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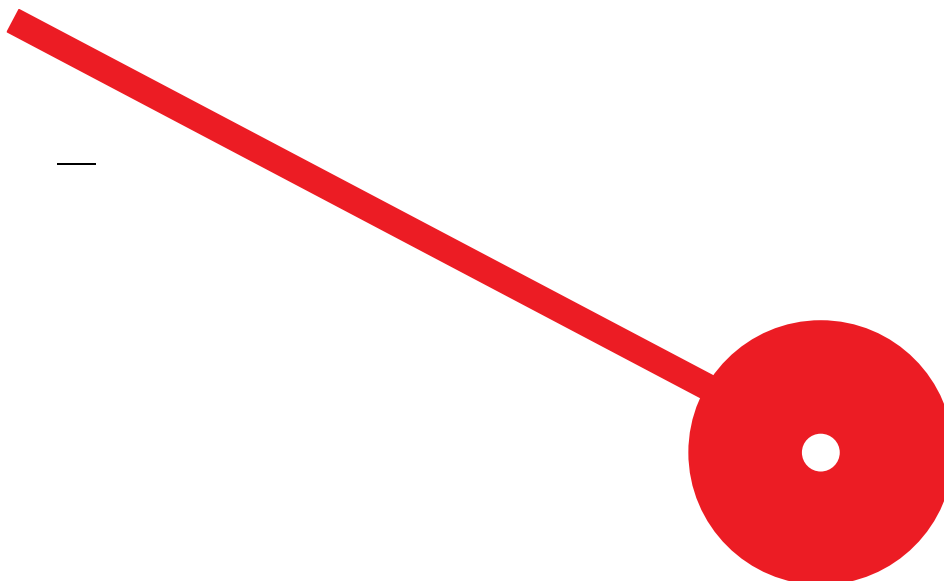
Intercultural Studies for Business

Navigating Intercultural
Dynamics and Employer
Branding: Strategies for
Talent Retention

Sara Beatriz Guedes Ferreira

2023/2024

Sara Ferreira. Navigating
Intercultural Dynamics and Employer
Branding: Strategies for Talent
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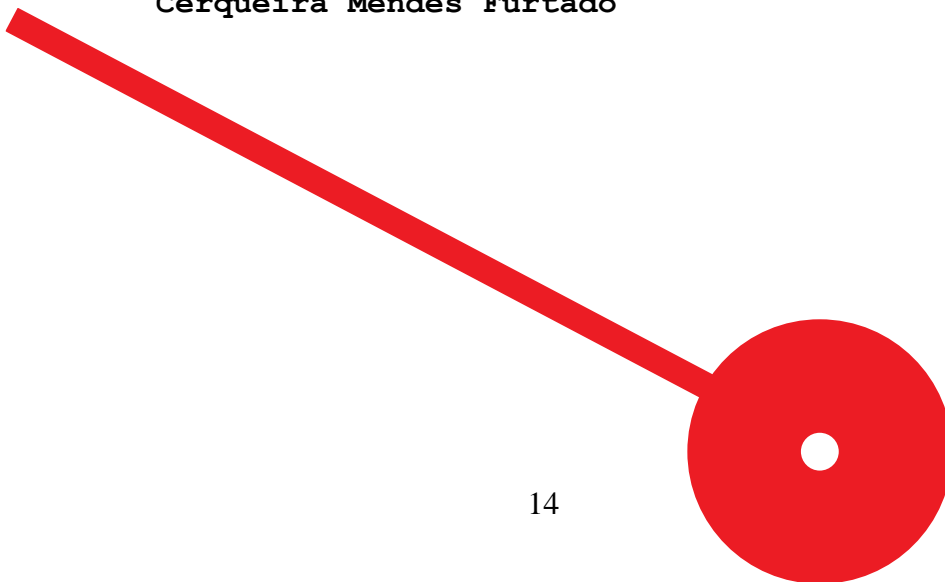
Navigating Intercultural Dynamics and Employer Branding: Strategies for Talent Retention

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Internship Report

presented to the Porto Accounting and Business
School in order to obtain the Master of Art
degree in Intercultural Studies for Business,
under the supervision of Professor Marco António
Cerqueira Mendes Furtado

Sara Ferreira. Navigating Intercultural Dynamics and Employer
Branding: Strategies for Talent Retention



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Abstract:

This report provides a comprehensive study of the intricate interaction between intercultural studies, employer branding, and employee satisfaction within a globalized business context. In an era of rapid globalization, understanding cultural dynamics is crucial for organizations to achieve outstanding outcomes from diverse workgroups. This research emphasizes that organizations promoting interculturalism and aligning corporate culture with employee expectations can significantly enhance retention, satisfaction, and overall mission effectiveness.

A case study of VML Enterprise Solutions illustrates how cultural initiatives, such as a cultural calendar, have markedly improved employee engagement in a hybrid, multicultural environment. As part of this case study, a survey titled "Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace," was conducted which provided valuable insights into employee perceptions and experiences related to cultural initiatives. Additionally, an interview with Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana, the Group Head of Employer Branding & Communication, to gain insights into the employer branding plan and its alignment with cultural initiatives. The findings from both the survey and the interview underscore the importance of integrating cultural initiatives into a broader strategy that addresses work-life balance, career development, and fair compensation.

Ultimately, prioritizing inclusivity, recognition, and effective communication enables organizations to cultivate a positive workplace culture that attracts and retains top talent, ensuring long-term success in an increasingly competitive market.

Key words: Intercultural Communication | Employer Branding | Cultural events
| Employee Satisfaction | Cultural Competence | Workplace Diversity

Resumo:

Este relatório oferece um estudo abrangente sobre a complexa interação entre os estudos interculturais, a marca do empregador e a satisfação dos colaboradores no contexto empresarial globalizado. Nesta era de globalização veloz, é fundamental ter parecer das dinâmicas culturais para que as organizações obtenham excelentes resultados com as equipes de trabalho diversificadas. Com o aumento da diversidade das forças de trabalho, as empresas precisam ajustar as suas práticas para fomentar uma cultura inclusiva e intercultural. Esta pesquisa destaca que, empresas que incentivam a diversidade cultural e ajustam sua cultura organizacional às expectativas dos funcionários podem aumentar consideravelmente a retenção, a satisfação e o desempenho geral da sua missão.

O estágio na VML Enterprise Solutions demonstra como as ações culturais, como o calendário cultural, contribuíram significativamente para o aumento da participação dos colaboradores em um ambiente de trabalho diversificado e híbrido. No âmbito deste estágio, um questionário foi conduzido, o que revelou insights importantes sobre as opiniões dos funcionários em relação às iniciativas culturais da empresa. Adicionalmente, uma entrevista com Magdalena Kornás-Owsiana, Diretora de Employer Branding & Comunicação do Grupo, a fim de obter uma visão mais detalhada sobre o plano de marca e sua conexão com as ações culturais.

Os resultados mostram a relevância de incluir as iniciativas culturais numa estratégia abrangente que trate de temas críticos como equilíbrio entre vida pessoal e profissional, desenvolvimento de carreira e compensação adequada. Dar prioridade à inclusão, ao reconhecimento e à comunicação eficaz ajudará as organizações a desenvolver uma cultura de trabalho positiva, atraindo e mantendo os melhores talentos, assegurando sucesso a longo prazo num mercado cada vez mais competitivo.

Palavras chave: Comunicação Intercultural | Employer Branding | Satisfação dos Colaboradores | Competência Cultural | Eventos Culturais | Diversidade no Local de Trabalho

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	23
Chapter I – Intercultural Studies in Global Business	17
1 Culture: Concepts and Dynamics	18
1.1 Understanding Culture.....	18
1.2 Culture in the Global Workplace.....	20
1.2.1 Intercultural communication.....	21
1.2.2 Intercultural Competence.....	24
Chapter II – Employer Branding as a Strategic Retention Tactic: The Interplay of Corporate Culture and Employee Satisfaction	27
2 Employer Branding as a Strategic Retention Tactic.....	28
2.1 Corporate Culture's Role in Attraction and Retention.....	32
2.2 Linking Employer Branding, Satisfaction, and Retention.....	35
2.3 The Role of Intercultural Studies	36
Chapter III – VML and VML Enterprise Solutions Case Study	45
3 VML and VML Enterprise Solutions Case Study.....	46
3.1 Company Overview	47
3.1.1 VML	47
3.1.2 VML Enterprise Solutions	48
3.1.3 Corporate Logo	49
3.2 Corporate Culture Analyses.....	50

3.2.1	Key Values.....	50
3.2.2	Corporate Social Responsibility	52
	Chapter IV – Internship Report.....	55
4	Internship Report	56
4.1	Enhancing Engagement through Cultural Events.....	56
4.2	Event Guidelines	61
4.3	Enhancing the existing Celebration Plan.....	63
4.4	Employer Branding Strategy	68
4.5	“Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace” - Form analysis	81
	Conclusion	86
	References.....	92
	Appendices.....	98
	Appendix 1 – Cultural Calendar	99
	Appendix 2 –Script for the “Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace for Academic Analysis” form	100
	Appendix 4 – Interview Script	105
	Appendix 5 – Transcript of the Interview with Magdalena Kornás-Owsiana Group Head of EB & Communication of VML ES EMEA	106

List of figures

Figure 1	30
Figure 2	31
Figure 3	37
Figure 4	49
Figure 5	49
Figure 6	58
Figure 7	60
Figure 8	71
Figure 9	74
Figure 10	76
Figure 11	77
Figure 12	82
Figure 13	83
Figure 14	84
Figure 15	85

List of Tables

Table 1	63
Table 2	66

List of Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

CRM: Customer Relationship Management

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

CVF: Competing Values Framework

CX: Customer Experience

EB: Employer Branding

EMEA: Europe, Middle East, and Africa

EVP: Employee Value Proposition

HR: Human Resources

KPI: Key Performance Indicator

OCB: Organisational Citizenship Behavior

PR: Public Relations

UK: United Kingdom

VML ES: VML Enterprise Solutions

The modern workplace no longer faces geographical constraints. Globalization processes and better accessibility to migration have considerably facilitated the cross-border movement of people. Business today is also more interdependent than ever before and is constantly changing. Similarly, depending on the industry, especially in the field of technology, corporations experience intense competition in their hunt for human resources. The modern workforce looks at their company differently from earlier generations by literally rejecting the concept of the company as a "family." Instead, they have put more importance on career development, social responsibility, mental health, a "healthy workplace environment", and higher pay, which override traditional loyalty to the company.

The contemporary workplace is heterogeneous to its core in terms of cultures, generations, and belief systems, building an ecosystem to get the top talent working efficiently and effectively while maintaining work-life balance calls for much action—especially in the tech industry. The trend of increasing remote work opens up challenges and opportunities for an organization. The ability to foster an inclusive and productive work environment is essential, as tech professionals can work from virtually anywhere, as long as they have access to reliable technology, such as a dependable laptop.

The report will seek to provide a comprehensive study regarding the intricate interaction between intercultural studies, employer branding, and employee satisfaction within a globalized business perspective. In this era of rapid globalization, understanding the underlying cultural dynamics is of greater significance for organizations in achieving outstanding outcomes from heterogeneous workgroups. This research work will examine how cultural nuances influence communication and skills in a multidimensional business approach, building a platform toward initiating and sustaining effective intercultural interactions.

Chapter I looks into the complex nature of culture with various definitions and perspectives on its dynamics and diversity. It underscores how intercultural communication and competence are important skills necessary to cope with the complexity arising in one's workplace in today's globalizing world. Examining these ideas will emphasize the need for intercultural

awareness from organizations among their employees, a thing that becomes crucial with each passing day to ensure proper collaboration and innovation within the multicultural team.

In Chapter II, the focus shifts to employer branding as a strategic retention method. This chapter explores how corporate culture affects employee attraction and retention and relates it to overall employee satisfaction. By discussing the relationship between employer branding and corporate culture, this report aims to demonstrate how organizations can leverage these elements to support their employees in greater engagement and loyalty, which, in return, contributes to higher organisational performance. Additionally, this chapter explores how intercultural studies can enrich employer branding strategies, ultimately leading to a more engaged and satisfied workforce.

Chapter III provides an introduction to VML and VML Enterprise Solutions, offering an analysis of the company's corporate profile and culture. This chapter serves as a contextualization of the Internship workplace, emphasizing how the corporate values and corporate practices of VML align with those theoretical ideas described for effective employer branding mentioned in the previous chapter.

Finally, Chapter IV delivers an internship report with a realistic view of the implementation of theories studied throughout the report. It talks about the initiatives taken for employee integration through cultural events and celebration strategies, along with strategic planning methodologies related to employer branding in the context of post-COVID-19. This chapter therefore highlights the urgency of adapting employer branding strategies to consideration for cultural differences and serious evaluation of their effectiveness.

The methodology uses a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Data was collected through a survey, interview, and fieldwork, providing direct insights from real-world organisational settings. This combination ensures a well-rounded analysis of the factors influencing employee retention.

In summary, this dissertation tries to strengthen the knowledge of intercultural studies and employer branding interaction for a better employee satisfaction and retention

ratio in a global business perspective. By amalgamating theoretical conceptual frameworks with practical applications, this research will attempt to provide serious recommendations for organizations striving to succeed in an increasingly diverse and connected global environment.

CHAPTER I – INTERCULTURAL STUDIES IN GLOBAL BUSINESS

1 Culture: Concepts and Dynamics

In this chapter, we will explore the multifaceted nature of culture and its significant impact on human interactions and societal structures. We will delve into how Williams' perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding culture in its entirety—recognizing both the ordinary and specialized domains of cultural expression. This approach encourages us to look beyond elite artistic representations and consider the cultural practices embedded in our daily lives. The chapter will also examine culture from an anthropological standpoint, acknowledging its variation across different societies and the historical contexts that shape cultural identities (Rothlauf, 2015). By examining definitions of culture, including Tylor's notion of a "complex whole" and Popper's view of culture as dynamic, we will highlight the critical role that cultural understanding plays in addressing challenges in intercultural communication time (as cited in Braslauskas, 2021; as cited in Deardorff, 2006) Furthermore, we will discuss the frameworks of multiculturalism and interculturalism, analyzing how these concepts shape our responses to cultural diversity in contemporary society. While multiculturalism advocates for the coexistence of distinct cultural identities, interculturalism promotes deeper engagement and dialogue between cultures, fostering social cohesion and mutual enrichment. Through this exploration, we aim to illuminate the strengths and limitations of both approaches, providing insights into how we can create inclusive environments that facilitate meaningful intercultural interactions.

1.1 Understanding Culture

Culture is a multifaceted concept that has been described as one of the most complex terms in the English language, as noted by Raymond Williams, who emphasizes its diverse interpretations and applications (McGuigan & Moran, 2014).

In his influential work, "The Long Revolution," Williams defines culture as a "particular way of life" that encompasses meanings and values expressed not only in artistic and intellectual pursuits but also in everyday behaviors and institutions (McGuigan & Moran, 2014). This perspective aligns with his earlier work, "Culture is Ordinary," where he distinguishes between culture as a comprehensive way of life and as a specialized domain of arts and learning, underscoring its significance in shaping human

experiences (McGuigan & Moran, 2014). Williams' approach highlights that culture is not merely an abstract concept but is deeply embedded in the lived experiences of individuals and communities. It reflects the social practices, values, and norms that define a society, making it a vital area of study for understanding human interactions and societal structures (McGuigan & Moran, 2014). Furthermore, Williams' emphasis on the ordinary aspects of culture suggests that everyday practices and interactions are crucial for comprehending the broader cultural landscape, challenging the notion that culture is solely the domain of elite or artistic expressions (McGuigan & Moran, 2014). Williams' contributions to cultural theory provide a robust framework for analyzing the complexities of culture, emphasizing its dynamic nature and its role in shaping both individual identities and collective social realities (McGuigan & Moran, 2014).

From an anthropological standpoint, the complexity of culture becomes even more pronounced, as it varies significantly across different societies and ethnic groups. Making homogeneous statements about cultural differences something that we should avoid, highlighting the need to recognize the historical and distinctive characteristics that shape cultural identities (Rothauf, 2015). Jürgen Rothlauf further illustrates this point by discussing the United States, where diverse ethnic cultures coexist, presenting challenges in understanding cultural dynamics (Rothauf, 2015). Tylor's definition of culture as a "complex whole" that includes knowledge, beliefs, and customs reinforces the idea that culture is deeply intertwined with societal behaviors and individual experiences (as cited in Deardorff, 2006). Moreover, the dynamic nature of culture is emphasized by Karl Popper, who posits that cultural influences, alongside technological advancements, shape societies over time (as cited in Braslauskas, 2021). This understanding is crucial for addressing intercultural communication challenges, particularly in intergenerational contexts where differing cultural interpretations can lead to misunderstandings.

As societies become increasingly diverse, the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism have emerged as critical frameworks for managing cultural diversity. Multiculturalism advocates for the coexistence of distinct cultural identities within a society, emphasizing the protection of minority rights and the preservation of cultural practices. This perspective is rooted in the recognition of cultural pluralism and the

celebration of diverse traditions, which can enhance social cohesion and promote tolerance (Wang & Coleman, 2009).

Multiculturalism promotes tolerance and respect for cultural differences but often stops short of fostering deeper interactions among cultural groups (Su, 2022). In contrast, interculturalism emphasizes active engagement and dialogue between cultures, aiming to build bridges that foster mutual understanding and social cohesion (Zhang, 2011). It encourages meaningful interactions and exchanges, positing that such engagement enriches society as a whole (Yang, 2000). Interculturalism recognizes the fluidity of cultural identities and the need for individuals to navigate diverse cultural contexts effectively (Church, 2009). Critics of multiculturalism argue that its focus on preserving distinct cultural identities can inadvertently reinforce segregation and inhibit the development of a cohesive national identity (Camerer, 2014). In contrast, interculturalism seeks to create a sense of shared belonging and collective identity by promoting intercultural citizenship and cultural solidarity (Sevimel-Şahin, 2020). This distinction is crucial for policymakers and community leaders as they navigate the complexities of cultural diversity in contemporary societies. In conclusion, while multiculturalism lays the groundwork for recognizing and celebrating cultural diversity, interculturalism provides the tools for transforming that diversity into a source of social cohesion and mutual enrichment. Understanding the strengths and limitations of both approaches is vital for developing inclusive and equitable environments that promote meaningful intercultural interactions (Wang, 2013).

1.2 Culture in the Global Workplace

In today's globalized world, workplaces are increasingly characterized by cultural diversity, leading to the need for effective intercultural communication and the development of intercultural competence. As organizations expand across borders, they must navigate the complexities of interacting with employees, clients, and stakeholders from diverse cultural backgrounds.

This subchapter explores how culture manifests in the globalized workplace, with a focus on the essential roles of intercultural communication and intercultural competence. Intercultural communication, which refers to the exchange of information

between individuals from different cultures, has become a critical skill in managing global teams and fostering collaboration (Gudykunst, 2004). Intercultural competence, defined as the ability to effectively and appropriately engage in intercultural interactions, has gained prominence as a vital component of successful international business operations (Deardorff, 2006). Developing this competence involves understanding and respecting cultural differences, as well as acquiring the skills to navigate these differences in professional settings. Intercultural competence is not only about awareness but also about adaptability and the ability to apply cultural knowledge in real-world situations (Dervin, Gajardo, & Lavanchy, 2011).

The globalized workplace demands that employees not only recognize the influence of culture on communication styles, decision-making processes, and leadership practices but also possess the capability to bridge cultural gaps. This chapter will explain the concepts of intercultural communication and intercultural competence and they can benefit th workplace's effectiveness and cohesion.

1.2.1 Intercultural communication

In researching the presence of culture or interculturalism in the workplace as a theoretical or academic development theme, I found that much attention is directed towards a specific aspect of intercultural interaction: communication. Intercultural communication has been extensively studied and developed within the fields of business and HR management in comparison to other areas of intercultural interaction.

