

**Employment Branding:
The Impact of Company Image and Training**

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EMPLOYMENT BRANDING: THE IMPACT OF COMPANY IMAGE AND TRAINING**ABSTRACT**

Organizations utilize different methods for employment branding. Employment branding strategies seek to create an image that an organization is a “great place to work” in the minds of employees and the general public. As the importance of employment branding continues to increase, many firms have recently tried offering different training programs to attract entry-level applicants. An experimental design tests the impact of a mentoring/training program and company image on an applicant’s willingness to accept a job. In addition, the moderating effects of individual motivations (e.g., self-efficacy, achievement-striving, and affective-identity) are explored. Findings indicate that applicants seeking a job at a more prestigious firm (store) desire a training program, whereas, a benefits only package is preferred by applicants seeking a job at a less prestigious firm (store). Tests of moderation of individual motivations (e.g., need for achievement) are unsupported. However, data show that females are more likely to accept a job with a training program over a job without training, and males prefer no training to a job with training.

INTRODUCTION

Brand image is often used to persuade customers to buy a product or service (e.g., Batra and Homer 2004, Keller 1993). However, in recent years, especially in today's competitive market, branding has also been used to recruit and retain good employees from a diverse work force. Most companies tend to promote factors that make their firm a good place to work. For example, they might highlight the fact that they have a bright and cheerful office space, an ethos of collaboration and teamwork, flexible working hours, crèche facilities, or even an excellent canteen. Moreover, other companies are active with charitable donations, family-friendly activities, and sporting events, all of which serve to enhance their "image." In contrast, relatively few companies specifically utilize career development and company image to attract entry-level applicants. In addition, others use mentoring and coaching as part of their training to attract managers, junior vice presidents, and directors (Noe 2008).

Recently, formal mentoring programs are gaining popularity within organizations (Allen and O'Brien 2006). Mentoring is hereby defined as a "one-on-one relationship between a less experienced and a more experienced person that is prototypically intended to advance the personal and professional growth of the less experienced individual" (Wanberg, Welsh, and Hezlett 2003). While more companies offer training and mentoring programs for entry-level employees, there has not been little research that examines the effectiveness of this strategy.

Research suggests that employees with certain individual difference characteristics such as the personality trait, need of achievement, are more likely to seek a mentor (Turban and Dougherty 1994). The study reported here uses an experimental design to test the impact of a mentoring/training program and company image on an applicant's willingness to accept a job. In addition, this study explores the moderating impact of individual motivations (e.g., self-efficacy, achievement-striving, and affective-identity).

BACKGROUND

A global study of the Human Resources (HR) Departments in 500 international organizations in 2006 shows that more than three quarters of them are not measuring the impact of their employment branding activity. A recent survey includes “organizational culture” and “employer brand” among the choices for insights into what intangible benefits most influence employees in changing jobs (La Pla 2007). Findings indicate that organizational culture and employer brand were chosen by almost a quarter of the respondents as factors that are becoming more important to staff. The largest group of employees chose “work/life balance” as their most important deciding factor if they were choosing between two jobs with the same salary and tangible benefits. However, the second largest group (18 percent) chose “organizational culture”, and “employer branding” was ranked sixth (by six percent of employees) (Le Pla 2007).

Essentially, this survey supports that organizational culture and employer branding play an important role in recruitment and retention. I seek to demonstrate that having a training program as part of an organization culture for entry-level employment opportunities will attract applicants. Moreover, my study examines if there is an interaction between training program and the company’s image (i.e., store name).

Brand/Company Image

In the minds of consumers, the meaning of a brand is based on what the consumers have learned, felt, seen, and heard over time (Aaker 1991). Research shows that a positive image of a brand differentiates the brand in the consumer’s mind,¹ and in return helps enhance brand equity (Pitta and Kutsanis 1995), resulting in higher market share and product prices (Badenhausen 1996). Usually, these “powerful” brands have high customer loyalty, name awareness, perceived

¹ A brand can distinguish a good, service, store, company etc. As is common in the literature, company image and brand image have similar meanings here.

quality, strong brand associations and other assets (Aaker 1991). A key reason for their strength is the existence of favorable, strong, and unique associations about them in consumers' memories (Keller 1993). Generally speaking, brand image consists of all the associations that consumers connect with a brand (or service or company or store), including but not limited to brand personality associations (see Batra, Lehmann, and Singh 1993). [Brand personality is "the set of human characteristics associated with the brand" (Keller 1993).] Similarly, evidence indicates that assumptions consumers make about merchandise quality are direct determinants of retail image (Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman 1994). In other words, consumer inferences about product offerings, service, etc. influence consumers' thoughts and feelings about a store, i.e., their perception of a retailer's image (Zimmer and Golden 1988).

