



PERSONAL BRANDING AN ANSWER TO EMPLOYABILITY – A CONCEPTUAL NEEDBASE ANALYSIS

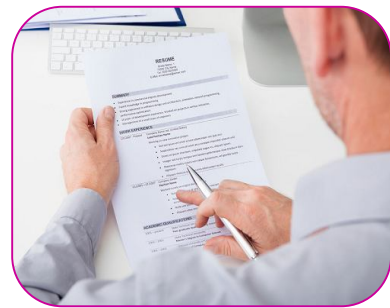
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ABSTRACT

Personal branding is a planned process that helps individuals make conscious efforts towards branding themselves in the market with underpinned intensions of gainful employment, entrepreneurial image or celebrity like visibility. A Personal brand is said to be the perception about oneself in the minds of others. Thus, the personal branding process is helpful for students to compete in the crowded employment market with focused objectives of employability that matches their personal and professional expectations. The paper discusses changing paradigms in the employment contracts that have led to emergence of non-linear careers. Increased onus on employees to manage their careers rather than it being the employer's prerogative. Making it imperative for individuals to continuously explore themselves and upgrade their skills to be of value in the market. Personal branding is taken as the fix for the flexibility and flux in the market. Various models of personal branding and some shortcomings or negative lashes about the phenomenon discussed will give readers a chance for reflection and thereafter use of Personal Branding to enhance employability.



KEYWORDS: Personal branding, employability, Career Grid Typology.

INTRODUCTION :

Progression of linear careers to non-linear career (Sullivan et al., 1998), advances in technology (Coovert 1995), increased workforce diversity (England, et al., 1996), increased global competition (Rosenthal 1995) and changing organizational structures (Clarke 2008), have changed the central nature of careers. Career patterns emerging with corrosion of job security are leading to increased attention on employability as contemporary employment relationships (Clarke 2008). As employers are not able to extend job-security as well as career-security, the imperative then lies on the employees to find alternative ways for ensuring on-going employment.

Changing paradigms in the job market are making it imperative for individuals to continuously explore themselves and upgrade their skills to be of value in the market. Personal Branding is claimed to have been come to light in 1997 by Tom Peters' in his article "The Band Called YOU" with *FastCompany* (Khedher, 2014; 2015). Ever since then, a steady popularity of the topic by consultancies, self-improvement books, websites, and self-help modules. Thus, Personal Branding is a process essentially "inside-out that serves to encapsulate the current strengths and uniqueness of the individual" (Shepherd 2005) in relation to the target audience. Rather than trying to sell 'new and improved' version of self, personal branding is about recognizing the inner and authentic you and proclaiming it to the world.

With primary focus on Personal branding, the paper is divided into two parts. First, we try to understand the need for personal branding by way of witnessing the changing paradigms in the employment market. Then, we propose Personal branding as the answer to the question of employability.

CHANGING PARADIGMS OF EMPLOYABILITY

Like any dynamic process involving many players evolves with time, employment in the job market with employers and employees as players has evolved, is evolving and will continuously evolve. Towards understanding the undercurrents of this phenomenon, put forth is history of changing employment contracts.

Till the dawn of 1800s, jobs were fundamentally activities linked to continuously changing 'tasks' rather than any specific position having clearly defined boundaries (Bridges, 1994), work force comprised of craftsmen and itinerant workers who took up responsibilities for their own employability (Bagshaw, 1997) and apprising their skillsets as per the task requirement (Garavan, 1999).

Setting in of the Industrial Revolution altered the employment models with growth in the manufacturing and financial sectors (Clarke, 2008), resulting into emergence of the organizational careers with structured roles and long-term contracts (Bridges, 1994). In such an environment, being 'employable' meant possession of knowledge, skills and behaviors that were company specific (Rousseau, 1995). Therefore employees devoted themselves towards organizational chores and the organization in return provided the employees with job and career security. Careers were essentially managed by the employers with tangible measures like having particular job title and nominating 'good' people for training and development.