The study of how to manage multicultural teams is an extremely popular topic at the moment both for companies as well as academics, its important to remember that scholarly research surrounding this topic emerged in the mid-20th century.

Intercultural communication is the study and practice of communication across cultural contexts. It applies equally to domestic cultural differences such as ethnicity and gender and to international differences such as those associated with nationality or world region. Intercultural communication is an approach to

relations among members of these groups that focuses on the recognition and respect of cultural differences, seeks the goal of mutual adaptation leading to biculturalism rather than simple assimilation, and supports the development of intercultural sensitivity on the part of individuals and organizations to enable empathic understanding and competent coordination of action across cultural differences (Bennett, 2013).

The primary objective of intercultural communication is to facilitate effective cross-cultural interactions by adapting to cultural differences relevant to effective communication. This involves identifying potential misunderstandings that may arise from these differences and adjusting one's behaviour accordingly to ensure successful participation in the cross-cultural encounter. This can be extremely beneficial in situations such as business from administration, negotiation, or just coexisting with colleges (Bennett, 2013).

In academic discourse, intercultural communication is often examined through the lens of models and dimension theories that explain how cultural differences shape communication practices.

Intercultural communication encompasses the exchange of information and meaning across diverse cultures, shaped by cultural dimensions such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus femininity, as articulated by Hofstede theory (Hofstede, 2001). These dimensions serve as a framework for understanding how cultural values influence communication styles, revealing the complexities inherent in cross-cultural interactions. The diversity of cultural values leads to varying communication preferences, which are critical in global business contexts (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). The exploration of invisible cultural boundaries and strategies for navigating these differences is essential, particularly in leadership roles where effective communication is vital (Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, introduced in "Culture's Consequences," identifies key dimensions that define cultural differences, such as the Power Distance Index and Collectivism versus Individualism (Hofstede, 2001). For instance, individuals

from the USA typically favor individualistic approaches, while those from China lean towards collectivism. However, this model has limitations, including its focus on national averages that may overlook intra-country variations and the diversity of cultural practices (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). Expanding the dataset to include a broader range of organizations could enhance the model's applicability and accuracy (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner further contribute to this discourse with their Cultural Dimensions Model, which examines how cultural differences affect business practices, decision-making, and communication (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). They identify value dilemmas that help managers navigate cultural differences effectively. However, the complexity of their model can pose challenges for practitioners, and it may underemphasize the conflicts arising from cultural differences (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). Meyer's "Culture Map" offers a more recent framework that categorizes cultural differences into eight dimensions, providing practical insights for global business communication (Meyer, 2014). Meyer distinguishes between low-context and high-context cultures, highlighting how communication styles vary significantly across cultures (Meyer, 2014). Despite the valuable insights provided by these frameworks, critiques exist regarding their potential to reinforce stereotypes and the need for continuous updates to remain relevant in a rapidly changing global landscape (Meyer, 2014). Meyer emphasizes the importance of adapting communication styles to fit cultural contexts, advocating for a flexible approach to intercultural communication (Meyer, 2014). This adaptability is crucial for successful cross-cultural interactions and collaborations, underscoring the necessity of understanding and accommodating cultural differences to enhance communication and management practices in multicultural settings (Meyer, 2014).

Employing tactical and intercultural communication in a project or the day-to-day life of a company can have the predicted outcomes of "decrease stereotyping", "increase knowledge of cultural differences", and "broaden the behavioral repertoire of the adapters." (Bennett, 2013). As well as better accomplishment of "cross-cultural projects such as transferring knowledge, conducting long-term business, or effecting change through community development projects." (Bennett, 2013).

In exploring the manifestation of culture within the globalized workplace, it becomes evident that intercultural communication is a critical component for effective interaction across diverse cultural settings. The theoretical frameworks developed by scholars such as Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Meyer have provided a comprehensive understanding of how cultural dimensions influence communication practices, particularly in business and HR management. These models offer valuable insights into navigating cultural differences, fostering more effective and harmonious workplace interactions by giving one more tool that needs to be used with a conscience.

However, while intercultural communication is essential, it represents just one aspect of managing cultural diversity in the workplace. The ability to communicate effectively across cultures must be complemented by a broader set of skills and attributes known as intercultural competence. Intercultural competence goes beyond communication, encompassing the ability to understand, appreciate, and adapt to cultural differences in a way that promotes inclusion, collaboration, and mutual respect (Deardorff, 2006).

As we transition to the next subchapter, we will delve deeper into the concept of intercultural competence, exploring its key components, the role it plays in the globalized workplace, and how organizations can cultivate this competence to enhance their overall effectiveness in managing cultural diversity. Understanding intercultural competence is crucial for building a truly inclusive work environment that not only accommodates but also celebrates cultural differences (Deardorff, 2006).

1.2.2 Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence refers to the ability to effectively navigate and interact across different cultural contexts. This competence encompasses a range of skills, attitudes, and knowledge required to communicate and engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006; Dervin & Gross, 2016; Dervin, Gajardo, & Lavanchy, 2011; Holliday, 2011, 2013; Sarmiento, 2010, 2014, 2016).

Intercultural competence has both theoretical and empirical facets, offering specific predictions of competent behavior. The model suggested by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) portrays the process of dualistic interaction needed for the growth of intercultural competence, emphasizing that effective development can only occur in an environment where both sides are motivated to share their knowledge and communicate (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). For that reason it involves understanding and respecting cultural differences while adapting one's communication style and behavior accordingly (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006). In this realm, individuals must navigate the intricate interplay among language, arts, conventions, and discourses, engaging in an ongoing process of problem-solving, anticipation, adaptation, and heightened awareness (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

The significance of effective communication and collaboration in diverse cultural settings is also highlighted, requiring individuals to possess not only linguistic skills but also the ability to interpret and navigate cultural nuances (Dervin, Gajardo, & Lavanchy, 2011). For the purposes of this work, effective communication extends beyond mere clarity, neutrality, or the initial exchange of information. It involves the ability to adapt one's communication style and behaviour to suit the specific needs of the individual or group being addressed. This adaptability is key to fostering meaningful interactions and building a foundation for future reference, this can lead to leveraging tools such as templates, guidelines, or other methods to enhance understanding and collaboration. Intercultural competence advocates for perceiving culture as a dynamic, ever-evolving process rather than a static entity (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006). This dynamic nature of intercultural competence is further emphasized through continuous learning and reflection on one's own cultural biases and assumptions (Sarmiento, 2010, 2014, 2016). Similarly, the importance of reflexivity and self-awareness in developing intercultural competence is underscored (Dervin & Gross, 2016).

These ideas contribute to a holistic understanding of intercultural competence as a multifaceted skill set that enables individuals to effectively engage with diverse cultural perspectives and navigate complex intercultural interactions. The exploration of the intercultural competence concept has highlighted its essential role in fostering effective communication and collaboration across cultural boundaries. This multifaceted skill set,

which includes empathy, cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and critical cultural awareness, is crucial for navigating the complexities of diverse cultural contexts. As the theories and models proposed by scholars suggest, intercultural competence is not merely about understanding cultural differences but also about engaging in continuous learning, reflection, and adaptation (Abdallah-Preteuille, 2006; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Intercultural competence enables individuals to move beyond static perceptions of culture, embracing it as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon (Dervin & Gross, 2016; Sarmiento, 2010, 2014, 2016). This perspective is essential in today's globalized world, where cultural interactions are increasingly complex and require a deeper level of understanding and cooperation.

As we conclude this subchapter, it becomes evident that intercultural competence is a foundational element for successful intercultural communication. However, its application extends beyond individual interactions to influence broader organisational practices and strategies. The next Chapter will delve into how intercultural competence and intercultural communication can be effectively integrated into Employer branding efforts, as well as, organisational frameworks, exploring their possible impact on team dynamics, leadership, and overall organisational success in a multicultural environment.

**CHAPTER II – EMPLOYER BRANDING AS A STRATEGIC
RETENTION TACTIC: THE INTERPLAY OF CORPORATE CULTURE
AND EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION**

2 Employer Branding as a Strategic Retention Tactic

The working context has significantly evolved due to various factors such as shifts in societal values, globalization of the workplace, and demographic changes like the retirement of a large proportion of baby boomers, leading to a decrease in the pool of qualified workforce (Reitman, 2007) and a lot more.

In her book “Talent Retention,” Reitman (2007) argues that a 'conflict in values' is the primary reason for job changes, as indicated by most retention studies conducted up until 2007, rather than the traditionally assumed reasons such as money and benefits. (Reitman, 2007). Another interesting point she makes in this book is the definition of the distinctive of the company work culture which she identifies as the most relevant for the permanence of employees: a work environment that is optimistic and forward-thinking, where shared values and ethics promote positivity, trust, and unity among team members, as well as a space that prioritizes fair and respectful treatment for all, and openly share information, whether it's positive or negative (Reitman, 2007).

Is worth mentioning the differences between the academic conceptualization of corporate culture and organisational culture, as they are going to be used through this academic paper.

Corporate culture, as conceptualized by scholars, encompasses the collective mindset, values, and behavioral norms that shape the organisational identity and guide the conduct of its members (Schein, 2010; Cameron & Quinn, 2011). It reflects the organization's history, leadership style, and underlying assumptions, influencing how employees interact, make decisions, and approach their work (Martin, 2002; Alvesson, 2012). Understanding corporate culture is essential for leaders and managers, as it impacts employee engagement, organisational performance, and the ability to adapt to change effectively (Schein, 2010).

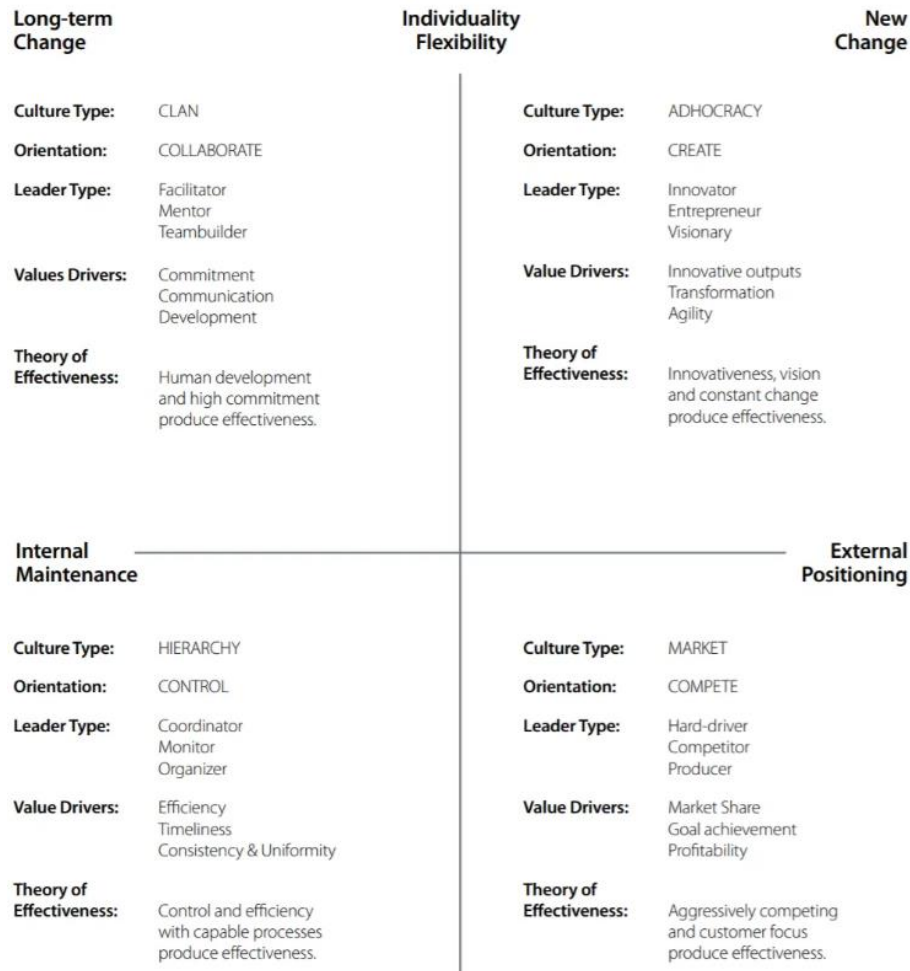
The concept of context of organisational culture can vary depending on the perspective assumed for we are going to look at it as “generally described as a set of norms, beliefs, principles and ways of behaving that together give each organization a distinctive character” (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000, p. 93) as well as adding that it involves

shared basic assumptions acquired by a group as it addresses external challenges and internal integration, subsequently transmitting these learned perspectives to new members (Schein, 2010). Strategically speaking the decisions surrounding keeping or changing the organisational culture needs to take into consideration the size of impact: organization-wide, focused on identified sub-cultures or directed at small groups formed for specific projects (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000). This consideration becomes particularly relevant when examining how organisational cultures may vary across different countries, as branches in distinct locations may exhibit unique cultural nuances due to contexts. When addressing the management of organisational culture, the initial step involves thoroughly identifying the characteristics of the current culture, which form the foundation of the culture itself (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000).

As mentioned above organisational culture can vary widely among companies, and scholars have identified various typologies to describe different organisational cultures. One commonly used framework to classify organisational cultures is the Competing Values Framework developed by Robert E. Quinn and John R. Rohrbaugh (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). This model suggests four major types of organisational culture based on two dimensions: flexibility versus control and internal versus external focus (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The following figure describes the concept in more detail:

Figure 1

Competing Values Framework



Note. Competing Values Framework model Source: The CFG Group. (n.d.). *The Competing Values Framework: Culture Contract* Image. In *The Competing Values Framework: Culture Contract*. Retrieved from <https://orghacking.com/the-competing-values-framework-culture-contract-quinn-nobl-7d1471c2cbe9>

While both terms refer to the culture within an organisation, as referenced in the conceptualisation above "corporate culture" specifically emphasizes the culture within a single corporation, while "organisational culture" has a broader scope and can refer to the culture within any type of organization.

Continuing from the insights referenced above about corporate culture Reitman mentions the existence of a connection between the inconsistency between the values of the working body and the organization and the consequent lack of motivation and

commitment of that same working body. We can infer that this inconsistency does not only affect the retention but also the productivity of the employees, giving it another monetary reason for the corporate world to change its ways. The concept aligns with the earlier idea proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996) regarding the link between the quality of employees and the quality of the products or services provided, updated to a more globalized and modern context (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Figure 2

The link between quality of employees and quality of product/service



Note. The first circle infographic represents the original “Link between quality of employees and quality of product/service” from Amber and Barrow, the second circle infographic represents my updated version to a more globalized and modern context. Own elaboration.

Nonetheless, the contemporary interpretation shifts to a focus on attracting top talent and how that talent contributes to workplace results. This updated perspective suggests that fostering a positive corporate culture and aligning values can lead to better employee performance, which, in turn, enhances the overall quality of the organisation’s offerings. The sequence can be summarized as follows: by cultivating a top workplace, organizations attract the best applicants, resulting in superior outcomes and a strong employer brand. This holds true today due to several contemporary workforce trends and organizational priorities, including shifting employee expectations, the use of employer branding as a competitive advantage, the link between engagement and performance, generational changes in the workforce, and the increasing emphasis on globalization and

diversity (Mosley & Schmidt, 2017; Reitman, 2007; Gourani, 2019; Silva & Dias, 2020). These aspects will be explored in greater depth as the chapter unfolds.

2.1 Corporate Culture's Role in Attraction and Retention

In their book 'Employer Branding for Dummies,' Richard Mosley and Lars Schmidt highlight how 'more progressive companies realize there are more efficient and effective ways to attract and retain talent' (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017).

Numerous companies have come to acknowledge the critical importance of acquiring and retaining employees with the same level of dedication as they do with clients, recognizing it as vital for long-term survival (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017). The costs associated with employee turnover, both hard and soft, are often significantly underestimated.

Consider, for instance, the implications of employee turnover on meeting deadlines, resulting in potential monetary losses amounting to six figures up. Additionally, there's the risk of eroding client trust, which could tarnish the company's professional image. This is just to touch the surface. Subsequently, today many companies are adopting a client-centric approach towards their employees. They understand the value of employee branding strategies, which require both “rigour and creativity,” similar to those employed to maintain client relationships (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017).

But what actually is employer Branding, Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow are the first ones to mention in their article “The Employer Brand” in 1996 that this concept, in the eyes of the theoretical it, can be seen as one “conceptual framework” that brings the “disciplines of human resources (HR) and brand marketing into” one (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 185).

At this point in 1996, Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow already made the theoretical connection between “Strong corporate equity with the brand's customers can improve the return on HR, while at the same time, improved HR can improve the return on brand equity from external customers.”, (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 188) the statement emphasizes the interconnectedness between a company's internal operations (HR) and its external brand perception. By investing in one aspect, the company can positively impact the other,

resulting in improved performance and returns overall (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 188). Some might argue that, at the time, the corporate environment didn't face significant challenges in employee retention or HR issues substantial enough to warrant a change in corporate priorities. This could explain the delay in companies adopting new practices.

When we now look at this concept in the direct light of business in the 21st-century context:

Employer branding is the process of creating a distinctively great place to work and then promoting it to the talent whose knowledge and skills are needed by the organization to meet its business goals and objectives[...] developing the kind of positive reputation that will help attract talented individuals when and where they're needed (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017, p. 13).

The key in business, when presenting a new strategy that entails the investment of resources such as time and money, is simplicity: you just need to showcase the potential gains (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017). As previously mentioned, retention has emerged as a "new corporate challenge" in this working age, and it presents a substantial financial burden for companies. This financial pressure prompts them to be receptive to solutions such as those offered by employer branding strategies (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017).

The main areas the strategies employee branding might affect are Engagement, Retention and Competitive advantage (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017). Employer branding can be divided into two main moments of strategy planning and action "Make your organization a distinctively great place to work" and "Make sure the right talent knows how great you are" (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017). When we look into the first main moment, we can also characterize it as the company's corporate culture or organisational culture which Reitman mentions, needs to be according to the employee's values for maximum potential gains (Reitman, 2007).

Corporate culture is a multifaceted construct that embodies the collective mindset, values, and behavioral norms within an organization, which play a critical role in shaping its identity and guiding the behavior of its members (Denison, 1996; Schein, 2010). It is influenced by various factors, such as leadership styles, organisational history, and the shared assumptions held by employees (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Cameron & Quinn, 2011). These elements collectively inform how employees interact with one another, make

decisions, and approach their work, ultimately impacting the overall functioning and success of the organization (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

Leadership style plays a crucial role in shaping corporate culture and, consequently, organisational performance. For instance, transformational leadership has been shown to motivate employees by aligning their personal interests with organisational goals, thereby enhancing overall corporate performance (Deng, 2023). This alignment is essential as it fosters a culture where employees feel valued and engaged, which is critical for maintaining high levels of organisational commitment and performance (Abdi *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the relationship between leadership style and corporate culture is reciprocal; effective leadership can cultivate a positive corporate culture that, in turn, reinforces the leadership's effectiveness (Xue, 2019). In addition, Akinteye, Ochei, and Itoe (2023) examined retention factors from a governance perspective in their study, *Corporate Governance and Employee Retention in Multinational Enterprises in Nigeria: Exploring the Role of Board Diversity and Incentive Mechanisms*. Their research highlights how transparent communication, ethical leadership, and other governance-related elements foster employee commitment. Together, these findings suggest that while corporate culture is indeed critical, it functions within a broader ecosystem of organisational strategies, from governance to branding, all of which contribute to employee retention (Akinteye *et al.*, 2023).

The concept of organisational identity is also integral to understanding corporate culture. Organisational identity serves as a framework within which employees interpret their roles and the organization's mission. It influences how employees perceive their contributions and the organization's values, which can significantly affect their engagement and performance (Tyworth, 2014). The shared understanding of organisational identity among members fosters a sense of belonging and commitment, which is vital for organisational cohesion and adaptability in the face of change (Arbabisarjou *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, the interplay between corporate culture and employee performance is well-documented. Research indicates that a strong organisational culture positively correlates with job performance, particularly among knowledge workers, where organisational identity and work values mediate this relationship (Miao *et al.*, 2022). This suggests that when employees identify with the

organisational culture, they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of performance and commitment. In summary, corporate culture is a critical determinant of organisational identity and performance. It is shaped by leadership styles and the collective values of its members, influencing how employees interact and perform. Understanding these dynamics is essential for leaders and managers aiming to enhance employee engagement and organisational effectiveness.

