

PERSONAL BRAND AS A TOOL FOR SHAPING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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Purpose: The objective of the article is to discuss the results of the study concerning the set of characteristics of the individual that are considered important in personal brand building, and which can be seen as a personal capital that can be brought to an organizational culture.

Design/methodology/approach: The review of literature was conducted in order to identify the set of characteristics of the individual who takes action in the personal brand building and to establish the relationship between the personal brand building process and the organizational culture. The empirical study employed the survey method with the use of a questionnaire. The study examined a representative sample of a thousand Polish Internet users in May 2021.

Findings: Taking action in the personal brand building can be viewed as a diagnostic tool when attracting employees, managing human capital and shaping the organizational culture. The results of the study suggest that there is a set of characteristics of the individual, attitudes and values that are considered important in building a personal brand, and people bring this personal capital to the organization along with their personal brands.

Research limitations/implications: Further research is needed to take into account the impact of the selected individual characteristics on shaping an entrepreneurial organization and its organizational culture, as well as the methods and possible scope of shaping these elements.

Originality/value: The results of the analysis and theoretical considerations discussed in this article complement existing research concerning the use of personal brand concept in shaping organizational culture.

Keywords: personal brand, human capital management, shaping organizational culture.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The concept of the personal brand, which has been developing since the turn of the century (Peters, 1997), has become an integral part of the practice of the economic life. Personal branding activities are undertaken by people representing different professional groups and at different stages of career development. It cannot be arbitrarily recognized that a personal brand

is a concept for everyone and constitutes an answer to all pressing questions in the field of career management or communication of the individual with key recipients. However, such an approach can be found in certain personal branding guides (Rampersad, 2010). The author of the present article emphasizes that everyone owns a brand, although not everyone consciously builds it. Such a statement can be interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on the adopted definition of the brand. The level of intensity of activities undertaken in the framework of personal brand building depends, among others, on the cultural and social capital the individual possesses. The intensity of such activities is also diversified depending on the type of professional group. This distinguishes the level of creativity of the performed tasks and the possibility of making independent decisions and focusing on achieving personal results (Walczak-Skałeczka, Mieszajkina, 2021). Similar conclusions can be drawn concerning the importance of cultural and social capital in relation to the effectiveness of the personal brand in increasing employability (Khedher, 2019). The personal brand concept usually emerges in the context of managing one's own career or business, which is natural, if only because of its roots (Peters, 1997). Therefore, the analysis frequently encompasses the activities of people dealing with e.g. sport, science, politics, art, operation of a business, creating content, or services provided in person (Scheidt, Gelhard, Henseler, 2020).

Undoubtedly, there are numerous reasons for the rapid increase in the interest concerning the application of the personal brand concept. Probably, the most important of these can be traced back to the source of the concept itself, namely to the profound social changes that led to the emergence of the culture of individualism (Berger, 1986; Taylor, 1986). Clearly, this is not a phenomenon that affects all communities in the world equally. However, such distinctions are not crucial for the considerations herein. The culture of individualism is one of the characteristics of societies of late modernity, where, in the process of socialization, a strong responsibility for shaping their own lives and personal autonomy is instilled in individuals from an early age. Among other reasons for the increase of interest in the personal brand concept, one can also mention a change in the type of relationship between the employee and the employer, and the development of technology owing to which basically anyone can obtain information about everyone today (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2016). The first of the reasons is also linked to broader changes in the labor market. At present, both employees and employers are much more accustomed to changes that sometimes arise from the needs for development, and sometimes from necessity of other kind. However, the career path less and less frequently leads through the ladder of a single company. Additionally, enterprises tend to depart from operating in one specific way over the years without changing internal structures, processes and modes of organization. The technology, which underlies the second cause, also has a significant impact on the labor market and the way companies operate, both in terms of internal processes and actions aimed at markets and entire societies. Referring even only to the aspect related to the communication of professional activity of the individual, it is clearly visible how important it is today to take skillful actions online. On such grounds, the personal brand with

accompanying instruments becomes a concept not only useful, but perhaps even fundamental, at least in some professional circles. Therefore, it is worth examining other means of exploiting the concept that has already become a fixture in the economic practice.