Store image is "the complex of a consumer's perceptions of a store on different (salient) attributes" (Bloemer and Ruyter 1998)." Similarly, Keller (2003) defines retail image as the overall affective impressions of a retail store kept in memory. It is often measured as consumers' perceptions of store performance. This choice is based on the idea of value-percept diversity, i.e., customers are likely to be more satisfied with the offering if what consumers need, want, or desire increases relative to the costs incurred (Johnson 1998). After much study, authors distinguish different store attributes or characteristics that are part of the overall image towards a store. Some of these attributes include price, merchandise quality, assortment, service, personnel, customers, physical facilities, comfort, promotion, atmosphere, institutional and post-transaction satisfaction (Bearden 1977; Ghosh1990; Lindquist 1974.) Any or all of these may impact overall retail image: e.g., retail image is associated with the perceived quality of brands in a retail store (Grewal, Krishnan, Baker, and Borin 1998).

As discussed above, customer-based brand equity is defined as a set of assets and liabilities related to the brand, including proprietary assets, name familiarity, loyalty, and brand associations including perceived quality associations (Keller 2003). In a retailing context, a store name that affords the customer with merchandise and services is similar to brand equity strength. Thus, a retail store name represents consistency, quality, and delivery, and therefore, it is a unique image in the highly competitive world of retailing (Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal 1991).

Little empirical attention has been devoted to the role of employer image (i.e., company or brand image) in the job application process. By using two different company brands (i.e., *Target* and *Sears*) with known varying public perceptions, this study manipulates company (brand) image.

Store image is sensitive to the performance of its employees, and employee performance is partially a function of how well an employee is trained. Moreover, employee training can be singled out as a major factor contributing to either building a store image that is admired and respected, or one that is not respected (Clardy 2005). Therefore, retail organizations use a variety of methods to train their employees and motivate them to make every customer encounter meaningful.

Training/Mentoring

Many companies do not have sufficient numbers of employees with the competencies necessary to manage in a global economy. In addition, their current workforce often lack certain skills required to operate in a dynamic business environment. Thus, companies may use training and development programs such as mentoring, job experience, and formal courses. A study by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) of more than 500 publicly traded companies in the United States finds that companies that invest the most in training and

development have a shareholder return that is 86 percent higher than companies in the bottom half (Bassi, Ludwing, McMurrer, and Buren 2000). *Training Magazine's* ongoing industry report states that US companies spend more than \$50 billion annually on formal training (Dolezalek 2004). Because of this big financial investment organizations make in training, it is important to provide evidence that training efforts are being fully realized (Dowling and Welch 2005).

Mentoring programs have been implemented for leadership development, a key tool of human resource training and development (Stead 2005). About 20 percent of organizations with 500 or more employees are implementing formal mentoring (Ragins, Cotton, and Miller 2000). Research shows a wide range of benefits for mentoring such as socialization into organizational roles, improved leadership skills, improved job performance, and lower employee turnover (Ragins, Cotton, and Miller 2000). The prominent mentoring goal is to develop high-potential employees and to increase the number of women and minorities in leadership positions (Douglas and McCauley 1999).

There has not been any research that links brand/store name and training/mentoring thus far in the academic literature. However, training and brand image may interact. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) image depends on the extensive applicant screening and selection process, and the training that it provides for its officials. The FBI guarantees that its agents are the best people in law enforcement (Ungar 1976). In this experiment, I examine the impact of both, company image and training, on employment branding. Therefore, based on the above literature, I propose that:

- H1: A mentor and a training program impact the job acceptance decision: i.e., training increases the likelihood of accepting a job.
- H2: Company image and training program interactively impact job acceptance. Training impacts the likelihood of accepting a job more for a company with a good image versus a company with low perceived image.

- H3: Company image and training program interactively impact the perception of the job. Training increases the overall perception of a job more for a company with a good image versus a company with low perceived image.

Moderating Effects

Achievement Striving. One personality characteristic that seems likely to motivate entry-level applicants' willingness to accept a job is the need for achievement (also termed achievement-striving in the literature). Need for achievement is one of three basic socially acquired needs (McClelland 1985). A main characteristic of need for achievement is the high desire to perform difficult or challenging tasks well (George and Jones 2002). Individuals with high need of achievement usually look for feedback on their performance in order to learn from their mistakes (Boyatzis and Kolb 1995). Need for achievement correlates with intrinsic motivation to master tasks, working hard, competitiveness (Spence and Helmreich 1983), a genuine appetite for success (Schroth and McCormack 2000), and goal attainment (Slocum, Cron, and Brown 2002).

Individuals with a high need for achievement set high goals and want to tackle difficult assignments. Therefore, it is more likely for them to invest and learn from such training. Most training programs aim to prepare employees for challenges that they might face in the work place. In addition, past research links the need for achievement with motivation to learn (Major, Turner, and Fletcher, 2006). This could be considered evidence of greater motivation to accept a job with a training program. Therefore, I propose that:

- H4: Those who score high in achievement-striving are more likely to accept a job that has a training program.