Understanding corporate culture is essential for leaders and managers, as it impacts employee engagement, organisational performance, and the ability to adapt to change effectively.

2.2 Linking Employer Branding, Satisfaction, and Retention

Employer branding has emerged as a critical strategy for organizations seeking to attract and retain talent in a competitive labour market. The relationship between employer branding, employee satisfaction, and retention is multifaceted, with strong implications for organisational success. This chapter explores how effective employer branding can enhance employee satisfaction and, consequently, improve retention rates.

Research indicates that organizations with a well-defined employer brand are more successful in attracting and retaining talent. Employees who perceive their organization positively are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement and commitment, which are critical factors in retention (Matongolo *et al.*, 2018). Employee satisfaction is closely linked to employer branding. When organizations effectively communicate their values and benefits, employees are more likely to feel aligned with the organization's mission and culture. This alignment fosters a sense of belonging and satisfaction among employees (Bagheri *et al.*, 2022). For instance, a study by Bagheri emphasizes that a positive employer brand significantly influences employee loyalty, reinforcing the idea that satisfied employees are more likely to remain with their organization (Bagheri *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, organizations that invest in their employer brand and prioritize employee satisfaction experience lower turnover intentions among their workforce (Matongolo *et al.*, 2018).

Employee satisfaction serves as a mediator in the relationship between employer branding and retention. Satisfied employees are less likely to seek employment elsewhere, thereby reducing turnover rates (Shrestha & Prajapati, 2024). Research has shown that organizations that invest in their employer brand and prioritize employee satisfaction experience lower turnover intentions among their workforce (Matongolo *et al.*, 2018). For example, found that employer branding HR practices, such as competitive financial and non-financial rewards, are directly related to talent retention (Matongolo *et al.*, 2018). This suggests that organizations should prioritize their employer branding efforts to enhance employee satisfaction.

The relationship between employer branding, employee satisfaction, and retention is critical for organisational success. A strong employer brand enhances employee satisfaction, which in turn leads to improved retention rates. Organisations that prioritize their employer branding efforts and focus on creating a positive work environment are more likely to attract and retain top talent (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Future research should continue exploring this relationship's nuances to provide deeper insights into effective employer branding strategies.

2.3 The Role of Intercultural Studies

In today's globalized workforce, organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of intercultural studies in shaping their employer branding strategies. Intercultural competence not only enhances communication and collaboration among diverse teams but also plays a crucial role in improving employee satisfaction and retention. This chapter explores how intercultural studies can enrich employer branding strategies, ultimately leading to a more engaged and satisfied workforce.

How can we relate all of these different concepts with the concepts or findings derived from Intercultural Studies, well we already identified a “new player”, a conflict in values between the employees and the company (Reitman, 2007).

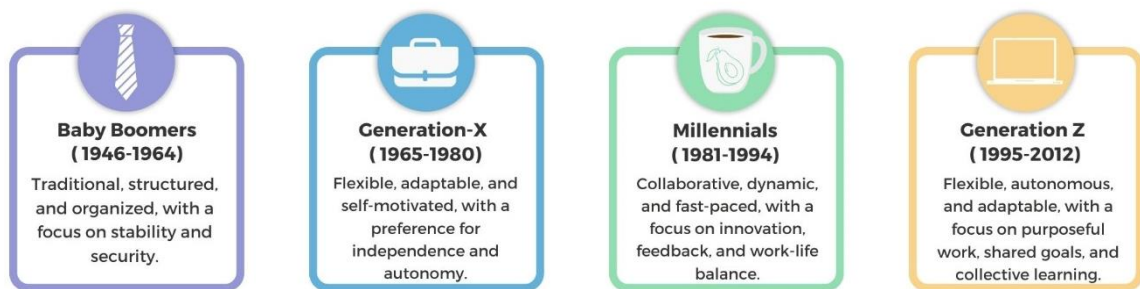
The focal point of the employer branding strategy is creating the image and environment of a great workplace (Mosley & Lars Schmidt, 2017). How do we know what

this image looks like to our target audience? This is where Intercultural Studies theories and concepts can help us out. The false idea that interculturalism is only civilizational or cultural can harm the efficiency of this image creation. Intercultural studies highlight the importance of understanding generational differences as a key aspect of interculturalism, which extends beyond civilizational contexts.

For instance, distinct generational values shape workplace dynamics: Baby Boomers often prioritize stability and tradition, Generation X values independence and flexibility, Millennials seek social responsibility and feedback, while Generation Z embraces technology and entrepreneurship. An example of this generational shift can be seen in the workplace preferences of Millennials, who often favor collaborative environments and flexible work arrangements, contrasting sharply with Baby Boomers, who typically value structured work settings (Gourani, 2019). These differences illustrate how cultural norms evolve, influenced by socioeconomic conditions and technological advancements.

Figure 3

The working Generations



Note. Description of each generation's working style

The impact of these generational differences in intercultural situations is significant. Effective intercultural communication can lead to improved collaboration and problem-solving among diverse teams (Hassan *et al.*, 2020). Conversely, misunderstandings arising from generational gaps can result in conflict and reduced productivity, (Gourani, 2019; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). The categorization of generations should not be seen as a rigid division of people, but rather as an understanding that

different lived experiences give rise to varying needs, perspectives, and challenges. The labels we assign to generations are reflective of historical contexts, and they should be used as tools for understanding rather than labelling individuals. For example, younger generations may utilize digital communication tools that older generations find challenging, leading to potential miscommunication. Furthermore, intergenerational solidarity plays a crucial role in these interactions. emphasizes the importance of reciprocity in cultural exchanges, while discussing how intergenerational learning fosters cultural understanding and appreciation, enriching societal interactions.

We cannot forget that the corporate or startup working settings are cross-generation partnership environments where the minority millennials and Gen-Z will eventually become the majority. Because of the environment they group up in of instability especially Gen Z (financial crisis of 2008) they are not afraid to be vocal and demand what they need from the company and moving on when their needs are not met (Gourani, 2019).

As mentioned by Gourani:

Due to each generation having different viewpoints and expectations for their work, learning and knowledge sharing, not to mention the culture in their workplace, it can pose a challenge for managers and HR departments who are tasked with attracting, leading, motivating and retaining new generations (Gourani, 2019).

Viewing a corporate environment as a "mini-society" allows us to appreciate its dynamic nature, characterized by constant flux and evolution, similar to the complexities found within broader societal structures (Cordes *et al.*, 2014).

The literature review not only underscores the multifaceted nature of employee retention but also highlights how various organisational practices interconnect to influence retention outcomes. Consistent with previous studies, Silva and Dias (2020) found that employer social representation plays a pivotal role in enhancing applicant motivation, particularly among millennials. This demonstrates that branding—through its reflection of corporate values and social standing—substantially shapes job seekers' perceptions of corporate culture and significantly impacts their employment decisions (Silva & Dias, 2020). Furthermore, research as established a clear link between

organisational culture and job satisfaction, affirming that a positive workplace environment enhances employee contentment and retention (McCarthy, 2023).

Intercultural studies can significantly enhance employer branding strategy planning through several key areas: enhancing diversity and inclusion, developing cultural competence and cross-cultural skills, enhancing employee satisfaction, and ensuring brand authenticity.

- Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion

As the corporate landscape evolves, companies increasingly seek diverse talent, often transcending ethnic and cultural boundaries. However, it is essential to understand that "increasing diversity does not, by itself, increase effectiveness; what matters is how an organization harnesses diversity and whether it is willing to reshape its power structure" (Thomas & Ely, 1996, p. 80). Focusing solely on the economic benefits of diversity can lead to unintended consequences, such as alienating underrepresented groups and undermining support for diversity initiatives (Ely & Thomas, 2020). The successful implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives requires more than just increasing representation. It involves creating an environment where all employees feel valued and respected, which enhances the employer's reputation and attracts top talent from diverse cultural backgrounds. This aligns with Kanter's (1993) theory of leadership, which suggests that empowerment in the workplace depends on access to information, resources, support, and opportunities for learning and development (Kanter, 1993). Ely and Thomas (2020) further emphasize that the relationship between diversity and organisational effectiveness is complex and nuanced. Their "Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm" highlights the importance of leveraging diversity to enhance organisational outcomes by valuing diverse perspectives and fostering a culture of continuous learning. This paradigm advocates for building trust, actively combating discrimination, and embracing diverse styles and voices. By using cultural differences as resources for learning and innovation, companies can drive organisational success. Organizations that adopt this approach encourage employees to draw on their unique backgrounds and experiences to enhance creativity and problem-solving, ultimately improving overall effectiveness (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

- Cultural Competence and Cross-Cultural Skills

To ensure that employer branding initiatives resonate with diverse audiences, organizations should involve individuals proficient in cultural competence and cross-cultural skills in the planning process. This ensures that initiatives align with organisational values and contribute positively to the employer brand image (Leung *et al.*, 2005; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). Historically, companies focused on cultivating cultural competence among top executives; however, in today's global marketplace, all employees should be encouraged to develop these skills to optimize their work and mitigate cultural-related challenges (Leung *et al.*, 2005).

Research by Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley (1999) highlights the importance of cultural competence and cross-cultural skills in the context of expatriate adjustment, which can be extrapolated to the broader multicultural workplace. Factors such as organisational support and non-work factors are critical in enhancing workplace integration. Specifically, logistical and coworker support are significant predictors of successful adjustment, indicating that companies should nurture a supportive organisational culture both domestically and internationally (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999).

To integrate this knowledge into employer branding, organizations can establish dedicated home-office support teams comprised of culturally competent employees who can mentor newcomers (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). For foreign employees relocating due to company initiatives, providing “employment assistance, such as help with work visas” and “subsidized career development activities,” is crucial for their initial integration (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999).

Intercultural studies provide valuable insights into the cultural dynamics that influence employee behavior and attitudes. Understanding these dynamics allows organizations to tailor their employer branding strategies to resonate with employees from various cultural backgrounds. For instance, research has shown that organizations that promote cultural awareness and sensitivity are more successful in fostering positive employee attitudes and behaviors, such as organisational citizenship behavior (OCB)

(Earley & Calic, 2018). Moreover, intercultural competence can enhance the effectiveness of internal communication strategies, which are vital for maintaining employee satisfaction.

- Enhancing Employee Satisfaction

Effective communication across cultural boundaries helps to mitigate misunderstandings and conflicts, thereby creating a more harmonious work environment (Rozkwitalska, 2017). This, in turn, contributes to higher levels of employee engagement and satisfaction, as employees feel more connected to their organization and its values (Collar Search, 2023).

Furthermore, intercultural competence enhances the effectiveness of internal communication strategies, which are vital for maintaining employee satisfaction. Effective communication across cultural boundaries helps mitigate misunderstandings and conflicts, thereby creating a more harmonious work environment (Rozkwitalska, 2017). This, in turn, contributes to higher levels of employee engagement and satisfaction, as employees feel more connected to their organization and its values. Moreover, workplace events can significantly influence employee creativity and engagement (Chen *et al.*, 2020). Having a dedicated calendar for such events can enhance employee satisfaction, as it provides structured opportunities for engagement and connection among employees. Research indicates that culturally tailored initiatives can lead to improved community engagement and social connectedness, as they foster inclusivity and participation from diverse employee groups (Wilson *et al.*, 2013). Involving community input in program development enhances the integration of initiatives into established community structures, making them more effective and sustainable. employees can act as cultural brokers, facilitating communication and understanding between different cultural groups within the company, which is crucial for fostering an inclusive workplace environment (Ricks & Harrison, 2011). Additionally, the design and implementation of enjoyable activities in the workplace should align with employees' needs and interests to maximize their benefits, enhancing employee engagement and reducing turnover (Tews *et al.*, 2014). Enjoyable activities positively influence job satisfaction and trust in management, suggesting that the nature of the activities can significantly affect employee

perceptions and engagement levels (Chan & Mak, 2016). Research indicates that recognition programs can effectively mitigate feelings of workplace exclusion and enhance employee engagement, which are critical factors in retaining talent (Ertop & Erdođan, 2023). Employees are more likely to remain with organizations that demonstrate a commitment to social causes, as this reflects shared values and enhances the overall workplace environment (Lee & Jeung, 2018).

I recommend that all companies implement a fun activities calendar tailored to their specific needs. Access to enjoyable activities in the workplace—such as ping pong tables, games, and pleasant outdoor spaces for relaxation—can significantly enhance employee morale. Additionally, recognition programs and corporate social responsibility initiatives, such as food bank drives, can foster a sense of community and engagement among employees. While this is possible and beneficial, it is important for companies to implement policies in a manner consistent with their specific goals, employee preferences, and financial considerations. Adapting functions to suit different units or departments can also help increase their effectiveness.

- Brand Authenticity

Employer branding involves creating a brand that reflects how a company operates and the benefits it offers to employees. According to Barrow and Ambler (2011), authenticity is a crucial aspect of employer branding, as it fosters trust and credibility with both potential and current employees (Amber & Barrow, 2011). Research by Piórkowska and Ingram (2019) indicates that authenticity in employer branding positively correlates with employee-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Piórkowska & Ingram, 2019).

Houston, Gwinner, and Michael (2012) propose a framework for measuring brand authenticity that includes dimensions such as heritage, sincerity, commitment, and consistency (Houston et al., 2012). Walter, Blut, and Schultz (2016) argue that transparency is essential for creating brand authenticity, as it allows stakeholders to verify the brand's claims and actions emphasizes the need for brands to identify and communicate their values authentically to build trust and loyalty (Walter *et al.*, 2016).

Insights from intercultural studies can enhance brand authenticity by providing a deeper understanding of how different cultures perceive and value authenticity. Culture significantly shapes consumer perceptions of brand authenticity. For example, collectivist cultures place greater emphasis on social responsibility and community involvement, while individualistic cultures value self-expression and uniqueness. These findings suggest that brands must consider cultural differences, in the administration world that would be the location of the Hub or subsidiary company, when developing their authenticity strategies (Kitirattarkarn, Araujo, & Neijens, 2019).

In the context of employer branding, insights from intercultural studies can help companies create more effective strategies for attracting and retaining talent from diverse backgrounds. Doherty and Dickmann (2014) emphasize that understanding the cultural values and expectations of different employee groups is essential for fostering an inclusive and authentic workplace culture that promotes engagement and loyalty (Doherty & Dickmann, 2014)

Overall, incorporating insights from intercultural studies into brand authenticity and employer branding strategies can enhance the planning and maintenance of these initiatives by creating more relevant and effective messaging that resonates with diverse audiences. By acknowledging cultural differences, brands can forge authentic and meaningful connections with their target audience, leading to increased loyalty and engagement, ultimately benefiting both employees and employers.

Intercultural studies play a vital role in enhancing employer branding strategies, particularly in relation to employee satisfaction. By fostering intercultural competence and promoting an inclusive work environment, organizations can improve employee engagement and retention. As workplaces become increasingly diverse, the integration of intercultural insights into employer branding strategies will be essential for organizations seeking to attract and retain top talent. Future research should continue to explore the specific mechanisms through which intercultural studies influence employer branding and employee satisfaction.

While some of these measures may not be explicitly recognized as rooted in intercultural studies, several companies are already embracing these principles to cultivate a more effective and harmonious work environment. For instance, VML Enterprise Solutions has implemented measures that align with the suggestions outlined above, demonstrating the practical application of these principles in a real-world context. In the next chapter, we will further explore who they are and what they are doing in this area to improve employee retention and satisfaction.

**CHAPTER III – VML AND VML ENTERPRISE
SOLUTIONS CASE STUDY**

3 VML and VML Enterprise Solutions Case Study

In the rapidly evolving landscape of marketing and technology, organizations are increasingly challenged to adapt to the dynamic interplay of consumer expectations, technological advancements, and competitive pressures. This chapter delves into the corporate profile of VML and its subsidiary, VML Enterprise Solutions, elucidating their strategic positioning, corporate culture that collectively underpin their market differentiation. VML, a prominent entity within the WPP Agency network, has emerged as a transformative force following the merger of VMLY&R and Wunderman Thompson. This amalgamation has not only expanded its operational capabilities but has also catalyzed a reimagining of its role as a growth partner that integrates creative agency functions with consultancy and technological innovation.

In its essence VML is a global marketing and communications company that stands out for its ability to offer a full package, including Brand Experience, Customer Experience, and Commerce, helping brands grow by creating engaging experiences, enhancing customer interactions, and developing e-commerce strategies to drive business success (VML, n.d.-a). For example, VML worked on the UEFA EURO 2024 branding, designing the tournament's logo and creating a brand film that captured the spirit of the event and its host cities, further showcasing their expertise in brand and customer experience (VMLY&R & Giant Ant, 2024)

The subsequent section on VML Enterprise Solutions highlights the consolidation of technology and data entities within VML, showcasing how this division is strategically positioned to address complex business challenges through a comprehensive suite of services. With a workforce of over 7,000 professionals, VML Enterprise Solutions is equipped to meet the burgeoning demand for technology-driven transformations and artificial intelligence applications. Furthermore, this chapter will examine the corporate culture of VML, emphasizing its foundational values of connectivity, creativity, inclusivity, and positivity. These values are not merely aspirational; they are embedded in the organization's mission and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, which collectively foster an environment conducive to innovation and collaboration.

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of VML and VML Enterprise Solutions, elucidating their corporate profiles and cultural values. By examining these dimensions, we can gain insights into how VML positions itself as a leader in the marketing and technology sectors, while simultaneously fostering a culture of inclusivity and innovation that resonates with its diverse clientele and the broader community.

3.1 Company Overview

3.1.1 VML

Following the merger of VMLY&R and Wunderman Thompson, VML has embarked upon a transformative journey as a growth partner, seamlessly integrating the roles of creative agency, consultancy, and technological powerhouse (VML, n.d.-a).

In the realm of contemporary corporate enterprises, VML stands as an emblem of innovation and advancement. Rooted in a collective heritage boasting over 300 years of combined experience and expertise, the organization represents the fusion of creativity and technological prowess, eliciting inspiration from a medley of diverse perspectives. The organization's proficiency extends across the entirety of the customer journey, encompassing domains such as communications, commerce, consultancy, CRM, CX, data, production, and technology. VML crafts holistic solutions that redefine conventional paradigms within the industry (VML, n.d.-a).

With a global footprint spanning more than 150 offices across 60-plus markets and a workforce exceeding 30,000 individuals, VML cultivates a culture characterized by connectivity, inclusivity, and the celebration of diversity (VML, n.d.-a).

At the core of VML lie its people – visionaries, trailblazers, and problem-solvers who orchestrate meaningful engagements with consumers and customers, leaving an indelible mark on every interaction (VML, n.d.-a). The organization remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering an inclusive work environment conducive to growth and fulfilment. Through initiatives focused on Inclusion, Equity & Belonging, complemented

by the philanthropic endeavors of the VML Foundation, VML actions to effect positive change within its communities and beyond (VML, n.d.-a).

VML is under the stewardship of Jon Cook, who serves as Global CEO, and Mel Edwards, occupying the position of Global President. Both Jon Cook and Mel Edwards previously held leadership roles at VMLY&R and Wunderman Thompson before the amalgamation (VML, n.d.-a). In addition to Jon and Mel, the global network is overseen by two other professionals: Debbi Vandeven, assuming the role of Global Chief Creative Officer, and Eric Campbell, taking on the position of Global Chief Client Officer. Further announcements regarding leadership appointments across pivotal practices and capabilities are anticipated in 2024 (VML, n.d.-a). Regional CEO leadership is instrumental in actualizing the organization's “positioning and key practices, including brand experience, customer experience, and commerce, within their respective markets” (VML, n.d.-a). In their capacity this leaders, are tasked with fostering connectivity across local markets, facilitating seamless integration of capabilities, clients, and cultural nuances (VML, n.d.-a).

