

THE IDEA AND INSTRUMENTS FOR BUILDING A POSITIVE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Recruitment and selection are ones of the most important aspects of human resource management (HRM). Nowadays, more and more organizations, according to the “new” look at the employment that appeared at the beginning of the 21st century, use the output of experiential marketing in processes of recruitment and selection. The purpose of this paper is to present the essence and instruments which can help in building positive experience for job candidates, i.e. candidate experience (CX). The article is theoretical. It is based on Polish and English literature on human resource management and experiential marketing. The article underlines the necessity to a systematic approach to creating positive candidate experience which occurs as a result of each interaction between the potential member of an organization and the given institution.

Key words: candidate, experience, recruitment, selection, candidate experience

1. Introduction

Processes connected with recruiting employees are believed to be crucial from the viewpoint of human resources management (HRM) and reaching the organization’s targets. Nowadays it is highlighted, however, that they also play a significant role in building customer experience, and mostly the group which includes potential candidates for a job.

The purpose of this article is to present the essence and instruments which can help in building positive experience for job candidates, i.e. candidate experience (CX). The author’s intention was to characterise the idea of creating customer experience through referring to both sub-disciplines of management: (1) human resources management (mainly the recruitment process), (2) marketing (experiential marketing in the vast majority). What is worth noting is that although the subject of shaping candidate experience is no novelty, in Poland it is more often addressed by practitioners of management than the representatives of the academic world.

The character of this paper is theoretical. The literature studies comprise Polish and English references concerning staff employment and the philosophy of marketing and experience economy. The article begins with an explanation of the term ‘candidate’. The following section shortly describes the genesis of building candidate experience. The further parts present: the essence of candidate experience, the tools for recruitment and selection which also constitute the instruments for shaping specific candidate experience, and the most important matters regarding CX control. The summary of the paper indicates the necessity to a systematic approach to creating positive candidate experience which occurs as a result of each interaction between the potential member of an organization and the given institution.

2. A candidate as the subject of experience building

The word candidate originates from the Latin word *candidatus*. The term was used in ancient Rome to describe a person running for office. This noun stems from the name of a snow-white toga called *candida* worn by candidates for senate during an electoral campaign. The purpose of wearing a white outfit was to distinguish oneself from other people wearing ordinary grey togas called *pura* [*Encyklopedia.pwn.pl* 2016].

The term *candidatus* is also used nowadays by specialists of bacteriology [*Some names...* 2016] for whom it stands for a state of temporary isolation in which the organisms not being a part of a bacteria culture are found. Microbiologists also highlight that *candidatus*, although it is not assimilated with a bacteria culture, is a recognized and fully characterized organism.

However, nowadays the word *candidatus* is usually associated with a candidate. The term, although similarly to ancient times, refers to the area of politics, is also used regarding all people applying for a job, position, function or membership in an organization or a group [Dunaj 2000]. A candidate is thus a category connected with human resources management. One of HRM purposes is to attract people to organization who are interested in becoming its members. Attracting a candidate, i.e. recruitment in its narrowest sense, in order to be deemed effective should perform three basic functions: informative, motivational and pre-selective. In such an understanding, the effect of recruitment actions is by gathering the organization’s data about people who were not only sufficiently informed

about the employment conditions in their broadest sense and meet the requirements specified by the institution, but were also motivated to try to get the position and have taken formal steps (through making an application) to become members of the organization. The pool of these people are the so-called applicants (the real candidates) at whom selective actions are later aimed.

When recruitment does not play an informative or motivational function, or when people interested in the job do not meet the employer's requirements, people who are preliminarily willing to have contact with the organization may resign from seeking employment. Although they are not formally applicants, they constitute a group of prospective candidates who, in the future, might apply for the position.

In this paper the term candidate will thus stand for any person who, as a result of participation in a one- or two-way communication with the organization, has taken part in any stage of the recruitment process¹, regardless whether or not they made an application or not.

3. The genesis of building candidate experience

Experiencing means learning, i.e. acquiring knowledge and skills on the basis of observation or adventures. Experiencing may have a one-time character or take place in a continuous manner. Regardless of the length of its duration, experiencing is usually accompanied by emotions and feelings which reflect the cognitive and affective dimension of the experience [Dunaj 2000].

The interest of management sciences with experience is connected with development of experiential marketing (ExM) and experience economy.

The first papers on the topic of experience appeared in marketing in the 1950s [Baran 2013]. However, a real boom of experiential marketing took place after the year 1999 when J. Pine and J. Gilmore published their book 'The Experience Economy'. In their work the authors claimed that experience represents an existing, but not articulated for years type of financial output [Pine, Gilmore 1999]. Due to the fact that on the post-industrial, saturated markets even a good product, that meets the consumer's expectations, is not sufficient to draw his attention [Boguszewicz-Kreft 2010]. Nowadays the offer must be enriched by added value which comes from the consumer's experience.