Self-Efficacy. Another factor that may affect entry-level applicants' willingness to accept a job is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, one of the cognitive factors in Social Cognitive Theory, is an individual's confidence that he or she can successfully accomplish a given task (Downey

and Zeltmann 2009). The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the challenge people set for themselves and the better a person's ability to cope with obstacles (Moore and Chang 2009). In the Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy is the most proximal regulator of human behavior and a strong predictor of thought, affect, motivation, and action. Self-efficacy beliefs influence the amount of effort one exerts in the pursuit of goals and the courses of action people choose to pursue (Bandura 1991).

Self-efficacy influences behavioral intentions, which predict actual behaviors (Pajares 1996). Research confirms a positive link between self-efficacy and work-related behaviors (Stajkovic and Luthans 1998) and job search (Ellis and Taylor 1983). Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to learn the training content better and outperform peers who score low on self-efficacy (Bouffard-Bouchard 1990). Therefore, I expect that people with high self-efficacy prefer jobs with training programs because with more training they get the chance to deal with more challenging tasks and to achieve more goals.

H5: Those who score high in self-efficacy are more likely to accept a job that has a training program.

Affective-Identity. Leadership is considered an essential part of a powerful organizational culture (Kotter and Heskett 1992). Evidence from a meta-analysis of past research indicates that transformational leadership can enhance subordinate motivation and performance (Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam 1996). Transformational leaders serve as role models in addition to provide coaching and mentoring for followers' development as individuals and in groups (Sosik, Godshalk, and Yammarino 2004). They have the ability to provide constructive feedback to their followers so that their followers have an opportunity to grow and develop (Bass 1985). According to Bass (1997), there is a universal nature of transformational leadership that impacts various work outcomes across cultures in a positive manner.

Kanfer (1990) defined the motivation to lead (MTL) as a (within-person) process that predicts the direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior. Chan and Drasgow (2001) find empirical support for the existence of a three-dimensional structure for the (MTL) construct: affective-identity MTL, social normative MTL, and non-calculative MTL. Affective-identity MTL is associated with those who lead because they like to lead: e.g., an employee who chooses to be a group leader without the merit of external rewards. Further research indicates that intrinsically motivated people are more interested and excited about their organizations (Nix, Ryan, Manly, and Deci 1999). Therefore, those with high affective-identity should prefer a company that offers more training that prepares them for leadership positions.

H6: Those who score high in affective-identity are more likely to accept a job that has a training program.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects and Procedure

The sample consists of 172 undergraduate business administration students from California State University, Long Beach. The sample was 54.7% female and 44.2% male (1.2% undisclosed). Experimental sessions were conducted in a classroom setting (random assignment to treatments). Participants were merely told that they were participating in a research study about training. The introduction page instructs respondents that they will review a job scenario and that they are to assume that the economy is relatively strong and that they have promising job options. Also, it instructs them to assume that they meet all the requirements for the job and to review only this job, although there are a lot of jobs in the market. Then each subject was asked to read a job description that included the experimental manipulations (described below). When all finished reading the job description, they were given permission to continue the survey by answering the questionnaire that included the dependent measures.

Stimuli Development

Four scenarios were created in the 2 (training/no training) x 2 (low/high company image) factorial design involving a hypothetical situation in which the subject makes a decision on whether to accept the job (see Appendix). The job descriptions are purposefully clear and easy to understand in terms of the company and the specific position being described. It was only important that the reader understand the benefits and the training part of the job description. The job descriptions are simply divided to a brief company introduction, job responsibilities, job requirement, and benefits and training (see Appendix).

The first manipulation is *company image*. In half of the job descriptions, the company is identified as *Target*. The *Target* brand name is considered as a well known and has a very good brand image. The other job descriptions identify the hiring company as *Sears*. The *Sears* brand name has a lower brand image than *Target* (*Fortune*, 2009).

The second manipulated factor is *benefits and training*. One job description scenario read, “Eligible team members will receive one of the nation’s best earnings, including competitive pay, all-around insurance coverage, 401(k), flexible scheduling, training and development and many other perks and benefits.” The remaining scenarios add “During the first two years of employment, you will rotate through all selling and non-selling areas of the store, such as receiving, replenishment, merchandising, in-store support, operations, human resources, and asset protection. You will learn the skills required in each role, but will also gain a macro view of how they all work together. There will be a Mentor Relationship that is critical to your development. These mentors are high performing managers and leaders who have proven themselves as drivers of business performance, coaches, and developers of people.”