3.1.2 VML Enterprise Solutions

VML Enterprise Solutions (old Wunderman Thompson Commerce and Technology) consolidates all technology and data entities within the organization VML into a unified operational unit, geared towards addressing intricate business challenges through the combined consulting, data analytics, technological, and innovative capabilities of the agency (VML, n.d.-c).

From the more than 30,000 individuals that compose VML more than 7,000 individuals belong to VML Enterprise Solutions, with positions such as “Technologists, Developers, Architects, Systems engineers, Analysts, Consultants, Data scientists, Testers, Coaches, and Product managers”, stationed across 25 global Hubs in local markets worldwide. VML's Enterprise Solutions division is primed to meet the expanding market demand for AI applications, technology-driven transformations, and operational streamlining facilitated by robust technological solutions (VML, n.d.-c).

Aligned with “VML's core practices of Brand Experience, Commerce, and Customer Experience,” VML Enterprise Solutions seamlessly integrates extensive technological service offerings. Moreover, it extends direct client engagement, boasting unparalleled global consulting prowess, engineering expertise, data analytics proficiency, scaled automation capabilities, and platform delivery excellence (VML, n.d.-c). This comprehensive solution suite encompasses VML's platform service brands, including MAP, Diff, and Satalia, the latter being a prominent AI entity acquired by WPP in 2021 (VML, n.d.-c). Furthermore, the division leverages longstanding global partnerships with industry giants such as Adobe, Salesforce, Google, Microsoft, Braze, and the MACH Alliance, among others, further fortifying its position as a leader in the technological landscape (VML, n.d.-c)

3.1.3 Corporate Logo

In today's competitive marketplace, visual branding plays a crucial role in establishing a company's identity and connection with its audience. VML recognizes the significance of a modern, minimalistic aesthetic, aligning with the trends embraced by many contemporary brands. At the heart of VML's identity is a striking snowflake logo, symbolizing the uniqueness of each individual—just as no two snowflakes are alike, VML celebrates the distinctiveness of its clients and employees.

Figure 5

VML Logo - stylized snowflake



Note. Source: (VML, n.d.-c)

Figure 4

VML Logo - standalone snowflake



Note. Source: (VML, n.d.-c)

This approach not only enhances brand recognition but also offers clients the flexibility of colour personalization, allowing for unique adaptations that reflect their branding needs. To further amplify their presence, VML employs vibrant colours that make a striking impact. With two distinct logo options available—a combination of the VML name and a stylized snowflake, as well as a standalone snowflake—VML is strategically positioning itself post-merger. Emphasizing the primary logo with the name serves to reinforce the refreshed brand identity, guiding employees in their representation of the company’s evolving image (VML, n.d.-c).

3.2 Corporate Culture Analyses

VML Enterprise Solutions, a global marketing and technology agency, exemplifies a corporate culture that emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and inclusivity. This analysis will explore the key dimensions of VML's corporate culture, drawing from their Key values and Corporate social Responsibility as well as on relevant literature to contextualize its practices and their impact on organisational performance.

3.2.1 Key Values

In the contemporary business landscape, corporate culture plays a pivotal role in shaping an organization's identity and operational effectiveness (Uche & Akanazu, 2017). VML Enterprise Solutions exemplifies this through its commitment to four key values: connecting meaningfully, inspiring creatively, including purposefully, and approaching positively. These values are not merely aspirational; they are integral to VML's mission statement and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, which collectively foster a culture of inclusivity and innovation (VML, n.d.-b).

We **connect meaningfully** through accessibility, striving to move beyond compliance to commitments. VML was the first agency to develop an Inclusion Experience Consultancy, and we continue to elevate narratives through bold inclusion inspiring action (VML, n.d.-b).

At VML, the value of connecting meaningfully is rooted in the belief that authentic relationships are essential for organisational success. This commitment extends beyond compliance with accessibility standards, VML aims to create an environment that genuinely welcomes all individuals. The establishment of the Inclusion Experience

Consultancy underscores VML's proactive approach to fostering inclusivity, allowing the agency to elevate narratives and inspire action through bold inclusion.

We **inspire creatively** through designing the website among other experiences with accessibility that welcomes, is innovative, and inspiring (VML, n.d.-b).

Creativity is a cornerstone of VML's corporate culture. The agency inspires creatively by designing experiences that are not only innovative but also accessible. This commitment to inclusivity in digital experiences ensures that all users can engage with VML's content seamlessly. By fostering a culture of creativity, VML empowers its teams to think outside the box and develop solutions that resonate with diverse audiences.

We **include purposefully** through co-creation among disabled communities, allies, advocates and others to continually improve accessibility of VML experiences. If, for whatever reason, there are any accessibility issues or challenges, questions, or comments, we encourage feedback (VML, n.d.-b).

Inclusion is a continuous journey at VML, characterized by purposeful engagement with disabled communities, allies, and advocates. This collaborative approach allows VML to gather valuable insights and feedback, which are essential for improving the accessibility of its experiences. Actively encouraging feedback regarding any accessibility issues demonstrates VML's commitment to listening and adapting. This aligns with the notion that collective problem-solving can propel organizations forward (Raj et al., 2020).

We **approach positively** in developing solutions where there are problems. Websites are always evolving, and through proactive actions, regular and ongoing audits and accessibility reporting we plan for and resolve issues on a regular basis (VML, n.d.-b).

At VML, challenges are approached with a positive mindset. The organization recognizes that problems present opportunities for growth and innovation. A proactive approach involving regular audits and accessibility reporting allows VML to identify and resolve issues promptly. By fostering a culture that embraces problem-solving, VML ensures that its websites and services continuously evolve to meet user needs.

VML's Key values reflect a great commitment to accessibility and inclusion, demonstrating a proactive and innovative approach. By connecting meaningfully, inspiring creatively, including purposefully, and approaching positively, the company not only aims to create accessible experiences but also to foster an inclusive culture that encourages continuous improvement and innovation inside out.

3.2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

VML Enterprise Solutions adopts a community-centric approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), emphasizing its active presence and engagement in the world. This approach manifests in various forms, including monetary support and skill development for local charities and non-profits, providing pro bono services, and engaging in volunteer activities.

One notable initiative this year was Project Shoebox, launched in Poland in celebration of Women's History Month and International Women's Day. This charity project, founded by Kate Kenyon in 2017, was inspired by her discovery of unused cosmetics in her bathroom—leftovers from multi-packs and unwanted gifts—that fit neatly into three shoeboxes. The Poland office embraced this cause, which quickly gained traction and spread to other European offices, including Hungary, Portugal, and the UK. The social media movement surrounding this initiative also attracted support from partner brands (VML, n.d.-d).

With the increase in contributions, the need for a dedicated website became apparent to connect with the audience, volunteers, and facilitate donations. VML leveraged its expertise to create and manage the website during this year's campaign, resulting in a remarkable 60% increase in the number of partners and over 50% more collected boxes. This initiative exemplifies VML's commitment to inclusivity and highlights the importance of supporting one another (VML, n.d.-d).

Sustainability and environmental responsibility are also integral to VML's CSR efforts. The development of a policy aimed at reducing environmental impact was a logical step aligned with the company's values. Additionally, VML introduced a "Sustainable Commerce Practice" in partnership with the climate tech company Vaayu.

This initiative emerged as a response to the global crisis highlighted at the COP26 event and aims to provide resources for retailers and brands to measure and meet their environmental commitments. The automated system and CO2 calculator enable real-time

Consulting	Design	Operations	Technology
Why and how should clients improve their sustainability credentials in commerce?	How can clients leverage design to deliver better sustainability outcomes in commerce?	What opportunities do clients have to optimise last mile delivery and returns to reduce its carbon footprint?	How can clients incentivise sustainable choices from its customers throughout the shopper experience/journey?

tracking and reduction of emissions (Zhang, 2023; VML, n.d.-e).

VML offers comprehensive support, including consultancy, design, operations, and technology services, to help clients measure and reduce the carbon footprint of their digital commerce.

Figure7

VML services related to Sustainable Commerce Practices

Note. Small explanation of the services VML offers related to sustainable practices, Source: (VML, n.d.-e)

By developing these solutions, VML holds companies accountable for tracking their emissions in real-time, thereby promoting a culture of environmental responsibility and transparency. As VML states, “Our goal is to create a culture of social responsibility that extends to our clients, partners, and communities, and to always strive to make a positive impact.” (VML,n.d.).

It is also noteworthy that many of the campaigns VML engages in align with these specific values. Assessing corporate culture through awards like “The ACT Good Report” helps evaluate the impact and dedication of companies to their causes. The ACT Good Report highlights the world’s most impactful use of creative communications to promote sustainability and social responsibility, raising awareness of significant social and environmental issues (ACT Responsible, n.d.).

Being placed 8th in the Networks category of the ACT Good Report signifies that VML is recognized as a leading entity in promoting impactful creative communications

for sustainability and social responsibility. This ranking underscore the network's excellence in producing campaigns that raise awareness of significant social and environmental issues, demonstrating a strong commitment to making a positive impact through creative work (ACT Responsible, n.d.). Among the Best 40 Campaigns promoting good, the "Killer Pack" campaign from India captured 30th place, winning multiple awards across various categories, including health and sustainability, such as the 2022 CANNES LIONS Health & Wellness Grand Prix and the 2023 ADFEST Design: Innovative & Sustainable Design Silver (VML, n.d.-f).

VML Enterprise Solutions exemplifies a corporate culture that prioritizes high performance, collaboration, open dialogue, diversity of thought, and inclusivity. These values are not only integral to the company's mission statement but also reflect its commitment to corporate social responsibility. Through initiatives like Project Shoebox and its Sustainable Commerce Practice, VML demonstrates a proactive approach to accessibility and environmental responsibility. As VML continues to evolve, its dedication to these principles will play a crucial role in shaping its identity and fostering a more inclusive environment for all (VML, n.d.-f). With this foundational understanding of VML Enterprise Solutions and its corporate culture, we now turn our attention to the internship report detailing my experiences at the Portuguese Hubs.

This next section will provide insights into how the company's values manifest in day-to-day operations and the impact they have on individual growth and professional development within the organization. Through this exploration, we will further elucidate the ways in which VML's commitment to high performance, collaboration, and inclusivity translates into tangible experiences for its interns and employees alike.

CHAPTER IV – INTERNSHIP REPORT

4 Internship Report

The purpose of my internship was to build upon the existing initiatives such as the cultural calendar of the organization and expand the range of activities and improved the participation rate in these events. This initiative aimed to foster a better environment among employees, encouraging them to come to the office while acknowledging that many employees work with global teams, often without any team members present in the office.

The company practices the hybrid work model, which combines remote and in-office work, which has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary organizations. This model aims to provide flexibility while maintaining productivity and employee satisfaction. Employees tend to value time flexibility, and the hybrid work model appears to be the most suitable solution in line with their preferences. However, this model also presents challenges, particularly in fostering connections among employees who may not have the opportunity to interact with their teams in person. By organizing events that bring employees together, organizations can enhance social interaction and create a sense of community, which is essential for employee well-being and engagement. Subsequently, Employee engagement is a critical factor in organisational success, driving productivity, innovation, and overall employee welfare. Engaging employees through organized events enhances their commitment to the organization and fosters a sense of belonging and community.

4.1 Enhancing Engagement through Cultural Events

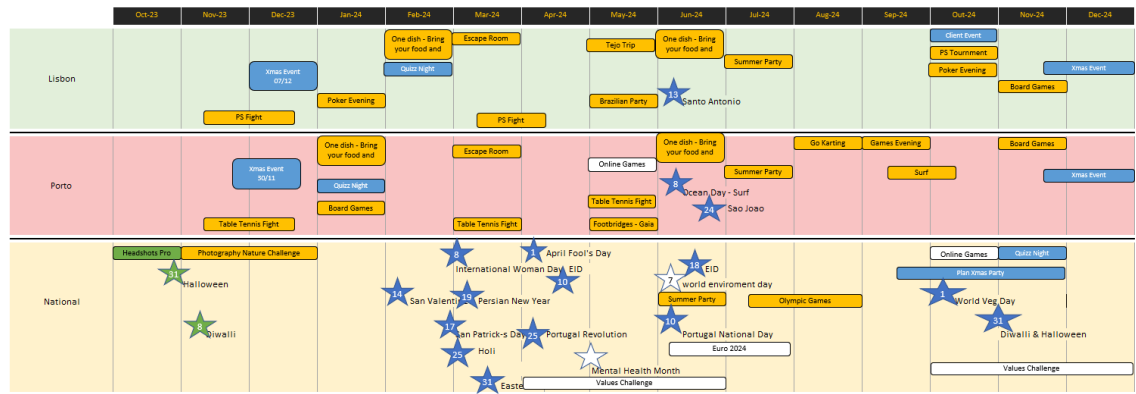
One effective strategy for enhancing cultural sensitivity and inclusivity within these events at VML Enterprise Solutions Portugal is the creation of a cultural calendar. By collaborating with two "global ambassadors" from diverse backgrounds, the company can ensure that events are designed with cultural awareness in mind. This approach is particularly valuable in bridging not only the employees from each office together but also the Porto and Lisbon offices themselves, creating a more cohesive and inclusive organisational environment.

The expansion of activities within the cultural calendar is not merely about increasing the number of events, it is about enhancing the quality and relevance of these events to employees. This principle can be applied to the cultural calendar by ensuring that the events reflect the diverse backgrounds of employees and resonate with their cultural identities. Moreover, the role of global ambassadors is crucial in this context. Their diverse perspectives can help identify and incorporate various cultural elements into the calendar, thereby enriching the organisational culture. Ambassadors can act as cultural brokers, facilitating communication and understanding between different cultural groups within the company. By leveraging the ambassadors' insights, VML ES can create events that not only celebrate diversity but also promote inclusivity and understanding among employees.

Additionally, the establishment of a cultural calendar can serve as a strategic tool for enhancing employee morale and fostering a sense of belonging. While the specific impact of cultural authenticity on community engagement is not directly addressed in the literature, it is generally understood that showcasing a variety of cultural celebrations and activities can create an environment where employees feel valued and recognized for their unique backgrounds. Furthermore, the cultural calendar can facilitate cross-office collaboration between Lisbon and Porto. By scheduling joint events and activities, the company can strengthen interpersonal relationships and foster a sense of unity among employees from different locations.

Figure 6

Cultural calendar during the internship



Note. For better viewing please revert to Appendix 1.

There were a lot of different types of events from size - Outside Activities, Collab Events /Panels talks, Gesture events and Events – to themes – Diwali, One Dish, São Joao and Games Night.

The effectiveness of workplace events, such as game nights or social gatherings, can vary significantly depending on the office environment and the preferences of the employees involved. For instance, the success of a Poker night in Lisbon, which resulted in high engagement and employee satisfaction, contrasts greatly with the experience in the Porto office, where a board games night proved to be more favorable. This discrepancy highlights the importance of aligning workplace activities with the specific cultural and social dynamics of each office location. For example, the Persian/Irian new year as only done at the Lisbon office because there is no one that celebrates that specific event at the Porto office. To continue the connection of both the images and message related to the event was published on the global chat of the company that way everyone new about the event and what it was about.

The varying success of workplace events across different locations underscores the necessity of tailoring activities to fit the unique cultural and social contexts of each office. Designing and implementing fun activities in the workplace is most effective when they align with employees' needs and interests. Such alignment not only maximizes

the benefits of these activities, but it can also enhance employee engagement, positively influence job satisfaction, foster trust in management consequently helping reduce turnover. This suggests that the nature of the activities can significantly impact employee perceptions and engagement levels. When interpreting the Porto office's preference for board games it may reflect a cultural inclination towards collaborative and strategic activities, which could foster a sense of community and satisfaction among employees.

The most effective approach I found was simply to listen to people and understand their preferences. Rather than just planning events and presenting them to my supervisor, I researched key cultural celebrations represented in the office. I asked employees if they celebrated these events and how important it was for them to recognize them. Additionally, I took the time to learn about their hobbies; for instance, I discovered that many enjoyed playing various types of board games and were also interested in competitive sports like paintball. To further facilitate communication, I created an environment where employees could send me messages with their event suggestions. I designed a template for this purpose, allowing them to propose and help organize events that reflected their interests. This initiative fostered a sense of ownership and creativity among the staff. It aligns with the concept of endogenous events, where employees initiate activities that are meaningful to them. This proactive approach complemented the work of the cultural ambassadors in our office, leading to successful events such as Quiz Night, Table Tennis tournaments, Footbridges – Gaia outings, Game evenings, and Escape Room challenges. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on learning and sharing knowledge, which fostered collaborations between the company and associations like Wtech, resulting in events such as the “Beyond Boundaries: Women’s Leadership Insights” meetup for International Women’s Day.

Cultural calendar events can serve as an effective tool for employer branding as, particularly when employees actively engage in promoting these events on social media platforms like LinkedIn. Engaging employees in the promotion of cultural events not only amplifies the company's visibility but also fosters an authentic representation of the workplace culture. This authenticity is crucial, as potential candidates increasingly seek genuine experiences rather than performative displays of corporate culture. This practice not only showcases the company's commitment to a vibrant workplace culture but also

highlights its values and community involvement, which are increasingly important to job seekers today.

When employees post about cultural events on LinkedIn, they create authentic narratives that resonate with their professional networks. This form of organic marketing leverages the trust and credibility that comes from peer recommendations, by creating a humanizing company narrative giving a face to what normally are just numbers.

Figure 7

Holi celebrations- Employee post



Note. Employee appreciation post regarding the company “celebration event “for Holi 2024 at the Porto Office.

The example provided of Shauna Singh post illustrates how employees can leverage social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, to positively promote cultural calendar events, as well as , showcases the company's inclusive culture and fosters a sense of community among employees.

Furthermore, by utilizing the template, employees can propose and organize events that reflect their interests, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and creativity. This proactive approach to event creation aligns with the notion of endogenous events, where employees initiate activities that are meaningful to them.

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4.2 Event Guidelines

In today's globalized workplace, effective intercultural communication is essential for fostering relationships among employees from diverse backgrounds. During my internship, I recognized the importance of addressing intercultural miscommunication in the "Events Guideline" and the "Employee Organized Event – Template." The latter serves a dual purpose: it is designed to assist individuals in administrative positions by providing a comprehensive overview of event details, while also serving as a supportive resource for employees who require more guidance or detail orientation.

These documents serve as practical tools for event planning and promote understanding and collaboration among employees from different cultural backgrounds. This chapter discusses the significance of the Events Guideline in fostering a well-organized event planning process and enhancing employee engagement

Successful intercultural communication and integration can only occur when there is intercultural competence. When this competence is lacking, misunderstandings can often arise if not managed effectively. Therefore, individuals in administrative roles need to be aware of themselves and others, understand the cultural differences present within

the organization and ultimately work towards creating common ground, ultimately enhancing employee relationships.

The "Events Guideline" was developed with these principles in mind, providing employees with the necessary tools to navigate potential miscommunications that may arise during event planning. By incorporating culturally sensitive practices into the guidelines, organizations can promote inclusivity and ensure that all employees feel valued and understood.

Intercultural miscommunication can lead to anxiety and uncertainty—two emotions that negatively impact an individual's performance. These issues may arise from various factors, including differences in communication styles, cultural norms, and expectations. The Events Guideline includes strategies for reducing anxiety and uncertainty by providing clear instructions and expectations for event planning, in this manner facilitating smoother interactions among employees. Furthermore, the guideline encourages employees to engage in open discussions about their cultural backgrounds and preferences. By creating a platform for employees to share their perspectives, organizations can build trust and strengthen relationships among team members.