2. Diversity of perspectives

As research shows (Walczak-Skałeczka, Mieszajkina, 2021), people pursuing professions requiring high creativity, dependent on individual performance, and at the same time, characterized by a wide range of decision-making, are more active in personal brand building. Such professions include designers, artists, lawyers, doctors, marketers, managers, entrepreneurs, scientists, psychologists, psychotherapists, coaches, and trainers. Although similar in some respects, these groups are also highly diverse. Some of them encompass liberal professions, professions of public trust, while others are related to business and the management of various types of resources. What personal brands seem to share today are the factors influencing their perception, including personality, authenticity, differentiation and visibility (Scheidt et al., 2020).

2.1. Perspective of liberal professions

The professional activity of liberal professionals is probably the most natural field of exploiting the personal brand concept. When examining the fields of activity which are analyzed in the context of personal brand building the most, it becomes clear that the following groups appear the most frequently: athletes, professors, politicians, visual artists (e.g. painters, sculptors), actors, musicians, comedians, models, medical staff, CEOs, entrepreneurs, consultants, journalists, authors, influencers, bloggers (Scheidt et al., 2020). One of the reasons behind it may be the availability of information necessary to conduct analyses, and the fact that people pursuing such professions seek to and need to reach wide groups of recipients. It may also happen naturally through the professional activity itself and via the performance of functions related to the activity, e.g. actors promoting a production they starred in.

The representatives of liberal professions base their work on professional education and can largely decide upon how to perform the work themselves. As a consequence, it is their personal knowledge, creativity and responsibility that form the basis of their activity. These people can and frequently are hired as employees. However, they can also **successfully** run a business or operate in another form of self-employment, thus it merely constitutes a secondary issue in the discussion. However, what is important is the basis that constitutes the starting point for building their career: knowledge, creativity, responsibility. Evidently, there exist more of these factors. The author of the article merely seeks to indicate that their specific situation stems from

the need to use personal resources in all fields of activities related to the professional activity, including communication with various groups of stakeholders.

2.2. Perspective of the entrepreneur – employer and the founder of the organization

Today, the personal brand of the entrepreneur has become a particularly vital component and tool for shaping the brand of the organization. From the point of view of an entrepreneur – employer, building a personal brand, in addition to objectives related to acquiring business partners and clients, has another extremely important goal which coincides with the approach practiced as *employer branding*. This concept, much like *personal branding*, emerged towards the end of the twentieth century (Ambler, Barrow, 1996). *Employer branding* denotes all activities undertaken by the organization with the view of addressing current and potential employees, aimed at creating the image of a good employer, and at the same time, consistent with business goals of the organization (Kozłowski, 2016). Additionally, there are authors who argue that the purposefulness and awareness of actions undertaken on the part of the organization are insignificant because the image of the employer is formed through the aggregate of activities and communication, and not exclusively via those undertaken with a specific intent (Mayo, 2001). On the one hand, present challenges of employers are related to the acquisition of employees possessing specific skills and knowledge, or at least predispositions, which can be subsequently developed. On the other hand, they are associated with maintaining the motivation of the team and retaining employees in the organization (Davies, Mete, Whelan, 2018). And all this in a world full of uncertainty both in the context of business risk and psychological and existential dilemmas of individuals (Giddens, 2012). Multifaceted building of an entrepreneur's personal brand has the potential to attract suitable job applicants, among others by shaping and communicating a specific organizational culture, regardless of the organization's size. Values constitute the interface between the personal brand of the employer (founder or the organization's manager) and the organization's brand itself. The values, in turn, are not only an important factor in shaping the organizational culture. They are also one of the criteria taken into account in the recruitment process, both on the part of employees and employers (Grzesiuk, Wawer, 2018).