Measures

After reading one job description, respondents were asked a number of questions about their intentions, their attitude about the job, and some general beliefs (all 9-point scales unless indicated otherwise). The first three questions assess the likelihood that the respondent would accept/not accept the position in the scenario (3 items; $\alpha = .91$). The next three questions measure the overall impressions of the job (overall attitude: “positive/negative”, “good/bad”, “favorable/unfavorable”; $\alpha = .87$). Two items capture impressions of the job in terms of enjoyment (“exciting/boring” and “fun/not fun”; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .94). Two items captured impressions of the job in terms of meaningfulness (“meaningful/not meaningful” and “worthwhile/not not worthwhile”; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .86). The next set of questions include respondents’ attitude about the company, and some general beliefs – used as manipulation checks. Three items capture the overall impressions of the company (“positive/negative”, “good/bad”, “favorable/unfavorable”, “Like a lot/Dislike; $\alpha = .95$). Two items capture impressions of the company in terms of enjoyment (“exciting/boring” and “fun/not fun”; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .92). Two items capture impressions of the company in terms of image (“high image/low image” and “sophisticated/unsophisticated”; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .89). Two items capture impressions of the company in terms of respect (“respected/not respected” and “stable and sound/unstable and unsound”; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .73).

The next set of questions present potential descriptive statements about the job (9-point disagree/agree scales). These measures are collapsed into four (summed and averaged) construct scales: fun perceptions (“will be fun”, “will be exciting”; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .87), career perceptions (“will be rewarding”, “will boost my esteem”, “will be fulfilling”, “will be interesting”, “will be good for my career”; $\alpha = .89$), image perceptions (“will

be high status”, “ will be high image”; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .96), and perceived task difficulty (“will be difficult” and “will be challenging”; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .76).

The next items include potential descriptive statements about the company offering the job (9-point disagree/agree scales). These measures are collapsed into three (summed and averaged) construct scales: mentoring and training perspective (“I will improve faster if I have a mentor”, “Having a mentor matters to me when choosing a job”, “Having a good training program matters to me when choosing a job”; $\alpha = .78$), overall working in the company perspective (“Working for this company would enhance my for career”, “I feel comfortable working for this company”, “I often buy things from this company”, “This company can teach me things I cannot learn elsewhere”, “Company name matters to me when choosing a job”; $\alpha = .72$), and respect of the company perspective; Spearman-Brown Reliability Coefficient = .49.)

Nine questions (disagree/agree scales) are taken directly from the International Personality Item Pool to measure how much a person strives to achieve (*need for achievement*). Items include questions such as “I go straight for the goal”, or reverse-scaled questions like “I put little time and effort into my work” ($\alpha = .81$). Ten questions seek to measure *self-efficacy*, which considers whether a person is competent in dealing with challenging encounters: e.g., “I complete tasks successfully”, or reverse-scaled questions like “I don't see the consequences of things” ($\alpha = .87$). Lastly, nine questions are designed to measure affective-identity MTL, how much a person strives to be a leader simply because their personality causes them to. For example, subjects rated “I am the type of person who likes to be in charge of others”, or reverse-scaled questions like “I am the type of person who is not interested to lead others” ($\alpha = .76$). The final page of questions asked for age, gender, ethnicity, and academic major. [Note: Not all

measured constructs described above are relevant to the hypotheses being tested here. Thus, several are not discussed further.]

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks and Covariates

As desired, overall perceptions of *Target* are higher than overall perceptions of *Sears* ($F(1,168)=41.80, p<.001, M_T=7.36$ and $M_S=5.92$). In addition, those exposed to the *Target* scenario rated the store (*Target*) as more respected ($F(1,168)=20.53, p=.001, M_T=7.23$) with a higher image ($F(1,168)=21.04, p=.001, M_T=6.48$) compared to those who read the *Sears* scenario ($M_S=6.21$ and $M_S=5.24$ for respected and image, respectively). In addition, those exposed to the scenario that included mention of a mentoring program agreed more strongly with the statement, “The job description included mention of a mentoring program.” ($F(1,168)= 69.17, p<.001, M=7.20$ versus $M=3.96$ for the scenario that mentioned/did not mention a mentoring program). In summary, the above findings support that the company image and training program manipulations behaved as intended.

There are no significant differences across treatments for store familiarity, and it has no impact on the ANOVA analyses reported below. Thus, it is not discussed further. In order to account for potential variance in individual differences across treatments and to test some hypotheses, achievement, self-efficacy, and MTL are incorporated as covariates in test of H1-H3.

H1-H3

In order to test H1-H3, the effects of the two experimental manipulations on the two primary dependent construct scales are analyzed via ANOVA: position acceptance and perception of the job. In each of the tests, the three moderating variables (affective-identity,

achievement-striving, and self-efficacy) are included as covariates. [See Table 1 for summary of treatment means.]

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

The first hypothesis (H1) tests the effect of the *training program* on the likelihood of accepting the job. Data show that ANOVA results for likelihood to accept the job are insignificant ($F(1,170)=.79$, *ns*, for the training main effect). H2 tests the interactive effect of *company image* and *training program* on job acceptance. Data show that the hypothesized interaction is insignificant ($F(1,170)=2.31$, *ns*) and cell means are not supportive of H2 either. However, directional support emerges: i.e., the training program is desired more by those seeking a job at *Target* ($M_T=6.55$ vs. 6.37) – the most prestigious store, and benefits only is preferred for *Sears* applicants ($M_S=6.78$ vs. 6.06).