The organization of events provides a unique opportunity for employees to interact and build relationships in a relaxed setting. By utilizing the "Employee Organized Event – Template," employees can propose and plan events that reflect their cultural backgrounds and interests. This participatory approach not only enhances engagement but also promotes cultural exchange and understanding. The template encourages employees to consider the diverse needs and preferences of their colleagues when planning events, which can lead to more inclusive and enjoyable experiences for all participants. This collaborative effort can help break down cultural barriers and foster a sense of belonging within the organization.

To ensure the effectiveness of the Events Guideline and the Employee Organized Event – Template, it is essential to implement a feedback mechanism that allows employees to share their experiences and suggestions for improvement. This interactive approach aligns with the principles of sensemaking, where teams collectively interpret experiences and adapt their strategies accordingly. By analyzing feedback, organizations

can identify successful elements of the guidelines and areas for enhancement, thereby continuously improving the event planning process.

The development of the "Events Guideline" and the "Employee Organized Event – Template" during my internship represents a significant step toward fostering intercultural relationships within the organization. By optimizing the existing processes, addressing intercultural miscommunication and promoting open dialogue, these documents serve as valuable resources for enhancing collaboration and understanding among employees from diverse backgrounds. As organizations continue to navigate the complexities of modern work environments, the integration of effective intercultural communication strategies will be essential for building a cohesive and inclusive workplace culture.

4.3 Enhancing the existing Celebration Plan

The implementation of a comprehensive celebration plan within an organization can be a tool to significantly enhance employee satisfaction and retention. Such initiatives, which include recognition for various life events and achievements, foster a sense of belonging and appreciation among employees.

While analyzing the Celebration Plan, I identified two areas for improvement. First, most events take place later in the employee journey, which may not be the most effective for retention. Second, many events focus predominantly on major life milestones, which fail to reflect the diverse experiences of the employees.

Table 1*Pre-existing Celebration Plan*

<i>Current</i>	<i>Celebration</i>	<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Cost</i>
	<i>Parenthood</i>	<i>Babys with Love (Charity) - The UK buys a baby Bundle to the charity</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Not Confirmed</i>
		<i>Congratulatory Note</i>	<i>Manager</i>	<i>0</i>
	<i>Sawubona /wunderhub</i>	<i>Between employes - Gratitude card (with no monetary value)</i>	<i>Employee in general</i>	<i>0</i>
		<i>Employee of the Quarter (between employes)</i>	<i>Employee in general</i>	<i>£250</i>
		<i>Recognition with money associated</i>	<i>Manager</i>	<i>Depends on the specific manager budget</i>
		<i>Years of service recognition</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>5 years - 250€ voucher 10 years - £500 voucher 15 years - £750 voucher 20 years - £1000 payroll 25 years - £2000 payroll</i>
	<i>Birthday</i>	<i>Birthday cake</i>	<i>Sara</i>	<i>?</i>
		<i>Birthday Slack Message</i>	<i>Sara</i>	<i>0</i>
	<i>Years of service recognition</i>	<i>Slack message</i>	<i>Sara</i>	<i>0</i>
	<i>Wedding</i>	<i>Wedding Bonus - via wunderhub</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>250 €</i>

The pre-existing initiatives within the celebration plan, such as "Babys with Love" charity contributions, congratulatory notes, and employee recognition programs, are essential for enhancing employee satisfaction and fostering a positive workplace culture. These initiatives not only celebrate personal milestones but also promote a sense

of community and belonging among employees, which is crucial for retention and engagement.

The "Baby's with Love" initiative, where the organization purchases baby bundles for charity, exemplifies corporate social responsibility and community engagement. Such charitable actions can enhance employee morale and create a sense of pride in the organization, as employees feel they are part of a company that contributes positively to society.

Congratulatory notes and gratitude cards exchanged among employees, even when devoid of monetary value, can significantly impact workplace relationships. Recognition, whether formal or informal, fosters a culture of appreciation and can lead to increased job satisfaction and loyalty.

The practice of recognizing employees through initiatives like "Employee of the Quarter" and years of service awards further reinforces this culture, as it acknowledges individual contributions and promotes a sense of achievement. Monetary recognition associated with these awards can also serve as a strong motivator, as financial incentives are often linked to enhanced performance and job satisfaction.

Celebrations such as birthday cakes and Slack messages for personal milestones not only create a festive atmosphere but also strengthen interpersonal connections among employees. Additionally, recognizing significant life events, such as weddings through bonuses, demonstrates an understanding of employees' personal lives, further solidifying their emotional connection to the organization.

While at VML ES, I was tasked with enhancing the existing "Celebrations Plan." Above explained. It is important to note that certain initiatives are managed by the Portuguese administration, while others fall under the UK administration. For example, the wedding bonus is drawn from the UK general budget rather than the Portuguese budget. Therefore, the new initiatives I proposed had to carefully account for these budgetary distinctions to ensure financial feasibility for the Portuguese administration. The objective was to introduce more impactful yet cost-effective additions to the existing benefits, maximizing employee engagement without significantly increasing expenses.

Table 2*Approved initiatives for the celebration plan*

New	Celebration	Initiative	Lead	Cost
	<i>Expressing condolences</i>	<i>Send Flowers(or cultural appropriate gift) for the funeral of an immediate family member + card</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>30-50 €</i>
	<i>Work anniversary</i>	<i>Feature in Company Newsletter/LinkedIn with interview and Highlight</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>0</i>
		<i>Switch Office visit</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>300€</i>
		<i>Certificate + message for kid/partner for the Pacience sent by mail</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>5€</i>
		<i>Personalized Swag (e.g. a mug with a personalized message can be adapted to the person in question)</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>15-20€</i>
	<i>Probation</i>	<i>Slack message</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>0</i>
		<i>Personalized Swag (e.g. a mug with a personalized message can be adapted to the person in question)</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>15-20€</i>
	<i>Employee Achievements (promotions/certifications)</i>	<i>Townhall</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>0</i>
		<i>Certificate</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>0</i>
		<i>Slack message</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>0</i>
		<i>You survived college kit - voucher wunderhub</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>20€</i>
	<i>Parenthood</i>	<i>Back-to-School Support (Backpacks with the company logo or a fun design, Stationery materials)</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>10 - 25 €</i>
	<i>Relocation</i>	<i>Housewarming gift - Portuguese kitchen Towels</i>	<i>To be decided</i>	<i>20€</i>

The final approved version of the celebration plan (Table 2) includes various initiatives aimed at enhancing employee satisfaction and fostering a supportive workplace culture. Each initiative is interconnected, demonstrating a holistic approach to employee recognition and support.

For instance, the expression of condolences through sending flowers or culturally appropriate gifts for the funeral of an immediate family member, along with a heartfelt card, demonstrates empathy and support during difficult times, this emotional support from the organization can significantly impact employee morale and retention by also humanizing it.

Moreover, recognizing work anniversaries through features in the company newsletter or on LinkedIn, along with an interview and highlight, serves to publicly acknowledge employee contributions. This not only boosts individual morale but also enhances the organization's image as a supportive workplace. A switch office visit (Porto-Lisbon) can provide a personal touch, reinforcing the value placed on long-term employees.

Additionally, providing certificates and personalized messages for employees' children or partners, along with personalized swag like customized mugs, adds a personal touch that strengthens family ties to the organization.

The recognition of employees completing their probation period through a simple Slack message on the main company communication channel can foster a sense of achievement. Coupled with personalized swag, this initiative enhances the onboarding experience and encourages new hires to feel more connected to the organization.

Furthermore, recognizing employee achievements such as promotions and certifications during a town hall meeting, along with issuing certificates and Slack messages, can significantly boost morale.

Support for parenthood through back-to-school initiatives, such as providing backpacks with the company logo and stationery materials, demonstrates the organization's commitment to supporting employees' families. This initiative can enhance employee loyalty and satisfaction, especially among working parents.

Lastly, offering relocation assistance, such as housewarming gifts, shows appreciation for employees' commitment to the organization. This thoughtful gesture can ease the transition for employees and their families, reinforcing the organization's supportive culture. This Last one is extremely important for the Portuguese offices since most of the employees, around 74 % at the time of my internship, are non-Portuguese workers and a high percentage of them did relocate to Portugal under the VML ES contract prospects.

In summary, these interconnected initiatives not only recognize individual achievements and life events but also contribute to a culture of appreciation and support within the organization. By implementing such a comprehensive celebration plan, organizations can enhance employee satisfaction, foster loyalty, and ultimately improve retention rates.

4.4 Employer Branding Strategy

This chapter examines the evolution of VML Enterprise Solutions' (VML ES) Employer Branding Plan, drawing on insights from an in-depth interview completed on May 22 of 2024 with Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana, the Group Head of Employer Branding & Communication for VML ES EMEA. With over 13 years of experience at VML, Kornaś-Owsiana has played a pivotal role in shaping the organization's approach to employer branding. Initially perceived as an extension of HR or marketing, employer branding has matured into a strategic initiative that encompasses various cultural and operational dimensions across the EMEA region. This evolution underscores the necessity for a cohesive approach that accommodates the diverse experiences and expertise of team members across different locations.

Her insights reveal that the initial concept of employer branding was not cohesive throughout EMEA, for the UK the strategy focused on recruitment events. formerly expanded into a more comprehensive strategy. The organisation has effectively leveraged successful practices from its Polish operations, demonstrating a common strategy in employer branding where organisations benchmark against leading employers to enhance their branding efforts.

Recognition through awards, such as the HR Angels and Employer Branding Excellence Awards for the Poland Hub, serves as a powerful motivator for teams to enhance their branding strategies. A well-executed employer branding strategy can create a sustainable competitive advantage. This competitive edge is crucial for organizations aiming to attract top talent and maintain a strong workforce. (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

When I referenced the fact that due to the merger “this year has been a little bit of a complicated situation because we are still finding ourselves, (...) I know that anything that deals with branding is on standby. “So just being able to get prizes, even being on standby, means that this strategy is really good by itself”. Kornaś-Owsiana notes that two of the biggest difficulties they have faced in more recent years are the pandemic and the rebranding, especially the first one were they had to “Change our mindset (...)” after they had just conquered “(...) a milestone when it comes to building our employer brand”, as the previous strategies that thrived in a unified office environment became less effective in a remote work context.

To address these challenges, they “took a step back” and went back to the “basics” the team adopted a data-driven approach, conducting satisfaction surveys and interviews with stakeholders and representatives from various teams to gather insights that informed their branding strategy (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

With this data, the team built personas to recognize who they have within the company and identify the groups of employees they want to recruit. In their strategy they always incorporate these two aspects of employer branding—internal and external—the internal being for them the top priority “So you need to take care of your own playground, let's say, and then you can tell about yourself outside.”. This process highlights the importance of internal branding, as Kornaś-Owsiana emphasizes that taking care of the internal environment is predominant before projecting an external image (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

The initial planning for a global employer branding strategy is a critical endeavor for organizations aiming to attract and retain top talent in an increasingly competitive labor market. Employer branding serves as a strategic tool that enhances an organization’s

image and aligns its values with the expectations of potential and current employees. We will dive now with the help of Madgadela on how that is being done at VML ES EMEA.

The Employee Value Proposition (EVP) at VML Enterprise Solutions is anchored in three key messages: "Drive to Create," "Good Vibes," and "Knowledge Sharing." These core values are integral to the organization's operations, both internally and externally, as articulated by Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana. She emphasizes that the EVP was not merely a marketing slogan but rather a reflection of the company's essence, stating, "It's our DNA". This foundational understanding of the EVP allows the organization to ensure that their activities and events align with their core values, serving as a "health check" to verify that their initiatives authentically represent who they are.

The development of an effective employer branding strategy at VML Enterprise Solutions is a multifaceted process that begins with understanding group goals. As articulated by Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana, the organization recognizes that "At this level it's impossible to do that quickly. We need a year or two to be sure that we are building something that is very, very consistent, but as I said, we combine global with locals". This statement underscores the importance of a strategic approach that balances a global core identity with local adaptations, acknowledging the diversity of cultures, offices, and people within the organization. To streamline their efforts, the team has identified several quick wins, such as presenting a unified onboarding presentation to all newcomers, which reinforces the idea of a cohesive group identity. Additionally, producing similar promotional items, or SWAG, for all offices helps to foster a sense of belonging across locations. Filipe, the Portugal Operations Director, has played a significant role in facilitating these initiatives.

Understanding the global strengths and weaknesses of the organization is also crucial. The company boasts a strong culture across all offices, a commitment to employee well-being, and a unified recognition program. However, challenges such as employee turnover and a lack of clarity regarding the company's identity—especially following the recent merger—pose significant hurdles. Kornaś-Owsiana notes that global alignment is particularly challenging in areas where the company has limited influence, such as salary reviews determined by WPP.

To develop a successful employer branding strategy across diverse countries, VML leverages the framework implemented in Poland and adapts it to the specific needs and cultural contexts of each European location. The methodology includes initial data gathering through interviews with leaders, employee surveys, and HR metrics collection. This data is then analyzed to identify cultural differences and common themes that resonate across all locations, ensuring a unified brand identity while allowing for local adaptations. The concept of managing local, global, and *glocal* identities becomes crucial, especially in industries like tech where mergers and acquisitions are common. Kornaś-Owsiana explains that when Wunderman Thompson merged with her original company, they leveraged shared values to blend their local identities with the new global identity, creating a cohesive glocal identity. They approached this by asking, “What are the things that connect us?” and identified shared values such as “technology,” “knowledge sharing,” and collaborative project work as foundational elements for further engagement.

To further understand the level of connection they leveraged the archetype analyses exercise, which they conducted by asking some of their employees to provide answers in a short test. First, let's start by explaining what this exercise entails and tells us. The 12 archetypes, as conceptualized by Carl Jung and further developed in marketing and branding contexts by authors like Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson, represent universal symbols and characters that inhabit the collective unconscious (Jung, 1959; Mark & Pearson, 2001). These archetypes can be effectively utilized in employer branding to create a compelling and relatable brand identity that resonates deeply with both current and potential employees (Jung, 1959; Mark & Pearson, 2001). Here's an overview table of each archetype and its application with examples in employer branding:

Figure 8

The 12 Archetypes and their Application in Employer Branding

	Attributes	Employer Branding Focus	Example
The Innocent	Optimistic, honest, enthusiastic.	Emphasize a positive, supportive work environment where employees feel valued and trusted.	A company that highlights its ethical practices and commitment to employee well-being.

The Explorer	Adventurous, independent, and curious.	Highlight opportunities for growth, innovation, and exploration within the company.	A tech company that fosters creative problem-solving and offers international assignments.
The Sage	Wise, knowledgeable, and reflective.	Showcase the company's commitment to learning, development, and intellectual growth.	A research institution focused on continuous education and expert knowledge sharing.
The Hero	Courageous, determined, and inspirational.	Emphasize challenges, achievements, and the company's mission to make a significant impact.	A healthcare company that focuses on life-saving innovations and heroic efforts of its staff.
The Outlaw	Rebellious, unconventional, and bold.	Appeal to those who excel in dynamic environments and challenge the status quo.	A startup that encourages disruptive innovation and unconventional thinking.
The Magician	Visionary, innovative, and transformative.	Promote the company as a hub for creativity, innovation, and transformative ideas.	A tech company known for its groundbreaking products and visionary leadership.
The Regular Guy/Gal	Down-to-earth, friendly, and approachable.	Highlight the inclusive and collaborative nature of the workplace, where everyone is part of a team.	A community-focused organization that values teamwork and inclusivity.
The Lover	Passionate, committed, and nurturing.	Highlight the company's dedication to a warm, supportive culture where employees feel a strong sense of belonging.	A hospitality company that prioritizes customer service and employee satisfaction.
The Jester:	Fun-loving, playful, and humorous.	Showcase a fun and engaging work environment where creativity and humor are valued.	A creative agency known for its vibrant office culture and playful approach to work.



Note. This infographic outlines the 12 archetypes used in employer branding, highlighting their attributes, focus areas, and real-world examples. Each archetype represents key characteristics that influence brand identity and recruitment strategies. It serves as a guide for aligning organizational values with talent engagement efforts. Own elaboration.

The exercise chosen by VML is primarily focused on marketing and branding, aligning closely with the Competing Values Framework developed by Robert E. Quinn and John R. Rohrbaugh, as discussed in the chapter on branding as a strategic retention tactic. The CVF emphasizes understanding and managing organisational culture, while the 12 archetypes serve as a framework for defining and expressing brand identity. Although the Competing Values Framework (CVF) and the 12 archetypes originate from different theoretical backgrounds, they can be related to organisational culture types.

When we analyze the results from this exercise done at VML ES we can see that at their core, they are the same company even though they are made up of multiple different companies.

Figure 9

Employer Branding Strategy - “The archetypes results”



Note. This image summarizes the results from the archetype exercise, showcasing the archetype for each country as well as the main common values and characteristics shared by all. Image from the “Employer Branding Strategy “PowerPoint presented during the interview with M. Kornaś-Owsiana

United Kingdom, Portugal, and China predominantly exhibit a Hierarchy archetype, represented by The Sage. This orientation underscores a strong cultural focus on structure, order, and procedural clarity, fostering environments where stability and predictability are paramount. The emphasis on knowledge and expertise facilitates effective decision-making processes grounded in established protocols and best practices. Additionally, the integration of Clan culture elements, represented by The Caregiver archetype, suggests that while these countries value structure, they also recognize the importance of nurturing relationships within the workplace. This duality enhances employee engagement and satisfaction, as individuals feel secure in their roles and valued as part of a community.

Hungary's cultural profile is characterized by a combination of the Explorer archetype with Caregiver and Sage elements, straddling the Adhocracy and Hierarchy quadrants of the CVF. The Explorer archetype reflects a cultural inclination toward innovation, creativity, and the pursuit of new experiences, which can drive entrepreneurial initiatives. However, the presence of Caregiver and Sage elements indicates that while innovation is encouraged, it is often guided by established

frameworks and expertise. This balance allows Hungarian organizations to foster an innovative spirit while adhering to necessary regulations and standards.

Poland's cultural profile, characterized by the Sage and Citizen archetypes, aligns primarily with the Hierarchy quadrant of the CVF. The Sage archetype emphasizes knowledge and expertise, which are essential for effective decision-making within structured environments. Meanwhile, the Citizen archetype highlights a focus on social responsibility and community engagement, suggesting that Polish organizations incorporate elements of Clan culture. This combination indicates a strong emphasis on stability and knowledge while fostering a sense of belonging among employees, encouraging them to contribute to both organisational goals and societal well-being.

The organisational culture in South Africa is represented by the Caregiver and Ruler archetypes, which can be mapped to both the Clan and Market quadrants of the CVF. The Caregiver archetype emphasizes nurturing, support, and collaboration, which are essential in a diverse society where inclusivity and community engagement are vital. Conversely, the Ruler archetype reflects a focus on control, stability, and authority, aligning with the Market quadrant. This interplay allows South African organizations to create supportive environments while maintaining the necessary structures for effective leadership and accountability. The combination of these elements suggests a culture that values both employee engagement and competitive positioning.

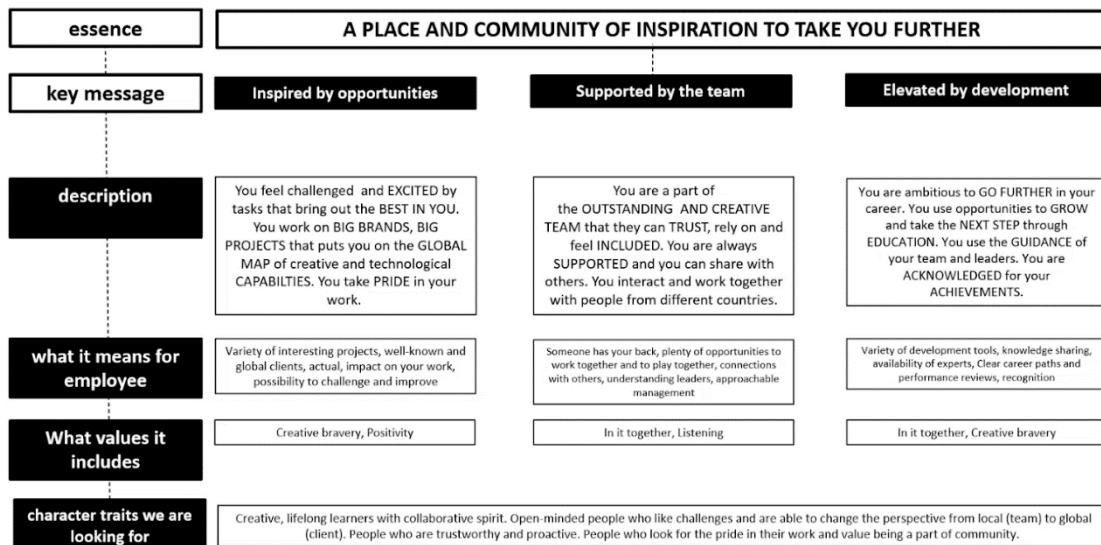
By analyzing the results we can identify two key aspects of their group identity: **people**, focusing on relationships, trust, openness, and taking care of each other when together, and **knowledge and expertise development**, encompassing everything related to their work and professional growth.