Examples of brands such as Virgin or Apple are significant in this respect. Their organizational culture is inextricably linked to the philosophy and vision of the world presented by their founders. Smaller companies have even more extensive capabilities in this regard due to the greater power of direct influence and involvement of the owner. However, the power of recognizability of smaller enterprises is definitely lower. Nonetheless, social media or the Internet in general, as well as the ability to scrutinize virtually everyone by such means, make the personal brands of founders or leaders of enterprises a multifaceted asset that directly affects the perception of the organization (Bendisch, Larsen, Trueman, 2013; Nanton, Dicks, 2015; Rosenberg, 2015).

2.3. Perspective of the manager of the enterprise or its part

In the case of people managing an enterprise or its part (branch, department or team), a personal brand has a similar significance as in the case of the personal brand of the founder of the organization and the entrepreneur – employer. The difference between them is that the reach of their personal brands may be more limited (less recognizability due to other groups of key stakeholders). Therefore, in the context of contributing, more or less consciously, to building the employer's organization's brand, while taking care of their own personal brand, managers at various levels provide both themselves and the organization with greater chances for cooperating with valuable employees, and attracting them to the organization through their activities and communication. The second aspect of building a personal brand by managers at various levels of hierarchy is the impact of their personal brands on the perception of the organization's brand and the willingness to cooperate expressed by business partners or clients. The third concerns their own development and career management.

At this point, it is worth devoting attention to practices included in *employer branding*, namely *employee advocacy*. Practices and activities identified under this concept can be exploited by managers in a conscious way. However, they are based on natural socio-organizational behaviors. As a consequence, *employee advocacy* consists in voluntarily promoting or defending the employer (Men, 2014) in relation to all stakeholder groups – both internal and external (Thelen, 2020). Those who understand the relationship between their own personal brand and the brand of the organization fare much better as far as communication with colleagues is concerned (Williams, 2014; after Mollaei, Siadat, Hoveida, Rizaneh, 2021). This, in turn, may lead to a more efficient performance of the role of the employer's brand ambassador, which employees in such a situation can do autonomously, due to the permeation of value systems represented by the organization's brand, the manager's personal brand and the employee's personal brand.

2.4. Employee perspective

Building a personal brand becomes a vital part of career management primarily because it increases the impact of the individual upon the ability to pursue and maintain their preferred employment. As a consequence, it can build a competitive advantage in the labor market and lead to career development in the direction and character considered by the individual to be the most rewarding (Evans, 2017; Horton, 2011). Therefore, it seems that the concept of a personal brand is a natural consequence of the feedback loop between broadly understood marketing and social life, which affect each other by forcing further changes (Giza-Poleszczuk, 2017).

Conscious career shaping with a focus on personal brand building can commence with a deep analysis of one's own assets, taking into account their critical evaluation. In the next steps, the individual can analyze trends in the labor market in relation to resources at one's disposal and check potential career paths, and set goals in different time perspectives.

What remains after that is the continuous development of skills, knowledge, communication competences and the brand itself. This process (Figure 1) is closely related to the self-awareness and activity of the individual in various fields.