In experiential marketing it is indicated that clients, in contact with organizations, products or services, gather positive or negative experiences (always subjective). The least beneficial from the point of view of the organization are the unremembered experiences (the consumer does not notice the offer). The best situation is when a customer's attention is fully concentrated on the experience which is so delightful (delight experiences) that he completely ignore the surroundings [Show 2005]. According to the philosophy of experiential marketing, its goal should be reached by generating various kinds of experiences: sensual, emotional, intellectual, behavioural and relational [Schmitt 1999]. Completing the offer with a component of experiences, called the economic progression, allows an organization to establish higher, but still acceptable for customers, prices [Skowronek 2011].

Experiences as a source of value are not created in isolation. Their potential is activated when consumption begins which regards raw materials, goods and services. Experiences are thus also the subject of economic analysis, and in particular experiences economy in which they are treated as a specific product and at the same time a source of competitive advantage [Marciszewska 2010; Majchrzak 2014].

In human resources management the role of experience has been discussed for years mainly in the context of employee training courses in which, according to the idea of constructivism, action learning was postulated. In reference to recruitment processes, until the 1990s the term 'experience' was rarely used. Although the employment tactics were enhanced, the purpose of perfecting them was mostly to develop such staff recruitment techniques which allowed to get to know candidates as well as possible and to choose those best suited to the organization's objectives and culture. The development of the instruments for employee recruitment was thus aimed at reaching the highest predictive value of the given method or technique.

Another look on employment appeared only at the beginning of the 21st century as a consequence of the rapid development of electronic recruitment. Due to the fact that the internet offers practically countless possibilities to help to inform about the recruitment processes (and thus building experiences), at the same time it gives the candidates a chance to share with other people their (both positive and negative) observations from the participation in the processes, employers began to look at employment process not only from the organizations' viewpoint, but also from the candidates' perspective. As a result, candidates' impressions connected with the recruitment, selection and adaptation started to be recognized and analysed [Crispin, Mehler 2011] and, according to the assumptions of experiential marketing, tools building the candidate experience began to be used.

¹ Although the process of staff employment comprises also human resources planning and induction, the analysis in this article was limited only to the functions of recruitment and selection.

4. The essence of candidate experience and of building the candidate experience

Most generally, candidate experience means an entirety of knowledge, emotions and feelings gathered by a candidate for employment. The cognitive and affective aspects of CX reflect the hierarchy of customer needs connected with experiences. At the basis of this hierarchy one can find mechanical impressions generated mostly by clues of physical character [Berry, Carbone, Haeckel 2002]; the higher positions are occupied by needs to experience emotions (Fig. 1).

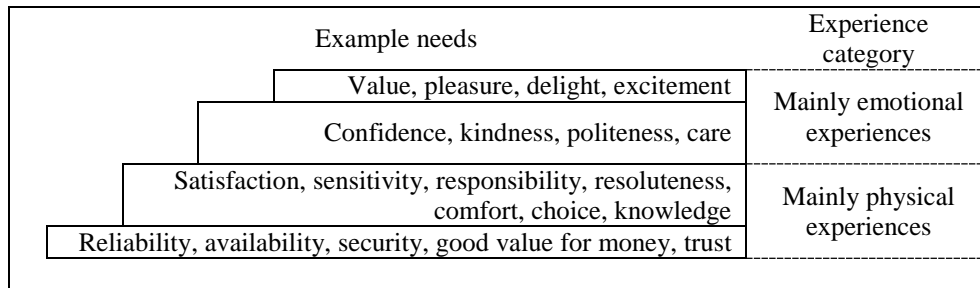


Fig. 1. Types of customer experience needs

Source: Show C., 2005, *Revolutionize Your Customer Experience*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 64.

When looking for a job, candidates expect their experience needs to be satisfied on all stages of the employment process. The aim of the employers building a candidate experience in a conscious way should be to conduct the recruitment and selection activities in such a manner that all candidates (prospective and real) will get highly positive physical and emotional experiences from the participation in the recruitment process. Due to the fact that one of the crucial employment instruments are IT processes, candidate experiences are formed mostly on the basis of an assessment of how an organization communicates the demand for employees and how it communicates with the people interested in joining the organization. Therefore, we must assume that, quoting K.W. Grossman [2013], a condition necessary to create a positive CX is giving the candidate information concerning: (1) the employer receiving the filled/sent application; (2) hiring/not hiring the candidate; (3) other proposals of employment/cooperation with the organization (or lack of these).