We can observe slightly different characteristics within their group: the Caregiver countries such as the UK, China, Portugal, Hungary and South Africa approach highlight taking care of employees, while the citizen approach country such as Poland promotes employee independence and provides tools for self-management. Despite these differences, they share the same core values (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

From this, they derived the essence of their EVP: "A place and community of inspiration to take you further." This was a significant part of their rebranding effort. Now they are focused on gathering and implementing tools that align with this new EVP (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

Figure 10

Employer Branding Strategy - "EVP"



Note. Image from the "Employer Branding Strategy "PowerPoint presented during the interview with M. Kornaś-Owsiana

Kornaś-Owsiana emphasizes the importance of internal clarity regarding career prospects and assessment processes, stating, "There's no point in organizing elaborate employer branding events if we haven't sorted out the basic issues". This focus on internal processes is crucial for ensuring that employees understand their career trajectories and the criteria for evaluation, which ultimately enhances engagement and retention.

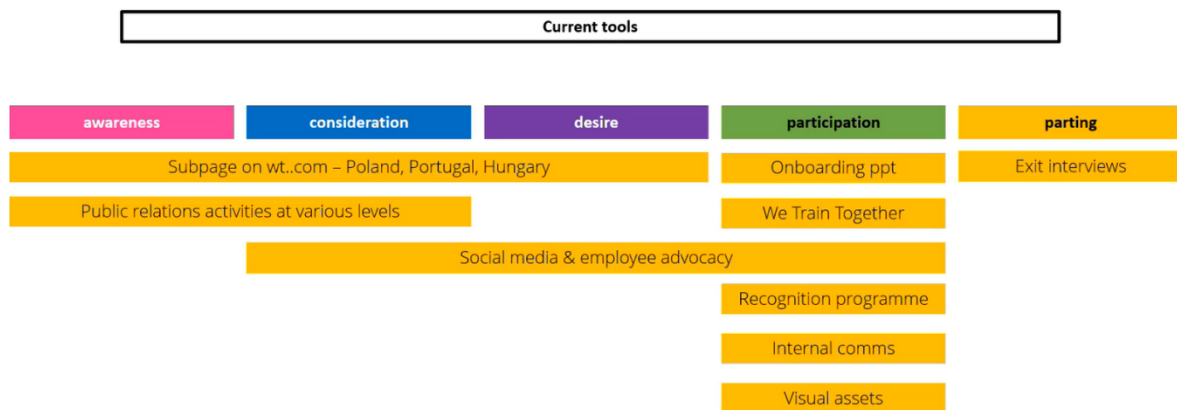
To further strengthen their employer branding, VML plans to continue hosting cultural events that reflect their identity across various offices. These initiatives, such as the upcoming "São João festivities" in Portugal, are designed not only to celebrate local culture but also to recognize and highlight the contributions of employees. Such cultural events play a crucial role in fostering a supportive organisational culture, which is

essential for effective employer branding. Moreover, the emphasis on cultural events reflects a broader understanding of employer branding as a multifaceted construct that encompasses various dimensions, including organisational trust and employee engagement.

Local teams are also focused on retention and turnover, coordinating recruitment efforts under the leadership of Michelle, who is responsible for aligning these strategies across the group. This initiative is part of a broader talent journey, emphasizing ongoing engagement rather than a finite lifecycle.

Figure 11

Employer Branding Strategy - “Current tools”



Note. Image from the “Employer Branding Strategy” PowerPoint presented during the interview with M. Kornaś-Owsiana

The company also runs recognition programs and maintains common internal communications, such as business updates. They are currently working on developing Managing Cultural Differences

This section of the discussion focused on integrating the various locations within the company and addressing the challenges posed by its multicultural nature. Specifically, the question was whether the steps taken to develop the current employer branding strategy effectively managed these challenges and if involving local teams was part of the solution. For Magdalena, the initial challenge stemmed from the diverse backgrounds of the companies that merged to form Wunderman Thompson (company name before the January 2024 merger). Previously independent entities such as Salmon and Cognifide had

varying levels of expertise and different needs concerning employer branding. This diversity presented a significant hurdle (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

The primary difficulty involved overcoming the anxiety and resistance from local HR teams. When Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana was tasked with managing this aspect, initial meetings revealed a sense of apprehension among local employees. She assumes that they feared that the new employer branding strategy might impose a top-down approach that could disregard their established practices and tailored efforts for their specific offices (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024) something that did not happen.

Another challenge was the varying interpretations of employer branding across different locations. In Poland, employer branding focused on externalizing the internal identity, while in the UK, it primarily involved recruitment marketing and job fairs. This divergence highlighted the necessity of a unified definition of employer branding for the entire group (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

Determining a cohesive direction also posed a challenge, as different offices had varying priorities. This issue was addressed during an in-person team meeting held in Poland last September of 2023. The meeting provided an opportunity for team members to discuss and align on employer branding strategies (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

Throughout the preceding year, there had been monthly calls with all leaders, during which each country presented their employer branding initiatives, including collected data, current metrics, challenges, and opportunities. Despite these efforts, the discussions often led to superficial solutions or "quick fixes" rather than a comprehensive and unified approach to employer branding (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

The in-person meeting proved to be a turning point. It fostered deeper collaboration and understanding among team members, enabling them to identify the

most urgent areas to address (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

One significant outcome was the development of a social calendar. The decision was made to coordinate quarterly events across all offices, rather than replicating every event at each location. For example, the British Pie Week was organized as a successful joint event that unified efforts across different offices (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

Another key challenge was improving internal communications. Implementing a common business update once a month was crucial to ensuring a steady flow of information throughout the company. This initiative aimed to enhance communication and keep all employees informed about important developments (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

Additionally, the approach to supporting leaders became a focal point. We recognized that leaders play a pivotal role in the company, serving as culture advocates. They are instrumental in transferring and reinforcing the company's culture within their teams (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

Consequently, providing support and resources to leaders was deemed essential for effectively embedding and perpetuating the company's cultural values. It was also inquired whether the strategy allowed local teams to organize their own events, leveraging their understanding of local preferences and needs, instead of imposing a uniform set of global events (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

To answer this question Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana mentions:

As you notice and as you said, you know your culture, your people, your team, your office in a way that I cannot ever know those people. So you know what they want? You know what they need? What will be beneficial? What will secure their attention? So do whatever is needed. If it's still in line with the values, it's. If it's still in line with the business approach. Do what do you want so.

The core values of the organization—positivity, inclusion, diversity, and belonging—are deeply embedded in all their initiatives and operations. These values guide their work across teams and offices, ensuring that their efforts in employer branding

and other areas align with their foundational principles (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

For example, the company's diversity and inclusion initiatives are reflected in various cultural events held in its offices. In Portugal, the team excels at celebrating diverse cultures with events such as Diwali and Persian New Year, showcasing their commitment to inclusivity. Similarly, for International Women's Day, there was a collective effort across offices, including Poland, Hungary, and the UK although there was a stronger participation from Poland, where the company organized a charity drive known as Project Shoebox. This initiative collected toiletries and beauty items for women affected by poverty, domestic abuse, and homelessness. The company's approach to sustainability and social responsibility also emphasizes integrating individuals into society and supporting community well-being. For instance, during Pride Week and other significant events, the company offers webinars and other learning opportunities for employees, reinforcing its commitment to these values (M. Kornaś-Owsiana, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

The company adopts a *glocal* approach, ensuring that every initiative reflects its commitment to diversity, inclusion, and belonging. This strategy maintains global core values at the heart of its organisational culture and practices, while the implementation of these activities is tailored to local contexts. The current employer brand of the company represents a strategic fusion of internal and external initiatives that embody its core values, culture, and expertise. This branding strategy prioritizes knowledge sharing, fostering positive work environments, and promoting a culture of creativity. To develop and promote its employer brand, the company employs a comprehensive approach that includes data collection through satisfaction surveys and interviews, the development of detailed employee personas, and the creation of a robust employee value proposition. Furthermore, the company facilitates various internal and external events and engagements to reinforce its brand. However, the organization has encountered challenges due to its multicultural structure, particularly in aligning disparate understandings of employer branding across different countries and offices. These challenges have been addressed through a 'glocal' strategy that integrates global branding frameworks with localized adaptations. Alignment with the company's overall business

strategy and core values is maintained by grounding all employer branding initiatives in its identified employee value proposition, ensuring that all actions and initiatives reflect the company's core values. Success in employer branding is measured through multiple metrics, including Net Promoter Score (NPS), job satisfaction surveys, retention and turnover rates, event attendance, and social media engagement. These metrics provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the branding efforts and their impact on employee satisfaction and loyalty.

The findings from this interview suggest that employer branding is a crucial tool for enhancing employee retention. By fostering a strong internal culture and identity, the company cultivates employee satisfaction and loyalty. The employer branding strategy also underscores the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion, evidenced by the organization of cultural events, recognition programs, and learning opportunities. Overall, the company's approach to employer branding not only supports its strategic objectives but also reinforces its dedication to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

4.5 “Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace” - Form analysis

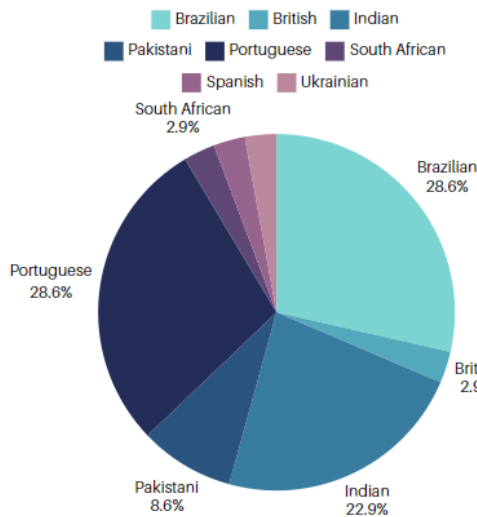
The analysis of the survey results regarding workplace interactions and cultural elements reveals significant insights into the perceptions of diversity and inclusion, feelings of respect and value among employees, and the impact of corporate culture on job retention.

This survey had a participation rate of 37% (37 people out of 100), which necessitates careful consideration to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. While such a participation rate is not uncommon in contemporary survey research and more than a third percent response rate is already considered relevant, it still raises concerns about potential biases and the generalizability of the results. To strengthen the reliability of the current findings, future cross-examination of data would be beneficial, allowing for more comprehensive insights and a better understanding of the broader employee population. The analysis of the data will be conducted in sections, allowing for a more focused and detailed examination of key areas. By breaking down the data into specific components, we can address the nuances within each area, enhancing the overall understanding of the survey results and identifying any potential trends or patterns. This structured approach will also help in pinpointing areas that require further investigation or intervention, contributing to more targeted and actionable insights.

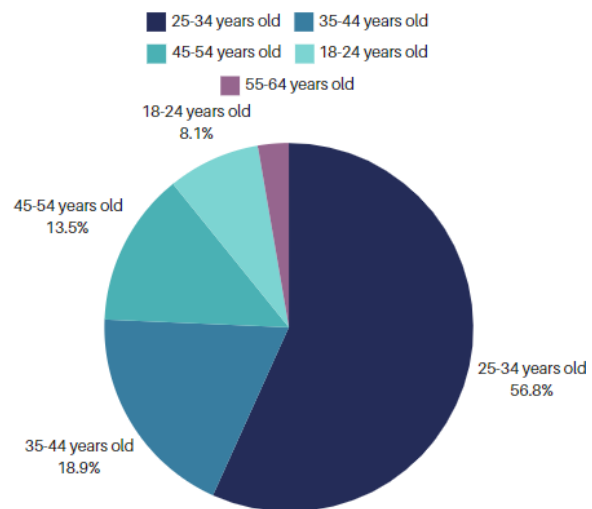
Figure 12

Participants Age and nationality

FORM PARTICIPANTS NATIONALITY



FORM PARTICIPANTS AGE



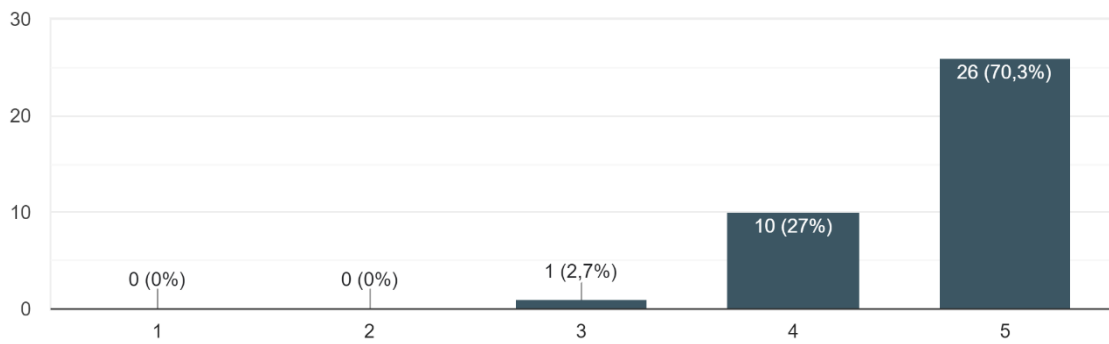
Note. Contextualisation of the data set, including variables such as age and nationality

- Perception of Diversity and Inclusion:

The survey indicates a strong positive perception of the company's efforts to promote an inclusive environment. A majority of respondents (26 out of 37) rated the company's initiatives at the highest level (5 on a Likert scale), with only one respondent rating it a 3. This suggests that the organization is effectively fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion, which is crucial for employee engagement and satisfaction.

Figure 13

Inclusive environment within the company



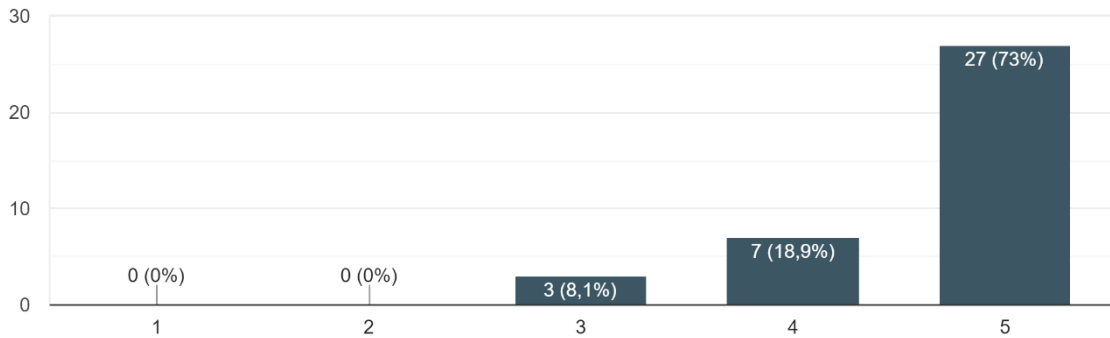
Note. "Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace" Google form retrieved June 2024

- Feeling Respected and Valued:

The data also shows that a significant number of employees (27 out of 37) feel respected and valued in their workplace, with the majority scoring this aspect a 5. This aligns with findings that suggest a positive workplace culture, characterized by respect and recognition, enhances employee morale and commitment. When employees feel valued, they are more inclined to demonstrate favorable attitudes towards their work and maintain their commitment to the organization, thereby diminishing turnover intentions.

Figure 14

Supportive initiatives within the company



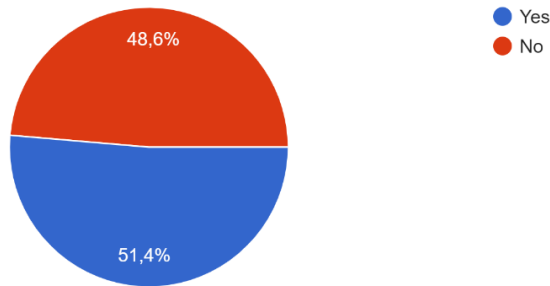
Note. “Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace” Google form retrieved June 2024

- **Impact on Job Retention:**

The survey results regarding job retention reveal a more nuanced picture. Responses were nearly evenly split, with 19 respondents indicating that corporate culture positively influenced their decision to stay with the company, while 18 disagreed. This indicates that while corporate culture is a significant factor for some employees, it is not universally perceived as a decisive element for retention. This finding is consistent with the insights literature review that highlights the complexity of retention factors, suggesting that while a positive corporate culture can enhance retention, other elements such as career development opportunities and work-life balance also play critical roles.

Figure 15

A positive corporate culture influences the decision-making



Note "Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace" Google form retrieved June 2024

- **Conclusions**

In summary, the survey results indicate that the company is perceived positively in terms of fostering diversity and inclusion, and most employees feel respected. However, the split in responses regarding job retention suggests that the company's initiatives may need to be further developed or tailored to increase employee retention. Organizations should consider a multifaceted approach that not only emphasizes diversity and respect but also addresses other critical factors influencing employee retention, such as career development, monetary compensation and work-life .While the survey provides valuable insights into workplace interactions and cultural elements, it is essential to recognize its limitations such as self-reported data, common source bias, and the limited scope of questions that can enhance the validity and reliability of future surveys.

Research into the role of culture in a globalized workplace has underscored intercultural communication and competence as essential ingredients for organisational success. This idea is captured by Raymond Williams, who defines culture as a "particular way of life" underlining the fact that it is impressed on everyday practices and societal frameworks, which can easily show that culture is not an abstract concept but part of human interaction and experience. Therefore, becomes vital in the modern workplace, where communication and collaboration hold the key towards executing results that any given organization would expect.

With increasing diversity within contemporary working environments, intercultural competence is a requisite one that calls for empathetic insight, flexibility, and sensitivity to cultures. Researchers such as Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Meyer have identified frameworks explaining how cultural dimensions influence styles of communication and organisational behavior and helped us understand within their limitations the dynamics of intercultural relations within a business context even if in some cases these findings can be somewhat incomplete.

Companies should strive to develop an environment based on interculturalism rather than multiculturalism as their main difference is that the latter does no more than note cultural diversity, while the former proposes the development of meaningful interaction among diverse groups exactly what makes diverse teams profitable. While multiculturalism advances the cause of coexistence, interculturalism propels active interaction and dialogue with the very needs that assure social cohesion and mutual enrichment in today's world, connected by communication channels. Intercultural communication and competence thus form a prime need in the operational frameworks of organizations struggling to provide an inclusive environment. Thus, by giving credence to these facets, organizations can further their ability to accomplish their mission and positively influence group cohesiveness and a respect-and-understanding culture. The action and commitment to finding one's way through cultural diversity make for not just enrichment in individual interactions but also a great contribution to broad organisational success in a multicultural landscape.

Additionally, workplace culture changes which are influenced by societal changes and globalization demand revisiting corporate culture and employer branding strategies. Organisational values and employee expectations must align, which is all too important for retention and productivity and entails a culture of positivity, trust, and shared values in the workplace. There is an interconnection between corporate culture and employee engagement: strong organisational cultures are positively related to both better job performance and employee satisfaction.