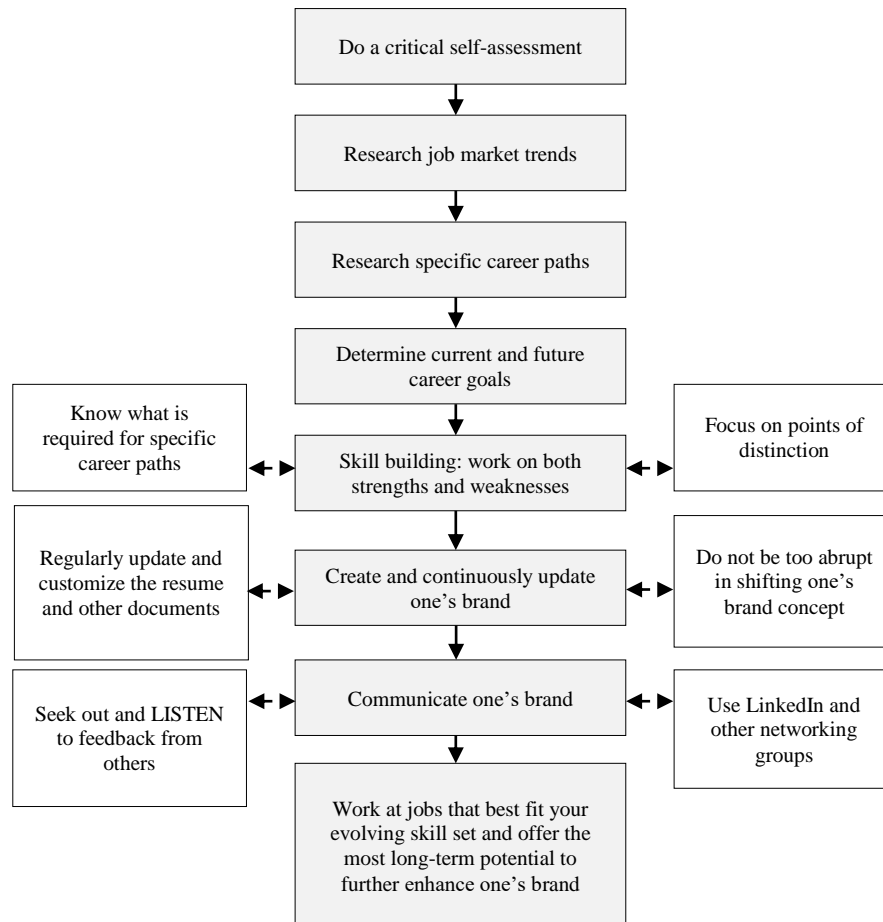


Figure 1. Self-Branding and Career Planning (at any stage in one's career).

Source: Evans, 2017.

2.5. Perspective of a person starting a professional career

People embarking upon their professional career face numerous challenges. However, in the modern reality (especially) young people have the opportunity to work on their brand long before they start their professional career. They also have unprecedented opportunities to shape their own path, which does not have to be related to the any specific organization, i.e. self-employment opportunities. Examples can be found, inter alia, among young Internet content creators, for whom activity, e.g. on YouTube, does not have to be initially related to professional plans and rather focuses on hobbies. Over time, the nature of such an activity can change and turn into a thriving business. However, in both cases we can already talk about activities that will affect the perception of the individual by various groups in the surrounding environment, including potential employers, business partners or clients. Young people show different attitudes towards pursuing paid work and consciously shaping their career from its onset. Studies involving graduates of various faculties aged 23 to 27, diversified in terms of

gender and the fact of having a job, showed that there is a positive relationship between active personal brand building and employment. This activity was studied in six dimensions: cultural capital, social capital, verbal self-presentation, mediated self-presentation, authenticity and appearance (Khedher, 2019).

3. Personal brand vs. organizational culture

Defining organizational culture is a difficult task. What seems the most important to the author of the present article in light of current considerations is that (1) organizational culture is a system of common beliefs and values, developing in the organization and guiding the behaviors of its members (Schein, 2010), (2) acknowledgment that organizational culture is of procedural nature and is characterized by internal dynamics, thus it can be understood as a learned product of group experience based on values (Sulkowski, 2002), (3) apart from integrative, perceptive, adaptive functions, and functions of assigning identity and stimulating organizational changes (Sikorski, 1990), it can also play the role of managing social potential. The author considers the latter context as one of the fundamental factors for the success of the organization in the world of late modernity. This is because changes in the organizational culture resulting from conscious and deliberate management are nothing more than ‘focus on changing attitudes and beliefs shared by employees; strengthening attitudes, values and beliefs that reinforce expected reactions, while weakening attitudes and beliefs that are useless’ (Panasiewicz, 2013, p. 7). The quote refers to one of the chief ideas discussed in *In Search of Excellence*, co-authored by Tom Peters (Peters, Waterman, 1982) considered to be the greatest promoter of the personal brand concept.