However, the three types of information listed above do not constitute all the instruments for building positive candidate experiences. On the basis of separate categories of needs connected with customer experiences and the cognitive and emotional aspects of candidate experience, a number of other pieces of information and behaviours of the employer’s representatives could be indicated, which are indispensable from the viewpoint of shaping a positive CX (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Chosen instruments for building physical and emotional candidate experiences

Stage of the employment process	Tools for building positive candidate experiences	
	Physical experiences	Emotional experiences
Recruitment	Informing about the conditions of employment in their broadest sense Informing about the application process Informing about the requirements towards the candidates Feedback on receiving the application	Additional information about the organization (also the organization as an employer) Informing about the selection procedure and adaptation Personal contact with the candidate An attractive and functional home page of the employer/career website
Selection	Informing the candidates in detail about the working conditions Professionalism in selection Feedback on rejecting the candidate /shortlisting the candidate to further stages of the selection	A partner approach to the selection Use of ‘new’ selection techniques

Source: own development.

It is worth adding that a positive CX is significant also from the point of view of other aspects of an organization's activity. It has been proved that it has an impact on the power of the employer's brand and the institution's reputation [Mello 2013; Sartain, Schumann 2008]. Candidate experiences also influence the applicants' behaviours as consumers, i.e. their shopping decisions – analyses conducted in this country prove that almost half of candidates who were dissatisfied with the recruitment process do not buy the company's products [Trzaska (red.) 2015]. Building a positive candidate experience should thus constitute an area of interest of customer relations management (CRM) in its broadest sense.

5. Tools for building candidate experience in the area of recruitment

One of the most important tasks of recruitment is to inform the candidates about the conditions of employment in the organization. According to the marketing approach to human resources management, this regards the presentation of the employer's offer, i.e. the so-called employer value proposition (EVP). It is assumed that the basis of EVP constitutes of propositions concerning: the salary, the working conditions and additional benefits connected with development in its broadest sense and establishing a balance between professional and private life [Berger 2008]. A job advertisement should therefore include a true and reliable characterization of these aspects of management. A value proposition is not only a declaration regarding the expectations fulfilled by the offer, but also information about the expenses one needs to bear in order to take full advantage of the opportunities of the offer. Employers ought to familiarize the candidates with the procedure for applying for employment (how to fill documents, what is the deadline for putting forward applications, etc.) and the requirements towards the applicants.

Thanks to a description of the major subfunctions of human resources management employers not only prove to candidates that they are reliable, but they also communicate what values for employees (financial and non-financial) they create. Moreover, any information passed on in the recruitment process satisfies the candidates' need for knowledge. If an organization decides to additionally present (preferably by giving their names and direct telephone numbers or email addresses) the people in charge of the employee intake, the candidates are likely to perceive it as 'accessible'.

Personalized emails sent by recruiters to candidates or telephone information about receiving the application will help the candidates to experience the politeness of the prospective employer. Furthermore, the message concerning when the next contact with the applicant will take place satisfies the candidates' need for security.

As it has been proved with the results of research on modern recruitment, the basic recruitment tools are home webpages of employers and the career websites which can be found on them [Jakrzewski 2006; Matuszewska 2012]. From the point of view of the candidates what is important is not only the substantial value of such websites (performing the informative function), but also their functionality and attractiveness. Building a positive CX thus requires the company webpages to be responsive (adjusted to mobile devices), to allow to quickly find the sought contents, for the intuitively navigated, the menu not hidden, and help available. Although the assessment of the visual attractiveness of a website is highly subjective [Jarosz 2014], it is assumed that the aspects significant for the candidates are: a positive first impression, toned colours, coherence of fonts used, and a readable and clear form of graphic elements [*Jak oceniać...* 2014]. Moreover, what is always important is the websites administrator's care for the safety of the applicants' data.

Company websites give employers practically countless opportunities to publish various kinds of information. Organizations may post on them short videos, infographics, photos and videocasts about the 'life' of the organization, its culture, or work environment. What can also be valuable to candidates are speeches from the currently hired regarding their internal career paths.

Through the career websites used in the recruitment process employers may create various candidate experiences. The most important physical experiences include: reliability, availability and the prospective employer's responsibility, organization's care about the comfort of the candidates and satisfying their needs for knowledge. Emotional impressions may, in turn, be: sense of security, politeness, value or pleasure.