Now, at this stage, the integration of intercultural studies into the employer branding strategy becomes pivotal. Understanding generational differences and cultural dynamics can enhance employer branding efforts, leading to improved employee satisfaction and retention. Organizations should grasp that their corporate culture needs to be in tune with the values of their employees to enable them to engage and be loyal. Accordingly, organizations act on the determination to reinforce employer branding activities that appeal to employees through the values of the latter. Thus, building a more engaged staff will naturally lead to organisational success.

In a nutshell, the internship experience at VML Enterprise Solutions had been a paradigm of how cultural initiatives can help lift employee engagement and satisfaction in a multicultural, hybrid work environment. By infusing inclusivity and cultural sensitivity through a cultural calendar comprising global ambassadors, this structured approach has been able to help people at every level in Portugal to feel connected and build interpersonal relationships. Besides, providing employee participation in the organization of events represents proactive work on engagement, so people can meaningfully contribute to organisational culture.

The curriculum at ISCAP has significantly enhanced my capabilities in the labor environment that I was able to experience first-hand with this internship, particularly through the development of culturally appropriate products and an understanding of diverse working styles across different countries. This educational experience has equipped me with essential tools that foster cultural competence and intercommunication skills. For instance, the training provided in cultural and linguistic competence has been practically shown in my experience, improving my communication skills, and attitudes,

which are critical for effective practice in diverse settings. Such training is vital as it prepares students to navigate the complexities of multicultural work environments, enabling them to create products that resonate with various cultural contexts. More specifically in the context of this internship, it helped me develop more efficiently and effectively the cultural calendar, and consequently the execution of the events in a way that they will not feel to the collaborators as a performative action.

The cultural calendar and employer branding strategy can indeed serve as tools to enhance employee retention. However, they do not constitute a complete solution. Employee satisfaction is a multifaceted issue that extends beyond mere integration into the corporate culture. Factors such as project conditions—often influenced by client-related challenges—career development opportunities within the organization, and fair compensation significantly impact employees' overall satisfaction and their decisions to remain with the company. As evidenced by both the interview with Kornaś-Owsiana the findings from the survey titled "Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace," 51.4% of participants indicated that activities associated with the cultural calendar influenced their decision-making when considering alternative job offers. This statistic underscores the notion that while corporate culture plays a role in retention, it is not universally perceived as the primary factor. The literature review not only supports this complexity of retention factors, but these aspects are also consistent with previous studies, such as those conducted by Silva & Dias, which found that employer social representation enhances applicant motivation, particularly among millennials. This indicates that branding significantly shapes perceptions of corporate culture and influences job decisions (Silva & Dias, 2020). Additionally, the findings from Tong et al. (2015) establish a link between organisational culture and job satisfaction. Similarly, the study by Akinteye, Ochei, and Itoe (2023), titled "Corporate Governance and Employee Retention in Multinational Enterprises in Nigeria: Exploring the Role of Board Diversity and Incentive Mechanisms," connects other retention factors, such as transparent communication and ethical leadership, which bolster employee commitment. This evidence illustrates that while corporate culture is important, it is part of a broader set of organisational practices that collectively influence employee retention.

While cultural initiatives and employer branding strategies can contribute to employee retention, they must be integrated into a broader framework that includes attention to work-life balance, career development, and fair compensation. The interplay of these factors creates a more comprehensive approach to employee satisfaction and retention, consistent with the findings from various studies that highlight the multifaceted nature of employee retention strategies.

Overall, the strategic importance of cultural initiatives in promoting employee engagement and satisfaction cannot be overstated. By prioritizing inclusivity, recognition, and effective communication, organizations like VML Enterprise Solutions are well-positioned to cultivate a positive workplace culture that attracts and retains top talent, thereby ensuring long-term success in an increasingly competitive market.

The following recommendations are particularly relevant for companies with multiple offices, whether nationally or internationally, and those operating in diverse, multicultural environments similar to those of VML ES. First, it is extremely important for leadership and higher hierarchies, from managers upward, to prioritize the development of intercultural training programs. These programs are essential for building communication skills and cultural competence, particularly among decision-makers and team leaders who set the tone for collaboration in diverse environments. By equipping leaders with the tools to navigate cross-cultural dynamics effectively, organizations can foster stronger alignment and inclusivity across their global operations. Second, incorporating engaging initiatives, such as team-building activities and designated relaxation spaces, can significantly promote employee well-being and enhance team cohesion. These initiatives help to mitigate the challenges of high-pressure, multicultural workplaces while encouraging creativity and productivity. Strengthening employer branding is another critical step. Organizations should emphasize their commitment to inclusivity, alignment with employee values, and cultural sensitivity. These elements not only attract top talent but also enhance the company's reputation within competitive global talent markets. Finally, addressing key factors influencing employee retention, such as transparent communication, ethical leadership, job stability, and work-life balance, is essential. In geographically dispersed and diverse workplaces, these strategies help create a supportive organisational culture that values employees' personal and

professional well-being, ultimately fostering loyalty and reducing turnover. By implementing these strategies, organizations in similar contexts to VML can create inclusive, innovative, and globally competitive workplaces.

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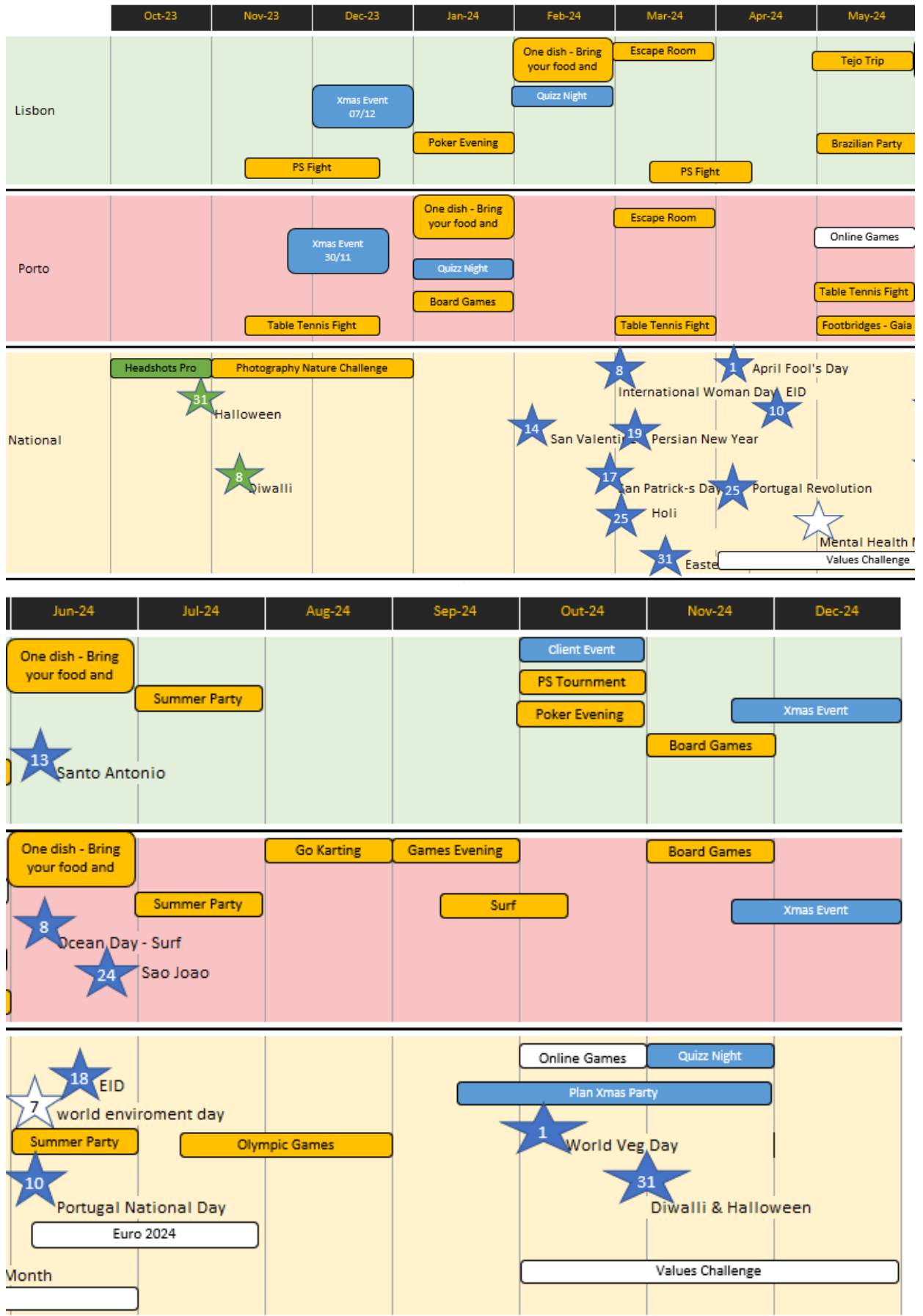
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Appendix 1 – Cultural Calendar



Appendix 2 –Script for the “Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace for Academic Analysis” form

Exploring Interaction and Cultural Elements in the Workplace for Academic Analysis

This survey aims to gather insights into employees' satisfaction levels regarding integration and cultural elements within VML Enterprise Solutions Portugal.

The collected data will be analyzed in an academic paper.

Your responses will remain anonymous.

Estimated Time to Complete: 3 minutes

1. What is your Nationality? *

Select only one option.

British

Egyptian

Hungarian

Indian

Iranian

Irish

Italian

Nigerian

Pakistani

Portuguese

South African

Spanish

Sri Lankan

Ukrainian

Other: _____

2. What is your age range? (Select one) *

Select only one option.

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 years old and above

Inclusive Environment and Office Integration

These questions are related to the people from the Portuguese Team such as Filipe Silva and Rita Oliveira and your fellow office colleagues not necessarily the people related to your projects.

Please state your level of agreement or disagreement, in which 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree", 5 to "strongly agree", regarding the following aspects:

3. The company fosters an inclusive environment that promotes diversity and * inclusion.

Select only one option.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

4. I feel respected and valued by my colleagues and supervisors. *

Select only one option.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

5. The overall company culture is aligned with my values and beliefs. *

Select only one option.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

6. The company leadership is visible and approachable for interaction and feedback. *

Select only one option.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

7. Cultural events have an impact on promoting a positive company culture and fostering integration at the office among employees. *

Select only one option.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Cultural Celebrations and Initiatives

These questions are related to the people from the Portuguese Team such as Filipe Silva and Rita Oliveira and your fellow office colleagues not necessarily the people related to your projects.

Please state your level of agreement or disagreement, in which 1 corresponds to "Strongly Dissatisfied", 5 to "Strongly Satisfied", regarding the following aspects:

- 8. How satisfied are you with the cultural calendar activities organized by the company, such as diversity celebrations, cultural heritage events, or team-building activities? *

Select only one option.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

- 9. How satisfied are you with the opportunities provided for social interaction and team bonding? *

Select only one option.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

- 10. The frequency and variety of cultural events organized by the company are adequate and enjoyable? *

Select only one option.

- No, I think there should be more events
- Yes. The current frequency and variety is adequate
- No, I think there should be fewer events
- Other: _____

Overall Impact on Job satisfaction

- 11. Do all of the current initiatives and corporate culture affect positively your decision-making process to stay when faced with another job offer? *

Select only one option.

- Yes
- No

Appendix 4 – Interview Script

How would you describe the company's current employer brand?

What steps has the company taken to develop and promote its employer brand?

Can you discuss any challenges the company has faced in developing and promoting its employer brand especially due to its multicultural nature, and how it has addressed those challenges?

How does the company ensure that its employer brand aligns with its overall business strategy and values, while also highlighting its multicultural identity?

How does the company's employer branding strategy reflect its commitment to diversity and inclusion? Can you provide examples?

How does the company support employees with diverse backgrounds, and what initiatives or programs does it have in place to promote intercultural communication?

How does the company measure the success of its employer branding efforts, particularly in terms of promoting its multicultural or global identity?

Do you agree employer branding is one of the most important tools for employee retention in the current corporate world? If yes, why?

Appendix 5 – Transcript of the Interview with Magdalena Kornás-Owsiana Group Head of EB & Communication of VML ES EMEA

May 22, 2024 / 1:03 PM / 53m 43s

Participants:

- *Sara Ferreira (Interviewer)*
 - *Magdalena Kornás-Owsiana (Interviewee)*
-

Transcript:

00:02 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Yes, it did, okay, Okay. So just to give you a little bit of context, because I know that we have worked together, but I don't think anyone has any context about me a lot of times. So I'm an intern in Porto, yeah, and I'm a people expert or a people's person, as I normally say. And I'm a people expert or a people's person, as I normally say, and the theme of my report is basically how cultural events and everything that we do for integration can affect with retention and the cultural events and all this kind of stuff. They are included in the employer branding and employer branding strategy.

00:45 - Magdalena Kornás-Owsiana (Guest)

So I thought it really made a lot of sense talking with you and understanding a little bit more exactly what the employer branding is, so like I can also have a better understanding of it and I can also explain it a little bit better, if that makes sense yeah, absolutely, absolutely so if you could just start by sharing a little bit about yourself, um yeah, so my name is Magdalena, everyone calls me, and I'm with the company for 13 years right now, and I started as a intern at the reception desk and then we've built, to be honest, together with Kinga, who is now the people officer here in Poland. We've built together our approach to employer branding, to be honest, because we started with no employer branding people and now we have got a great team and many

people, many teams, are contributing to employer branding. So when we started in 2011-12, we started to build the employer brand, it was no, I would say it was just the beginning of that field as a separate, something separate from HR, from marketing, something in between HR and marketing, because previously people didn't think about employer branding as something separate, something that should be done by the company. So we started with doing some events, some actions supporting recruitment, but then it just grew into a bigger strategy and now we are building that strategy, or trying to reflect the strategy, to the whole group of enterprise solutions in EMEA. So, yeah, we are still building that and when it comes to the group, it's because I would say, we have got various levels of experience in that area. In that field, we don't have that much people who can do the whole strategy from the very beginning to the very end, and we started with different levels of advancement when it comes to employer branding. So that's why we are now more like working as a group to do that.

But we are also repeating or replicating some of the steps that we've done in Poland and for our involvement in employer branding we were awarded as a company, as a team, several times as a previous company, before the rebranding, after the rebranding. So the most recent award is from two weeks ago. Recent award is from two weeks ago and we were in top three of the contest, hr Angels, for our employer branding strategy. We didn't win the main prize, but we were in top three for the whole Poland for our approach to employer branding. And last year, for example, we won the main prize in Employer Branding Excellence Awards Poland contest for our employer branding. And last year, for example, we won the main prize in employer branding excellence awards, poland's contest for our employer branding strategy.

04:10 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

So I think, yeah, we have got some experience in that definitely yeah, I would say it's amazing how, how much you guys have done in such a short amount of time. And I can also say, because I'm slightly involved, that this year has been a little bit of a complicated situation because we are still finding ourselves again in a way. So I know that anything that deals with branding it's it's on standby, so just being able to get

prizes, even being on standby, it means that strategy is really good by itself and it just it can be without doing much.

04:54 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Does it make sense? Yeah, yeah, yeah, I understand.

04:59 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

So, um, yeah, sorry no, no, you can continue, sorry, no, no.

05:05 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Yeah, I just wanted to point out that it was very difficult for us to change our mindset, I would say after the branding, after the pandemic, because that was kind of a milestone when it comes to building our employer brand. Before that it was way easier. You had people in one place, in one office. They were present, everyone you know was working at the office, only a few people worked remotely. And everything had to change. After those events and to achieve what we have right now, we had to do a step back. So we started with the you know basic things. So first was data, so everything that we always were doing the satisfaction survey, a very detailed one, very crafted to our team. So it was like, you know, something that was prepared only for us, that was giving us insights. Then we did interviews with the main stakeholders, with people with the representation of the teams. So we've gathered more information, we've built personas, so we recognized who we have here, what groups of employees, but also who you want to recruit. Because we always combine those two aspects of employer branding internal and external and we believe that internal one is the more important and it should come first. So you need to take care of your own playground, let's say, and then you can tell about yourself outside. So it's always like that, because in our industry, the most powerful channel of communication is word of mouth. So it's always like this is a really, really small environment and everyone knows everyone. And this is something that is crucial and it always has been. And internally, we focus on our values. We focus on in Poland we have got this. Our employer value proposition is we got it because it is IT, and in Poland you can use the word IT for the whole industry, not only for the people who are doing the maintenance and stuff, but

also for the whole tech, more tech industry. You can call them IT and this is okay, but it's specific to Poland. So it makes sense for us, even if we're looking for developers, for architects, for all the stuff. And our EVP is built on three key messages it's drive to create, it's good vibes and knowledge sharing. So those three are expert knowledge, something like that. So those three things are in the heart of everything we do internally and externally, and it's not something that we've invented. It's something that was diagnosed among the people, among the teams. So we are like that, it's our DNA, so we can offer that to others and take that externally to the broader audience.

After that we came up with the employee value proposition, because it's not that you only have nice keyword for something. For us it's kind of a check if we are doing that accordingly to our DNA. So when we plan to do any external or internal event, we always ask ourselves okay, is that connected somehow to who we are? So we have got diagnosed who we are. We know that we are experts. We like to change the world around us, we like to be in a team. We have got this team spirit. So are those things, various activities, are those feeding to our DNA? So this is kind of a health check for us the employee value proposition, and after that you are just based on that.

Based on that you create a whole variety or portfolio of events, of other engagements that you can do to provide support to employees but also to attract candidates at every step of the path. So you have got this employee path and it starts with attention attraction, so the whole life cycle of the employee. Then, when you have got this employee, then retention and stuff. So this is kind of the whole system and you just appoint some of the engagements, some of the events to the very particular parts of that lifecycle. So it's basically it and this is nothing else. Behind employer branding, what is very important is to check, to gain feedback, to question status quo and not to follow the old paths, because the world is changing and you need to adjust. So yeah, this is it.

11:00 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Thank you so much for this really big explanation. There was a lot of points that you touched that I also wanted to touch that. I just wanted to go a little bit deeper, if it was okay with you.

11:16 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Absolutely yes.

11:17 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Like, for example, you explained a lot about the Poland employer branding and I understand exactly that because that's the one I've been doing for the longest in Poland and adapting it to the other countries, or taking the formula and finding the same data on the other countries.

11:53 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Yeah, I would say that something that I described for Poland is a good framework for doing employer branding strategy everywhere. So it's kind of, I would say, the good example, the best practice that you can do to be sure that your employer branding approach and your employer branding strategy and every action that supports the strategy are in the right place. For the group, we did that slightly different, so we implemented elements of that. We do gather data, so we have got this document with all the information. Initially, I had this interview with every people, leader from every country in our group, so with Rita, for example, of course, and Philippe and all people from Hungary, uk and China and Poland. Of course, I knew already Portugal, south Africa, so we found out the most important information about us all and so we gathered all the data. So we are now following that so we can keep track on the retention, on you know how many people work in each country, how many people we are looking for, what exact roles, what are the values, what is the internal comms rating and stuff. So things like that ENPS, are people happy or not with working job satisfaction? All the stuff, all the measures that you can think of are the most important ones.

13:33

Then when we found out that the landscape is really different in every country. So we have got different offices. For example, in Poznań, we have got over 200 people. In the UK, we have got over 600 people, but divided into two offices. In Portugal, we have got about 100, I think, and they are also divided into two offices. In Hungary, we have got about 100 in one office.

So you can see that the approach has to be different because we have got slightly different people, slightly different culture and slightly different offices and not everyone needs the same. So that was another thing that was very important for us as a group from the very beginning to combine global with local. That was very important for us as a group from the very beginning to combine global with local. So as a global company, as a group, we had the same values, for example. So we followed when we were Wundermann Thompson, those you know in it together and positivity, creative bravery and stuff. Now they changed, but for me they're also. Also, it's still the same, but we have got totally different wording exactly, but still that was our core.