3.1. Procedural nature of organizational culture

Organizational culture must be considered as a kind of multi-component and multi-layered system that organically undergoes various types of turbulence and transformations. These layers, which, starting from the basic cultural assumptions related to the five problems of human existence (Kluckhohn, Strodbeck, 1961; after Gadomska-Lila, 2011), also reflect the process of shaping the culture of the organization. What is important and what constitutes perhaps the greatest challenge in the conscious and deliberate shaping of the organizational culture is access to individual layers. Symbols (linguistic, behavioral and physical artifacts) are relatively easily accessible, noticeable and tangible. However, in order to obtain a full understanding of their meaning and potential consequences their use entails, one must examine deeper layers. This is because they always involve interpretation, which in turn may require time, openness and perseverance on the part of both managers and the team. The interpretation of an external observer without becoming familiar with deeper levels of a given culture may be

faulty. Norms and values function in both the unconscious and conscious spheres. They are more durable than the symbols themselves. On the other hand, they are more difficult to observe. Fundamental assumptions, which are durable and difficult to change, constitute the source of culture (Schein, 2010).

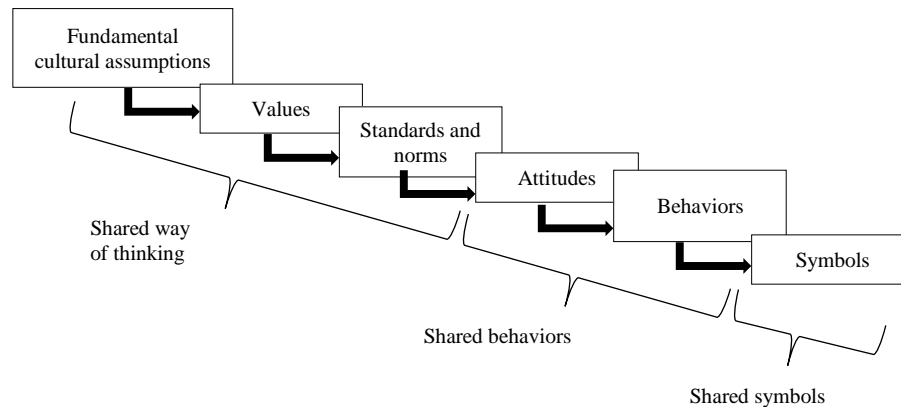


Figure 2. Sequence of cultural components.

Source: Gadomska-Lila, 2011

Among the factors that influence these changes are people. This pertains not only to those at the highest levels of management, but to all employees. ‘Employees constitute and shape this culture, building and modifying a set of views, values and hidden assumptions shared within the company. All these processes take place simply during everyday cooperation’ (Panasiewicz, 2013, p. 25).

Values are one of the most important factors influencing both the development, way of building, activity and communication of personal brands, as they are, among others, what underpins the cultural capital an individual owns and expands. Values are also one of the fundamental elements of shaping the organizational culture, regardless of whether this process takes place in a manner planned and controlled by the organization's managers. Values thus become a kind of a platform by means of which people at all levels of the organizational hierarchy are able to communicate. The degree to which employees identify with the values of a given organization has a huge impact on their commitment and loyalty (Rzemieniak, Wawer, 2021), which in turn translates into the way the organization operates and into the experience that employees, managers, clients and other stakeholder groups share.

Man is a carrier of all elements of the process of organizational culture building. Many of these components were shaped on the basis of the individual's experiences throughout his life. Such a baggage is brought to the organization by the individual. Over time, when the culture crystallizes, the potential for its change by one person or several people is reduced. All the more, one of the critical points of conscious building and managing organizational culture is the moment of selecting employees whose profile corresponds to the preferred organizational culture.

3.2. Features, values and attitudes important in the process of personal brand building in light of empirical research

The review of literature inspired the attempt to determine whether there exists a universal set of values, attitudes and features characteristic for people taking active actions in personal brand building. Clearly, this is not an easy task and requires multi-stage research conducted by means of a variety of methods. The presented results are therefore only the beginning of the process which may lead to the profile of a candidate becoming outlined in terms of the personal brand. The establishment of such a universal bundle of values, attitudes and features would open the way to a more accurate assessment of what an employee contributes to the organizational culture of the enterprise.

The study was conducted on a representative sample of 1000 Polish Internet users. Gender distribution was even (499 men and 501 women). Age distribution was as follows: 13% – respondents aged 18-24, 24% – those aged 25-34, 26% – 35-44, 17% – 45-54, 14% – 55-64, and 7% – 65 and above. The survey method CAWI with the use of a questionnaire was employed in order to verify the hypotheses. An original survey questionnaire was employed as the research tool.

