more time and innovative efforts towards the organisational goals?	If you had the opportunity to be an intrapreneur (an employee who is tasked with developing innovative ideas or project within a company, behaving like an entrepreneur while working within a large organisation), how would you add value to your organisation?	How else can an employer make an employee feel involved and valued?	What gig activities opposed or conflicted with traditional organisational structures in or outside of your organisation or industry?	How can employer brands take advantage of the gig economy?	Why should the beliefs, attitudes and values of employees be aligned with that of the organisation and its' culture?
Giving the audience what they want and capitalizing on trends.	Team building and workshops once every 3 to 6 months will keep employees engaged	Yes, the SABC has a few different brands within the organization. For every Chanel/ station it has an identity of it own.  I believe the corporate image is being represented well by the HR department	Incentivise employees in the most appropriate ways. Side gigs are a way of ensuring you can make ends meet without depending on your next paycheck Work hard play hard motto.	Being given tasks outside of the daily job description/ competition with peers in order to ensure more invested time from employees	By increasing the productivity of the business by focusing on the operations of the company, come up with solutions to motivate teams within the organisation to become driven and goal orientated.	Employee of the month initiatives, communicate clearly and often, encourage effort.	They are able to employ gig workers and not more permanent workers	Being able to employ gig workers as they have more industry knowledge	They should align because employees will most likely work in synergy with what the employer offers and the image of the brand will reflect one.
Trust and integrity. Less micromanagement	Encourage training. Not just for what they want to achieve but what the employees would also want to achieve. Ensure that the goal is more or less the same	No To a large extent, the Human Resource Management function is there for the employer and not the employees. The corporate image is not communicated to the employees, only to the outside world	Full time employment and or ensuring that they always look forward to their opportunity in the office	Invest in oneself. Invest in what you'd like to achieve	Therapy. Occupational therapy is of utmost importance	Have one in one sessions. Ask for their input on certain tasks	In our industry, we're forced to be consultants	Create more learnerships with the aim of introducing individuals to the brand	What I bring to the organization is what I'll leave with if I don't align myself with its qualities
1. Embody brand values as the employer 2. Encourage participation and alignment to organisational objectives	1. Seek continuous feedback from the employees and implement those activities with potential benefits to both employer and employees.	No. The brand values encourage equity however, this is misaligned in the company structure.	Are remuneration packages market-related? How stimulated and satisfied are employees in their daily work? Is there too much work flexibility i.e. free time on hands of employees?	Intrapreneurship drives high levels of innovation which indirectly drive higher levels of employee engagement.	Identify the 3 biggest corporate risks which have the potential of denting brand image and create innovative solutions for these, complete with associated implementation timelines and required budget	By encouraging the voice of the employee to be heard through formal platforms	Internal policies state that there is to be no external conflict of interest displayed by any employee. Any gigs that are similar to an employee's direct line of work are prohibited.	By offering employees the flexibility to work from wherever they are provided deliverables are met. By making work more adaptable to the demand patterns thus allowing for employee flexibility	For sustainable output, alignment is required. Alignment of beliefs, attitudes and values drives employee motivation and motivated employees are more likely to be productive in their work.