So we found out what is, what are the things that connects us. So, for example, those values, for sure, technology and knowledge sharing, and we work together in projects. So we treated that as a base to do some further engagement, how we can do things easily and quickly to start to create the common identity. So creating this identity was a key for us because we focused when it comes to employer branding, we focused on internal. As I said, it always comes first, so we need to know what we have got inside. So we did this and I think I can share that with you. Later we did this assessment in every country to measure our it's not identity, but it is archetype oh yeah, that's the word. So we did employer brand archetype in every country and we found out that maybe I can just actually show that to you, maybe that will be useful. Is the direction that I'm talking about? Is it okay for?

16:31 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

you. It's going slightly different, but it's still good.

16:38 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Every information is still good, because I was going to talk about basically the difficulties that we got, so we're kind of the same yeah, so please let me just join the call and I will share my screen and I will show you something that we come up. That was still um, don't use audio. Okay, yes, and join, and now I can share the share my screen. It presents, oh, but not here. Oh, sorry, something. My computer, I think it's not supporting me anyway.

So before it will, yeah, okay, I think I can now do that what I wanted. Yes.

17:32 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

I mean technology are also not bad friends most of the time, so it's okay.

17:36 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

You know the technology company. It's always like that, it's always happening. So we've started to build this I know it's the Wunderman Thompson Commerce and Technology because we didn't have much time to change that. We didn't know how we will call ourselves.

So that's why it's still, but I think it's still in place. And so that's why it's still, but I think it's still in place. So for our goals, we wanted to build recognition as a company with good teams, good vibes, good atmosphere and also strong expert background. So that was very, very important to all of us in the group important to all of us in the group. And for business goals, we wanted to feed into our business strategy with consistent employer branding strategy, or maybe the basics of the strategy, because at this level it's impossible to do that quickly. We need a year or two to be sure that we are building something that is very, very consistent.

But, as I said, we combine global with local. So we have got this global or group core and we just translate that to local goals and to local approach, because we are so different and we have got different cultures, different offices, different people. Yeah, so that was our goals and, as I said, we've defined some quick wins that we can do. For example, we can always present the same presentation to newcomers because we are one group and we are talking about ourselves in one voice. So that was quite easy.

Or we can do very similar swag items, or we can do some stickers that we can do in all the offices actually, Philip helped us with that and yeah, for um, for strengths, we've, uh, found out that we have got very common and strong culture across all the offices we can develop. We care for people, we care for work-life balance. We have got a common recognition program. We are flexible in all of our offices. We also have got common projects that we do together and access to the technologies, to the knowledge. Also, we have got the common communication channels. Maybe not all of them, but some of them definitely. And for weaknesses, we've found out that, well, we have got two less projects. We have got people leaving business. These are normal situations, but this is kind of our weakness we don't have this clarity about the identity of the company and it's still in progress. And, yeah, we also have got some kind of global alignment that we have to do. And this is difficult because some of the things we don't have any influence on the salary review, for example, because it's being decided by WPP, yeah. And then, yeah, this one wasn't. Yeah, it was done. The personas wasn't done. So we had defined those direct and indirect groups, so we decided to focus on employees and on leaders as the main groups that can support us in building this as a first step, this internal approach and strategy, and, of course, externally, you would like to reach out to candidates, both students and people who are starting, young talents that are starting their career, but also experienced experts. Yeah, this one wasn't done and this is something that I wanted to show you, because it showed us also that we are and I wanted to show, yeah, this one. So we did that exercise. So we asked some of our employees to provide us some answers in the short test and at the very end it turned out that we are, in our core, the same company, even if we are combined from six or seven various companies. Sorry, we are still the same.

So we have got two aspects in our group of our identity. One is people, so relations, trust, openness, taking care of people, being together. This is one aspect, and the other is knowledge, expertise, development, so everything that is connected to what we do. And you can see slightly different characteristics, because caregiver is the company who is taking care more of an employee than citizen, is more independent, so giving people more independency and tools to make them take care of themselves, but still we are in the same area. Let's say so very, very same core to all of us. Then we found out what is our employee value proposition. Then we found out what is our employee

value proposition and at the very bottom of the pyramid we have got this economical layer and it's comfort benefits, stability, then functional support for development, having an impact, changing the world around us, job satisfaction and inclusion, diversity. And for emotional aspect trust, expertise, openness, recognition. So this is something that defines us in all of our offices in the group. And then we came up with the essence of our EVP a place and community of inspiration to take you further. A place and community of inspiration to take you further.

So, yeah, that was when the rebranding came and our work stopped here. So right now, it's like we are working more on collecting the tools that we can use to be sure that we are still following and, from my recent conversation with Andy, we did stop for building the employer branding strategy. So we are doing, or maybe we are following what we have right now. So we are doing, or maybe we are following what we have right now, but not doing something else or something new, because we are focusing on slightly different processes. Right now. We want to be sure that everything connected to cake and to this architecture, career architecture and drive, clear review and stuff, this one is placed. So this one is more important right now. So we need to fix some internal processes and we are still working on Project 1. And I agree with that because there's no point on inventing some kind of you know fancy employer branding events when we don't have the clarity and, yeah, in those basic things. So people need to know where they are going, what's their career prospects, how they are being assessed in the company, and so this is important From this element of employee branding that we will continue to do is to do some cultural events that will show us in our offices, in our countries, who we are.

So the next one is Portugal and we are having a call with Rita tomorrow to plan something that we can do perform in every office to reflect the Portugal office and to show the Portugal culture and show people who work in Portugal and stuff. We do the colleague net promoter score survey and this one will be issued in June. So very, very soon we'll do the survey and we will do the job satisfaction survey. Of course. We will have this all in survey in autumn, I think, together with WPP, but we will try to include there some questions that will be very specific to us, and as local teams, we care for stuff like retention, turnover, so we recruit and we are also connecting that

efforts on the group level. So we have got one recruitment lead, who is Michelle, of course, and she's also responsible for, you know, connecting that in our group.

This is something that I told you before. So these are like this life cycle of our talent journey. That's very fancy, nice name for that. Yeah, maybe better than life cycle, because life cycle means that the life ends at some point. So talent journey is something that is helping us with our engagement here. So, yeah, this is something that actually is happening at some point. So we are promoting ourselves on LinkedIn and it will happen very soon because we will have our own LinkedIn account for enterprise solutions. Now we are using VML Commerce, but I helped on that one.

27:26 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

I'm so happy finally.

27:28 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, because we had this Wundermont on some commerce and technology page that we wanted to use, but we had to ask people to leave that page as employees.

27:40 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

I was the one sending the email, so I know how it was I sent 400 emails.

27:47 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Oh my God yeah, so this is it. We have this, or we should have this one onboarding presentation for everyone. Like to present the group? We will do this. We train together activity. It will be called something fast, sport Fest, vml Sport Fest or something in September, so it will be the sport activity to everyone. We do recognition programs.

So Bona, of course we have got common internal comms, like business updates, and we are working on common visual assets. So we will talk soon to we have got this

creative director in Budapest, in our office in Hungary, and he will help us with having a very consistent approach to doing the swag and all the visual assets, very consistent approach to doing the swag and all the visual assets. So, yeah, and this one, yeah, we had this WT Cribs, so the whole series of videos presenting our offices. So it was Portugal and Lisbon and Poznan, I think. So far, and probably Joe will do that more later in the year. That's the plan. We have got this brand positioning statement ready, employer value proposition defined and we are working on social calendar. So we also do those events together as a group and we are engaging leaders to support those things. We are doing the programs for leaders. So we are connecting our processes. We are connecting our approach. Yeah, and this is it for now thank you.

29:36 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Would you be okay if I stole 10 more minutes from you?

29:40 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

yeah, that's okay. That's fine. I don't have any more meetings today, so it's fine.

29:44 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Okay, in that case, we talked a lot about how we are connecting every single place. So, for example, would you say that, basically, the steps that you took, or that they were taking, to develop what we have now for the employer branding is what you presented to me? What do you say? That was the challenges because of the multicultural nature of the company, and how would you say that you address those challenges? because I if I'm kind of answering the question at the same time as I'm doing it, but just so that I understand because you did mention it, but just to confirm, yeah, yeah it's just to involve the local team and to basically not tell the local team but say, okay, we have this global events, let's do you can do your local events, because you also know what your people want and what your people like, and let's do both at the same time and in this way we have this two-in-one situation. If you'll say, Glocal.

31:06 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

It is called glocal.

31:07 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Glocal exactly.

31:09 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Glocal yeah, I love that word Absolutely. I wouldn't say that was a challenge For me. The first challenge was we came from very different companies. Before. We were Wunderman Thompson, because we were Salmon, we were Cognified, we were whatever we you know. So our level of knowledge about employer branding was different and our needs was different.

And for me the first challenge was to overcome, I would say, kind of the anxiety of local people officers. I would say kind of the anxiety of local people officers. So I thought that when I started to do that, I was asked by Andy to take care of that. I had those meetings with people and I felt this kind of resistance that maybe, you know, it's always when something new is happening. So I think some of people thought that I will, you know, come and say, okay, so this is our employer branding strategy, do that and don't do any more of those things that you are doing for your office. So that was the first thing that I felt. I cannot confirm that it was true. That was something that I felt when I started to do that. That was something that I felt when I started to do that.

Then, yeah, it turned out that for us, employer branding means slightly different things. It was something different in Poland because it was this internal identity that was taken outside. But for the UK employer branding was mostly, you know, job fairs and stuff like that and recruitment marketing. So that was the employer branding for them. So the other thing was the common definition that we will follow as a group. So that was the challenge. And the third one was direction that we want to take, because there were more important things for various groups, for various offices, and the thing that helped us to overcome that was the team meeting in person.

Here in Poland we did that last year in September, where we just met in this group. We had those calls. We had, you know, during those calls because I had these monthly calls with all the leaders. So in every meeting we had this presentation. So every country was presenting what they are doing in terms of employer branding, what are data that they are gathering, what are the measurements right now. So what are the challenges, what are the opportunities and stuff.

But it wasn't connecting us that much and we were inventing kind of a low hanging fruit just to, you know, take care of that and to do something, that we are doing something on our employer branding. But when we met, we sat together, we just, you know, talked, we learned more about each other and that was something that changed everything and that was something that gave us the boost to recognize the most urgent areas that we want to cover, and I remember that was this social calendar. So, you know, doing some events together, not everything. We don't have to repeat every single event in every office, but we want to have, quarterly, one event that we are doing together in all the offices, like we did the British Pie Week. That was crazy. It was impossible to find, you know, pies with meat. Who eats that? Really, I bought an apple pie In Porto is an apple pie.

34:46 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Yeah, yeah, I know pies with meat. Who eats that really? I bought an apple pie In Porto. It was an apple pie.

34:50 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Yeah, yeah, I know, I know we also wanted to, so that was also the solution. But amazingly, our office team found a provider of these British pies with meat and it was delicious really, but it was so surreal that's the good word. It was so surreal, yeah, but it happened. And now we have got Portugal, then we will have Hungary, then we will have Poland and the next year China. So we will just, you know, follow that and do something that will help us to connect in this very, I would say, very minor way, because this is really casual, nice thing that we do and nothing more.

The other one was internal comms, so doing the common business update for everyone once a month to provide a stream of communication to people. That was also a very important thing. Then, leaders our approach to leaders, support for leaders, because we found out that leaders are the most important figures in the company, so they are kind of culture advocates or evangelists, culture advocates or evangelists and they just transfer the culture to teams, to people. So this is something that is important as well was onboarding, for sure. So our approach to onboarding, or elements because, again, you cannot do the same if you have got different I don't know law when it comes to hiring people to HR yeah, exactly, employment law, and we have got different offices and different technologies that we do.

So it cannot be the same. But it needs to have the same core, the same values, the same elements. So, yeah, and we started to work on that and then it was going really well. Then the rebranding came, so we had this big stop before we were announced in Enterprise Solutions.

It was like three months, so it was really difficult to do anything but, we still continued to do, for example, newsletters and stuff, and, of course, everything that is going on locally because, as you noticed and as you said, you know your culture, your people, your team, your office, in a way that I cannot ever know those people, so you know what they want, you know what they need, what will be beneficial, what will secure their attention. So do whatever is needed, if it's still in line with the values, if it's still in line with the business approach what do you want?

37:57 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

One thing that I kind of find interesting is how do you guys measure the success of the employer branding?

38:04 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

So we do have the whole set of measurements. So, definitely, net promoter score is something that gives us a lot of information, because the survey includes not only scoring the company but also there's an open question that you can share and you can tell what company is doing well and what we can do more and stuff. The next one is

all in survey, so it measures job satisfaction and the most important factors that influences that. So it gives us direction of areas that we would like to improve. Then we measure retention and turnover right every year. So we follow that and we can see, for example, how many people left, how many people we hired.

Then we measure events. Well, firstly, internal comps, so we measure how many people attend the meetings, how many people read the newsletters, stuff like that, but also we measure events in a way that okay, so how many people we are looking for, what kind of events we are attending externally, how many different types or job fairs or something. What's the outcome? So how many candidates do we have? And also in the offices, what's the outcome? So how many candidates do we have? And also in the offices, how many people attend various events? Just let me master data and I will tell you maybe more, because I have got that, because I have got that, yeah, business updates, attendance mailing statistics and social media followers, of course as well. It's not like for employer branding you don't have one measurement one KPI.

40:01 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Yeah, it's a lot.

40:02 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

It's a lot of them and you have to combine the most important.

40:10 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

It's going to be one thing for one area of the employer branding. So, keeping in mind the employer retention and turnover that you talked about, would you say that employer branding is the most important or the best new tool to reduce or to have more retention in the current corporate world?

40:37 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

I would say this is something that can help. It's not the only or the most important thing. I would say it's something that supports, because to be sure that people are not leaving, you have to be sure that all the basics are in place. So if they are getting a

good salary, if they are treating equally and well in the company, they have got the opportunity to progress in their careers. So all that thing because this is something that we come to work, yes, so to have money and to develop, so those two things this is something that is, you know, basic and it's kind of outside the employer branding. So you won't do the perfect employer branding when you don't pay people enough or you are underpaying them or you don't provide any development opportunities. So those HR indicators have to be okay and then you can build employer branding and it definitely supports building the culture, like in this employee value proposition pyramid. So those economical things have to be in place and then you can think of creating more value for employees and this is something at some point that decides if people stay or not. Recently I was doing the exit interviews analysis for Poland but I had these answers that if someone, the other company will offer people 10%, 15% more of the salary. They are not interested in that Because there is a certain level of culture of feeling like you belong to the company. Sorry that you don't consider changing job. The money has to be really, really, really better to do that. If you are an honest employer and if you treat people fair, in that case employer branding is a game changer because it is keeping your culture in place. It's not like it's creating your culture no, no, no. It's like it supports and it allows that to develop, because it's a clever way to making sure that you are going in the right direction. And, yeah, in that case, it will support that and we can.

When you consider Poland, yeah, I will come back to that because this is the closest one for me but the moment that we didn't have employer branding was during the pandemic in 2021. 2020, 2021, we've changed, we've rebranded to Wundermann Thompson. We were cognified before and people felt really connected to the brand, like it was their family and home, and suddenly the pandemic happened. So we didn't have those connections in the office and we've changed our name and it was a moment when we weren't able to do anything like in this real employer branding because there was no company and there was no office. So how to do that? And that was the moment where we had the highest turnover rate and most people left, and they left because of the money.

When we came back to the office, when we've rebranded and settled in that and we started to build our employer branding strategy again on the new foundations, asking people again how they feel, what they think about the company and how they describe that it's improved definitely, like you can see that, yeah, really that, for example, last year it was 60 people who left no, not last year, it's 2022. 60 people who left and last year only 40. So, yeah, the turnover rate lowered from 22% to 10% After a year of strategy being in place, like this very, very strong strategy here in Poland because, as I said, we have got kind of our specific one, but it is definitely connected to the group one.

45:34 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

I just have one last question, and this is really specific to the diversity and inclusion. So how would you say that the company employee branding strategy reflects the commitment to diversity and inclusion, and if you could provide any examples?

46:03 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Well, I think this is reflected and this is in the core of our values, even if we consider the previous ones. Yeah, positivity in it, together, you know, inclusion, diversity, belonging this is something that is a foundation and it defines all the work, all the teams, all the offices here and we, just in our initiatives, we support that at every step. So, for example, for diversity and inclusion, we do those cultural events, yeah, in the offices In Portugal. You are masters in that. You have got so many people from so many different countries and you do the Diwali and other thing and I don't know Chinese New Year or something. Everything is happening in Portugal. You know you are the perfect example, to be honest, when it comes to that. So this is your way of doing that.

But also for International Women's Day, we did something together too. So we did that charity that we do in Poland, project Shoebox. It was done also in Hungary and the UK. So this is kind of a collection of toiletries and beauty items and cosmetics and we do that for International Women's Day and we give those boxes filled with items

to women who suffer from poverty, who suffer from domestic abuse, from homelessness, abuse from homelessness. So our sustainability, our social responsibility is also focused on that, on including people again to the society. So that was another example. Yeah, I think also that, when it comes to learning and development, we have got always, when there is, for example, pride Week or other events like that, we always have got some webinars, some events, you know, offered to employees. They are free to attend to this kind of event.

48:30 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Uh, yeah, and, as I said, everything that we do, it's like in the core of that is our drive for diversity, inclusion and belonging I think that from my side this should be everything, because I feel like we talked about every single question that I had in every single way possible, and even right now, when we talk about this question, I had a question about the initiatives or programs that we have to support different backgrounds, and even that we kind of talked about with the cultural events. I just have one question would L&D be part of the employer branding or is it not?

49:18 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

just so we don't make a mistake yeah, so this is kind of a different department, but still I think again, we follow the same values and the same rules, so one feeds to other. So whatever is going on in learning and development is building our employer brand, but on the other hand, we are also inspiring some of the events, I don't know.

49:44 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Yeah, Because, for example, the Berks I is, they're still named Burke's right the employer by alice for employees resources groups yeah exactly? They are still a part of the employer branding, or would they be a lnd in?

50:06 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

I don't know, because works are organized by global VML, not by the enterprise solutions, so it's something outside our jurisdiction and I know that it's not quite known and popular in enterprise solutions because when you consider last year, all in survey and there was a question about how helpful for you are birds, only 20 something percent people answered that they know what is it? About. So I think maybe in London some of the people, but definitely not in the group. It's not something that we do locally in our offices.

50:57 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Okay, and just one quick question, sorry, because I forgot about it, and that's the feedback from the diverse employees. How do you normally address their concerns or issues related to their different backgrounds? So I assume most of the feedback that you get nowadays would be through the leads or, for example, in the case of Portugal, the feedback that you get would be through Rita. How is that feedback normally applied to the employer branding?

51:42 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

I don't recall that kind of situation. To be honest, I don't know if any feedback came back to me from any part of the business regarding that. I guess something might be included in the CNPS survey, but for now we need to wait because I'm doing that for the first time. It was done by someone else before me and that person got retired last year, so this is kind of the first one that will happen.

52:20 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Okay, so from my side is everything. Thank you so much and I'm sorry for taking so much of your time. No worries, I hope you had a good time as well.

52:32 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

I'm happy, I'm really happy to meet you in person. Thank you, yeah, we've only talked via Teams, so I'm really happy that we had this opportunity. I hope that it will be

useful for you, and if you need anything else, I'm always happy to help and you can reach out to me anytime you want. So, yeah, I will make sure I will find time, no worries, and yeah, I'm really happy that people are still interested in that area, that people are still interested in that area.

53:08 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Yes, even before I got the internship, I was already thinking about doing something about employer branding. So it was really cool when I got here and I was like, oh, I can actually write about it. So I'm really happy and, if you're okay with it, when I have the chapter written I will send it to you, just so you can check it out and see if everything is okay with you whatever you need, thank you so much, thank you very much.

53:37 - Magdalena Kornaś-Owsiana (Guest)

Have a nice afternoon have a good afternoon.

53:39 - Sara Ferreira (Host)

Bye, thank you.