6. Tools for building candidate experience in the area of selection

Appropriate organization of the selection process may help the candidates to experience similar, positive impressions as in case of recruitment. The job interview is of great importance here, whose each of the stages may contribute to satisfying the physical needs. For example:

- candidate experiences connected with knowledge or security may be shaped by presenting those responsible for conducting the interview (or a series of job interviews) and their role in the selection process, giving detailed information about the conditions of employment, informing the applicant about the planned date of filling the vacancy;

- the reliability assessment of the conducted interviews is higher when the questions asked are based on work analysis, are not discriminatory, refer to specific situations and candidate behaviours [Campion, Palmer, Campion 1997];
- the candidate's comfort is ensured by an introduction to the interview, during which additional 'ice-breaking' questions are asked [Camp, Vielhaber, Simonetti 2006];
- trust is built by assessing the candidate on the basis of substantial criteria;
- encouraging the applicant to ask questions or to speak their mind indicating that the employer understands the idea of partnership of both parties of the job interview may help the candidate to experience sensitivity to their needs [Sartain, Schumann 2008].

The professionalism in executing the selection activities also builds emotional candidate experiences. A friendly atmosphere during an interview supports kindness, and informing the candidates immediately after the results of subsequent stages of the recruitment allows the applicants to experience care from the prospective employer. Moreover, empirical research shows that using the Assessment Centre techniques has a positive influence of CX [Tuzinsky 2013], and the use of the idea of gamification, basing on the rules of edutainment (a combination of education and entertainment), allows to experience pleasure and excitement [Piotrow, de Fossard 2004; Starzyński 2012].

7. Tools for researching and analysing candidate experience

Building positive candidate experiences connected with the participation in the recruitment and selection process is only one of the aspects of creating a candidate experience. Another, not less important action, is controlling the impressions of people applying for a membership in an organization. It is assumed that the best sources of knowledge about the recruitment process are the candidates themselves. It is worth conducting research on CX among all the candidates, both the prospective ones and the real ones who had applied [Machnicka 2013].

For CX research various techniques of gathering information can be used: direct or telephone interviews, survey questionnaires sent by traditional mail, electronic mail or posted on the company's website. To measure, one can also use the tools offered by IT systems supporting recruitment processes. Practitioners of human resources management advise that at least one of the current employees should 'go through' the recruitment procedure in order to check what the process looks like [*It's All About...* 2014].

Questions asked to the candidates should be aimed not only at the assessment of the recruitment and selection process, but also the identification of specific experiences accompanying the application and participation in the recruitment. It is estimated that the behaviours that influence the negative CX the most [*4 Things...* 2015] are: unclear instructions regarding the application, unfriendly career bookmark, lack of intuitive navigation on the employer's website, not adjusting the application process to the requirements of the young generation (lack of bookmark responsiveness), and insufficient contact with the candidate. Consequently, it is worth making an audit of staff recruitment processes taking the above into consideration. Such an internal control might help to check whether during the application any technical problems occur, the application process does not take too long, or the data required to be provided by the candidate are really necessary [*The Candidate...* 2014].

Nowadays, it is also highlighted that a vital aspect of building a CX is recognising the candidates' expectations connected with the execution of recruitment processes. It must be thus assumed that any analyses conducted among the candidates must be supplemented with a diagnosis of their needs. The more so, since as the conducted analyses prove, there exists a 'black hole' between the expectations and candidate experiences [Kingsbury 2011; Biro 2011].

A confirmation of the above statement could also be the results of the second edition of the 'Candidate Experience' research conducted in Poland in 2014. They show a clear discrepancy between the opinions of employers on what they do within the shaping of candidate experiences and the impressions of job applicants. As many as 66% of employers claim that they take care of relations with the candidates on all stages of the staff recruitment process, whereas 57% of candidates believe that the companies 'behave' quite the opposite [Trzaska (ed.) 2015].

8. Conclusion

The development of economics and experiential marketing is mirrored by the changes in the area of human resources management. One of the effects of the influence of modern marketing on HRM is the interest of this specialisation in the experiences of job candidates. HR specialists more and more frequently reach for tools which are useful in shaping various categories of impressions of people applying for a job.

Although the notion of 'experience' is ambiguous and does not have one commonly accepted definition, we must assume that the customers' impressions are created during each interaction with the brand, product or service. A similar situation takes place during building candidate experiences which, what we need to keep in mind, are shaped not only

through participating in recruitment and selection processes, but also through any other contact with the organization offering employment. It can be said that the activities aimed at building positive candidate experiences should be systematic in character.

The analysis conducted in this article, although limited to chosen recruitment and selection instruments, proves that the recruiting companies can create physical and emotional impressions of the candidates (who may already be, or may soon become consumers of the goods or services offered by the organization). What is important, however, is to keep these experiences so positive that they can be described by such adjectives as: great, branded, memorable, effective, perfect or outstanding [Boguszewicz-Kreft 2010].

Biography of the author:

Katarzyna Wojtaszczyk is an associate professor in Department of Human Resource Management at University of Lodz (Poland). Her research interests revolve around issues of human resource management, with particular emphasis on issues related to the human resources development and training, dysfunctions in the implementation of the HR function and “new” trends in HRM.

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