Tests of H3 show that the *training x company image* interaction for perception of the Job is insignificant ($F(1,170)=.34$, *ns*) and cell means are not supportive of H3. Respondents in the *Target* scenario with a *training program* ($M_T=6.70$), have similar perceptions as those in the three other scenarios: *Target* and *no training* scenario ($M_T=6.87$), *Sears* brand name and a *training program* ($M_S=6.52$), and *Sears* brand name and *no training* program ($M_S=6.78$).

H4-H6

These three hypotheses measure the effects of the moderating variables (affective-identity, achievement-striving, and self-efficacy) on a person's willingness to accept a job and the person's perception of the job. As noted above, these variables show no great impact as covariates (ANCOVAs). For a more powerful test of H4-H6, median split variables are created for each of the three individual difference characteristics. These are then included as a third fixed factor in a series of ANOVA analyses.

Achievement-Striving: H4 proposes that those who score high in *achievement-striving* will be more likely to accept a job that has a *training program*. Data for job acceptance likelihood show that the proposed interaction is insignificant ($F(1,170)=.71, ns$, for the *training program* x *achievement-striving* interaction) and cell means are not supportive of H4 (see Table 2A). There is no difference between the *benefits only* and *benefit with training program* groups for high achievers ($M_s=6.58$ vs. 6.53), nor for low achievers ($M_s=6.55$ vs. 6.00). Results for perception of the job are also insignificant ($F(1,170)=.59, ns$, for the *training program* x *achievement-striving* interaction). The differences *between benefits only* and *benefit with training program* are similar (not significantly different) for high achievers ($M_s=6.68$ vs. 6.84) and low achievers ($M_s=6.53$ vs. 6.30).

[Insert Table 2A about here.]

Self-Efficacy: H5 proposes that those who score high in *self-efficacy* will be more likely to accept a job that has a *training program*. The impact of *self-efficacy* and training on job acceptance is insignificant ($F(1,170)=.35, ns$, for the *training program* x *self-efficacy* interaction) and cell means are not supportive of H5 (see Table 2B). The *training program* has little effect on high *self-efficacy* individuals' job acceptance ($M_s=6.65$ vs. 6.50), nor on low self-efficacy individuals' responses ($M_s=6.55$ vs. 6.04). Results for perception of the job are insignificant as well ($F(1,170)=.18, ns$, for the *training program* x *self-efficacy* interaction). The training program elicited similar effects for individuals with high self-efficacy ($M_s=6.67$ vs. 6.37) and individuals with low self-efficacy ($M_s=6.57$ vs. 6.42).

[Insert Table 2B about here.]

Affective-Identity: H6 proposes that those who score high in *affective-identity* will be more likely to accept a job that has a *training program*. Again, the predicted interaction effect is

insignificant ($F(1,171)=.002, ns$), and cell means are not supportive either (see Table 2C). Individuals with high *affective-identity* ($M_s=6.58$ vs. 6.28) and individuals with low *affective-identity* ($M_s=6.62$ vs. 6.35) report a similar pattern of effects. Perception of the job is not impacted by the *training program* x *affective-identity* interaction ($F(1,171)=.91, ns$). The differences between benefits only and benefits with a training program are similar (not significantly different) for individuals with high affective-identity ($M_s=6.70$ vs. 6.86) and individuals with low affective-identity ($M_s=6.60$ vs. 6.30).

[Insert Table 2C about here.]

Gender Effects. In addition to tests for the primary hypotheses, interesting observations emerge for *gender*. There is a significant interaction between *training program* and *gender* for likelihood to accept the job ($F(1,169)=4.03, p<0.05$). Cell means indicate that *females* ($M_F=6.59$) are more likely to accept a job with a training program over a job without training ($M_F=6.31$). In contrast, *males* prefer no training ($M_M=6.92$) as compared to a training program ($M_M=6.01$). Also, there is a significant interaction between *training program* and *gender* for perception of the job ($F(1,169)=6.49, p=0.012$). Cell means indicate that *females* ($M_F=6.98$) are more likely to accept a job with a training program over a job without training ($M_F=6.41$). In contrast, *males* prefer no training ($M_M=6.98$) as compared to a training program ($M_M=6.27$).

[Insert Table 2D about here.]

Results Summary

In summary, results do not show support for H1 and H2. However, directional support for H2 shows that those seeking a job at *Target*, the more prestigious store tested here, desire a training program. In contrast, a benefits only package is preferred for *Sears'* applicants, the less

prestigious store. ANOVA analyses testing H3 are insignificant and no considerable difference emerges across cell means.