The results presented below should be treated as a starting point for further research. However, a few interesting observations are worth pointing out. Among 35 different statements, the respondents indicated that the following features are the most important in the process of personal brand building: professionalism, creativity, consistency, perseverance, reliability, commitment, responsibility, ability to cooperate, respect for others, (person) building trust, intelligence, wisdom, diligence, personal culture. These features were indicated as *significant* or *very significant* by 81% to 85% of the respondents (Figure 3). On the one hand, the range is quite extensive. On the other, it seems to have some internal coherence. The feature which, with the above set of criteria, obtained the lowest index is the focus on finance (55%). At the same time, it was the only statement that scored below 60% of the total indications labeled *significant* or *very significant* (Table 1). Considering the fact that the personal brand concept is based, among others, on increasing the chances for a financially satisfactory job or career, this seems to be quite an interesting result.



Figure 1. Assessment of the significance of individual features in the personal brand building process in the opinion of Polish Internet users.

Source: own study.

Another interesting observation that can be made on the basis of the present results is the equally high percentage of responses labeled *insignificant* and *of low significance* in the case of the focus on finance, humility and modesty, and good education. Humility and modesty may not be considered important in the personal brand building process, for example due to the fact that a personal brand, apart from many other activities, must take targeted actions in terms of communicating its own value to individual groups of recipients. However, such an assumption needs to be verified in further research.

Table 1.

Assessment of the significance of individual features in the personal brand building process in the opinion of Polish Internet users – average values, percentage of responses in specific ranges

Feature, attitude	Average value for the feature	Percentage of indications labeled significant and very significant	Percentage of indications labeled insignificant and of low significance
Focus on finance	3.629	55%	8%
Focus on values	4.122	77%	4%
Strategic thinking	4.13	76%	3%
Experience	4.123	76%	3%
Professionalism	4.27	81%	3%
Creativity	4.261	82%	4%
Consistency	4.242	82%	4%
Perseverance	4.308	82%	3%
Emotional intelligence	4.058	75%	4%
Ambition	4.111	77%	4%
Self-confidence	4.109	77%	4%
Openness	4.118	76%	4%
Empathy	3.954	69%	6%
Boldness	4.062	75%	4%
Independence	4.101	77%	4%
Imagination	4.153	79%	4%
Kindness	4.078	75%	5%
Humility and modesty	3.847	64%	8%
Reliability	4.287	82%	3%
Commitment	4.326	84%	2%
Responsibility	4.353	84%	3%
Ability to cooperate	4.226	81%	3%
Respect for others	4.291	83%	4%
Authenticity	4.162	79%	3%
Possesses much knowledge	4.099	77%	4%
Conveyor of knowledge	3.97	73%	6%
Inspiring others	3.949	70%	6%
Departing from routine actions	3.801	63%	7%
Attentive to others	3.959	71%	5%
Building trust	4.214	81%	3%
Intelligence	4.261	82%	3%
Wisdom	4.239	81%	3%
Diligence	4.367	85%	3%
Personal culture	4.291	83%	4%
Well-educated	3.852	64%	8%

Source: own study.

At this stage, these results should not be generalized. However, they can be treated as an indication of the direction in which the model of values, attitudes and features related to active personal branding may develop.

4. Conclusions and avenues for further research

The present results of empirical research constitute an interesting starting point for further research. The author intends to identify the features, attitudes and beliefs that underlie the effectiveness of personal brand building activities and support the shaping of the organizational culture of enterprises and other entities. The benefits of a personal brand for conscious career management have already been confirmed. Still, this concept has untapped potential in terms of shaping an entrepreneurial organization and its culture. This is particularly important for the capability of developing the innovation of the organization and its performance. Entrepreneurship culture is conducive to increasing the effectiveness of operation in the conditions of high uncertainty and a crisis of confidence (Mieszajkina, 2018). Therefore, exploiting the potential of a personal brand in building a competitive advantage is an interesting approach which requires further interdisciplinary research.

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