There is also no statistical support for the hypotheses involving the moderating variables. Cell means analyses fail to yield support for any of these hypotheses. However, considering gender as a moderating variable, there is clear evidence that a training program is more attractive to females while males find a no training offer more appealing.

DISCUSSION

Most organizations do some degree of employment branding. Employment branding is a long-term strategy to market and manage the awareness, image, and perception of employees, potential employees, and stockholders. The purpose of employment branding is to drive recruitment and, increase retention, and productivity management efforts. In other words, it creates a favorable image for an organization as a great place to work in the minds of employees and the community. Employment branding can be a key competitive advantage to attract and retain the best talents in the work force.

During the job search process, applicants start to gather information about the organization and job in which they are interested. Using this information, applicants can decide if the goals and values of the organization are consistent with their own goals and values. Training and development should be important values. If applicants become employees, training will help them to master skills and gather knowledge required for their immediate job. Compared to training, development is geared toward increasing their skills, knowledge, and behaviors with the goal of improving their ability to meet changing job requirement (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Patrick 2003).

This study tests the impact of two employment branding tools, mentoring/training and company image, on an applicants' willingness to accept a job. Moreover, it explores the moderating impact of certain individual characteristics. Contrary to expectations, having a mentor and a training program had little effect on the job acceptance decision (H1). Self-determination theory may explain this result. According to this theoretical framework, intrinsic motivation (autonomous) refers to engaging in behavior because of interest, enjoyment or inherent satisfaction. On other hand, extrinsic motivation (control) refers to engaging in behavior for reasons that are outside the person will, such as getting rewards, evading sanctions or following employer orders (Deci and Ryan 2000). Empirical studies suggest that some managerial strategies and interventions designed to enhance employees actually undermine these outcomes because they promote the controlled rather than autonomous types of motivation (Deci and Ryan 1985). An organization-wide training program may be considered an extrinsic motivation that undermines the good outcomes.

In addition, company image and training program did not interactively impact the decision of accepting a job (H2). However, directional support shows that a training program is desired by applicants seeking a job at the most prestigious store (*Target*), and a benefits-only package is preferred by applicants seeking a job at the less prestigious store (*Sears*). This attitude may be due to applicants' perceptions that organizations with lower image are a resource for income only, while organizations with better images are seen as career builders and thus, training is more important. Moreover, an applicant's perception of how long he/she will work for an organization may depend on the company's perceived image. If they agree to work for an organization with a lower image, they may work for a short period of time and get the benefits only package. On other hand, if they accept a job for an organization with higher image, they may plan to work for

a longer time and prefer the benefits with training. In addition, organizations with lower images are not perceived as good places to receive quality training because people observe that such organizations as not as good in terms of customer service or other image-related attributes. Therefore, applicants may think that they are better off without the organization's training. Future research should investigate this finding further.

Data do not support predictions of H3. That is, company image and training program do not interactively impact the perception of the job and training does not have a greater impact on the overall perception of a job for companies with a high perceived image versus companies with a low perceived image. Perhaps applicants have preconceived notions regarding the organization's image and having a training program does little to change that perceived image. Also, we acknowledge that the image of *Sears* and *Target* are rather similar. The manipulation check indicates that the overall mean image rating is 6.5 for *Target* versus 5.24 for *Sears*. While these are statistically different, both are in the mid-range: i.e., they may not differ substantively. Investigating companies with more varied images is suggested.

Results for H4 are interesting: tests that applicants with high scores in need for achievement are more likely to accept a job that has a training program do not yield significant effects. This is a very disappointing result in terms of formal mentoring. Fagenson (1992) reports that individuals who are high in need for achievement are more likely to have informal mentors. However, my finding is similar to a recent research that need for achievement does not moderate the effect of mentoring on organizational attraction (Bradley, Horvath, and Wasko 2008). The reason those with high need for achievement do not prefer a training program may be due to their willingness to keep their job difficult and challenging. In other words, with training, they learn

how to perform the job the easy way, but without training, they face the challenge of being forced to learn by themselves.

Analysis of H5 shows that applicants who score high in self-efficacy are not more likely to accept a job that has a training program. Control theory may provide insight. Control theory uses goals as a key motivational construct and focuses on the comparisons between desired goal states for variables versus perceptions of one's current, estimated, or anticipated states of those variables. To apply this theory here, consider an entry-level applicant who has a goal of being prepared for a job and a perception of how to be prepared. Control theory suggests that applicants are motivated to reduce a positive difference between the desired level of preparedness and the perception of preparedness. If the applicant does not feel prepared for the job, he/she will allocate resources to get ready (prefer to have a training program) (Mazzoni and Cornoldi 1993). Thus, when self-efficacy beliefs are relatively high, applicants can be expected to devote fewer resources (prefer to not have a training program) because the difference between the desired level of preparedness and the perception of preparedness is smaller than that of applicants with relatively low self-efficacy.

Data also do not show support for H6, that having a high score in affective-identity increases the likelihood of accepting a job that has a training program. One possible explanation is that there is little evidence of the effectiveness of mentoring and coaching for new leaders (Hobson and Sharp 2005). This has been reported in the literature despite agreement that mentoring offers significant benefits for leaders in different ways, such as role socialization, reduced feelings of isolation, professional development, increased job satisfaction, improved leadership skills, and leadership-capacity building (Browne-Ferrigno and Muth 2004). Applying expectancy theory, applicants would not be expected to prefer the mentoring program. Expectancy theory explains

individuals' motivation to make choices, expend effort, and complete a task (Vroom 1964). Accordingly, motivation consists of three components: individual expectancy that effort will lead to performance, the belief that performance will lead to certain outcomes, and the value or valence placed on these outcomes (Rynes and Gerhart, 2000). An individual feels motivated when he or she feels that effort will lead to an acceptable level of performance, performance will lead to an outcome, and the outcome is personally valued (Isaac, Wilfred, and Douglas, 2001). In the case of applicants with high affective-identity, they do not prefer mentoring because it may not be good training for them (level of performance) or it may not be an improvement (lead to an outcome).

Interesting observations emerge for gender. Specifically, females are more likely to accept a job with a training program over a job without training. Quite the opposite, males prefer no training to a job with training. Studies indicated that women are more likely to participate in training, not only in the United States (Simpson and Stroh 2002), but also in the United Kingdom (Green and Zanchi 1997) and Australia (Wooden and VandenHeuvel 1997). Past research also suggests that women need more mentoring to help them advance in the hierarchy in their organizations because they have more obstacles than men do (Wallace 2001). For example, compared to men, women incur more gender discrimination from male managerial hierarchies and lack informal networks for advancement. In contrast, Burt (1998) shows that men do not require mentor sponsoring to advance, but women do. Stereotype Threat Theory offers insight arguing that the concept of women as not able to do well on a task or test is not in the decision-makers' minds (white males), it is in the self-concepts of the women. Therefore, females prefer to get training because of their own stereotype of themselves (Steele 1997). Another theoretical model that explains gender differences in the workplace, the socialization model, suggests that

gender differences in attitudes result from psychological differences occurring from the socialization of men versus women. This means that women are socialized to prefer interpersonal factors (training and mentoring) to a greater extent than men (Smith, Smits, and Hoy 1998).

Limitations and Future Research

A clear limitation is the sample of respondents used in this study. College students taking undergraduate business classes may very likely have different attitudes toward training and brand names than people who are not attending college or students who are taking other college classes. Moreover, this study focuses on the retail industry that does not have extremely complicated tasks compared to some industries. For example, a business major who is going to work in retail industry will view training different than a nursing major who is going to work in a hospital with much hands-on experience.

Incorporating a broader age range of participants and graduate students may have interesting implications as well. The majority of the respondents are undergraduate college students under the age of 25. Work experience may play a part as well. People who have been working for longer time may appreciate the importance of training more than those with less experience.

Testing different brands/companies or changing the explanation of the training program is also suggested. Choosing a higher company image than *Target*, such as *Nordstrom* or *Bloomingdale's* should maximize the variability of positive/negative brand names. In addition, this experiment focuses on mentoring as a training program. However, different types of training programs can be studied, such as leadership training, extensive rotation program, classes at corporate universities, and classes at colleges. In addition, factors other than training and company image that impact employment branding warrant study (e.g., flexible working hour, retirement benefits).

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TABLE 1
Summary of Treatment Means

	Target, Training	Target, No Training	Sears, Training	Sears, No Training
<i>Measures</i>				
Position Acceptance	6.55 (1.37)	6.37 (2.03)	6.06 (2.33)	6.78 (1.86)
Perception of the Job	6.70 (1.44)	6.87 (1.54)	6.52 (1.85)	6.40 (1.58)
Perception of the Company	7.37 (1.18)	7.38 (1.22)	5.77 (1.71)	6.01 (1.63)
Company Image	6.34 (1.46)	6.61 (1.29)	4.94 (2.17)	5.55 (1.97)
Company Respect	7.22 (1.15)	7.25 (1.30)	5.86 (1.83)	6.55 (1.51)

TABLE 2A**Summary of Treatment Means for Achievement-Striving Tests**

	High Achievement-Striving, Benefit Only	High Achievement-Striving, Benefit and Training	Low Achievement-Striving, Benefit and Training	Low Achievement-Striving, Benefit Only
<i>Measures</i>				
Position Acceptance	6.58 (1.78)	6.53 (1.97)	6.00 (1.93)	6.56 (2.02)
Perception of the Job	6.58 (1.56)	6.00 (1.69)	6.52 (1.61)	6.55 (1.60)
Perception of the Company	6.70 (1.64)	6.74 (1.67)	6.33 (1.71)	6.71 (1.49)

TABLE 2B**Summary of Treatment Means for Self-Efficacy Tests**

	High Self-Efficacy, Benefit Only	High Self-Efficacy, Benefit and training	Low Self-Efficacy, Benefit and Training	Low Self-Efficacy, Benefit Only
<i>Measures</i>				
Position Acceptance	6.65 (1.86)	6.45 (2.02)	6.04 (1.90)	6.55 (1.91)
Perception of the Job	6.67 (1.67)	6.73 (1.77)	6.42 (1.57)	6.57 (1.49)
Perception of the Company	6.82 (1.68)	6.64 (1.70)	6.45 (1.70)	6.70 (1.48)

TABLE 2C
Summary of Treatment Means for Affective-Identity MTL Tests

	High Affective- Identity, Benefit Only	High Affective- Identity, Benefit and Training	Low Affective- Identity, Benefit and Training	Low Affective- Identity, Benefit Only
<i>Measures</i>				
Position Acceptance	6.58 (1.86)	6.28 (2.183)	6.35 (1.69)	6.62 (1.91)
Perception of the Job	6.69 (1.60)	6.85 (1.70)	6.29 (1.60)	6.62 (1.53)
Perception of the Company	6.78 (1.65)	6.76 (1.78)	6.40 (1.45)	6.61 (1.49)

TABLE 2D
Summary of Treatment Means for Gender Tests

	Males, Benefit Only	Males, Benefit and Training	Females, Benefit and Training	Females, Benefit Only
<i>Measures</i>				
Position Acceptance	6.92 (1.60)	6.01 (2.27)	6.59 (1.62)	6.31 (2.04)
Perception of the Job	6.98 (1.33)	6.27 (2.00)	6.98 (1.19)	6.41 (1.69)
Perception of the Company	6.82 (1.48)	6.34 (1.77)	6.79 (1.59)	6.63 (1.63)

APPENDIX

Experimental Scenarios

Job Description (the same across all treatments):

Assistant Store Manager Responsibilities:

- Manage a specific area of store operations - Logistics, Guest Service, Hardlines, Softlines, or Human Resources
- Responsible for driving sales for two to three departments with sales ranging from \$2-\$9 million
- Oversee and motivate team members, demonstrate leadership and stimulate civic / community service
- Participate in recruiting / hiring decisions, structuring orientation and training programs, and on-the-job support components

Job Requirements:

- 4-year college degree
- Leadership ability
- Ability to operate store computer and electronic systems
- Ability to read and understand labels, instructions, reports, policies and procedures
- Ability to communicate clearly and effectively in varying situations with great interpersonal skills
- Strong cognitive skills, including problem analysis, decision making, financial and quantitative analysis

Company Name & Benefit/Training Package Treatments:

Target, Benefits Only

Target is a company living a clear vision; to be the best, in every area of our business. In everything we do. Our nationwide channel of retail stores, distribution centers, and corporate offices offer you thousands of opportunities to join our diverse team and bring your best.

Eligible team members will receive one of the nation's best earnings, including competitive pay, all-around insurance coverage, 401(k), flexible scheduling, personal development and many other perks and benefits.

Target, Benefits and Training

Target is a company living a clear vision; to be the best, in every area of our business. In everything we do. Our nationwide channel of retail stores, distribution centers, and corporate offices offer you thousands of opportunities to join our diverse team and bring your best.

Eligible team members will receive one of the nation's best earnings, including competitive pay, all-around insurance coverage, 401(k), flexible scheduling, personal development and many other perks and benefits.

During the first two years of employment, the training program will rotate you through all selling and non-selling areas of the store, such as merchandising, in-store support, operations, human resources, and asset protection. You will learn the skills required in each role, but will also gain a macro view of how they all work together. There will be a Mentor Relationship that is critical to your development. These mentors are high performing managers and leaders who have proven themselves as drivers of business performance, coaches, and developers of people.

Sears, Benefits Only

Sears is one of the nation's largest and most successful retailers, operating nearly 900 full-line stores and 1,100 specialty stores, along with related service businesses.

Eligible team members will receive one of the nation's best earnings, including competitive pay, all-around insurance coverage, 401(k), flexible scheduling, personal development and many other perks and benefits.

Sears, Benefits and Training

Sears is one of the nation's largest and most successful retailers, operating nearly 900 full-line stores and 1,100 specialty stores, along with related service businesses.

Eligible team members will receive one of the nation's best earnings, including competitive pay, all-around insurance coverage, 401(k), flexible scheduling, personal development and many other perks and benefits.

During the first two years of employment, the training program will rotate you through all selling and non-selling areas of the store, such as merchandising, in-store support, operations, human resources, and asset protection. You will learn the skills required in each role, but will also gain a macro view of how they all work together. There will be a Mentor Relationship that is critical to your development. These mentors are high performing managers and leaders who have proven themselves as drivers of business performance, coaches, and developers of people.