Now with the dawn of the 20th century, career patterns altered significantly, as organizations experienced extensive and on-going restructuring by way of downsizing, in response to the ever increasing competitive pressure (Cascio, 1993). Thus, the previously offered long-term hierarchical careers on organizations were no longer a promise of job security; thereby making way for shorter-term contracts as against lifetime employment (Capelli, 1999b). Employees were encouraged to remain attractive in the labor market for an on-going employment through enhanced job profiles and lateral moves, along with multiple career paths. Under these new arrangements, individuals were stimulated to think of themselves as 'self-employed' (Garavan, 1999) and take charge of the careers even when they were employed by an organization. In addition, organizations looked at tapping ready supply of employees with advanced "generic skills" (Clarke, 2008) rather than those with only firm specific skills.

As a progressive process, employability has also witnessed progression, both from the consumers i.e. employers and providers i.e. employees. Employability defined by Hillage and Pollard (1998) states that it is "the capacity to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment". Early 20th century definition of employability stated it to be 'an individual's ability to find a job, retain a job and move between jobs and/or industries should the need arise (McLeish, 2002; & Brown et al., 2003). Further (Sanders and de Grip 2004) said it was the capacity and the willingness to be and to remain attractive in the labor market, by anticipating changes in tasks and work environment and reacting to these changes in a proactive way. From these definitions, we observe that with time, the definitions of employability have shifted base. From capacity to move self-sufficiently within the labor market (Hillage and Pollard 1998), to individual's ability to move between jobs and/or industries (McLeish, 2002 & Brown et al., 2003) to capacity and willingness to remain attractive by being proactive (Sanders and de Grip (2004). Therefore, we observe the shifting emphasis of employability more and more on the employees. To understand the progression of employability we need to understand various components as to why employers along with employees started promoting employability.

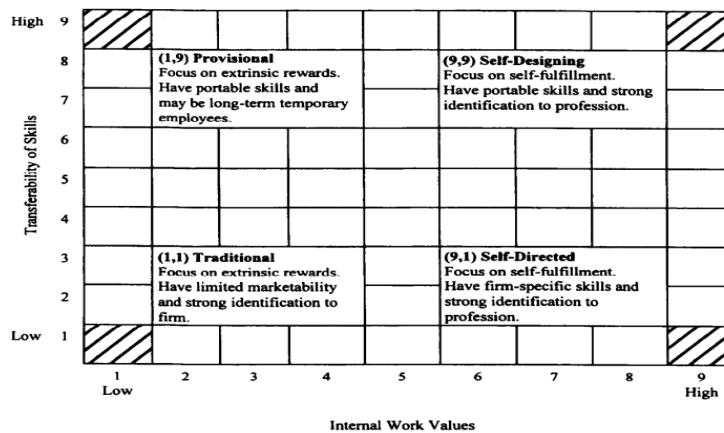
Besides the individual factors, (Clarke, 2008) proposes both organizational and demographic changes as contextual factors that have increased interest in employability. First being, Demand – Supply Imbalance. As organizations continue to downsize, restructure (Piore, 2002), delay and outsource (Clarke 2008) there

has been growing emphasis on flexibility and employability over long-term job security. Further (Clarke 2008) asserts that demographic changes also contribute to the growing interest in employability. In countries like the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia, declining birth rates and aging populations resulted in skill and labor shortage (Clarke 2008; McDonald and Kippen, 2001; Dixon, 2003; Burke and Ng, 2006), making way for geographic movement of labor. Geographic movements (Burke and Ng, 2006) to a large extent are a result of this demographic changes, where employee shortage is met by expanding the labor supply through skilled migration schemes. Movement from one geographic area to other requires development of newer skill sets.

Secondly, changing Employment Model with erosion of job security (Clarke 2008) giving rise to Individualism and ownership of one’s career as against Parentalism (career progression of employees was on the employer). Employees take it on themselves to remain attractive in the market by undergoing training & development and short-term employments. Finally, availability of jobs or opportunities define the labor market conditions. In Narrow Labor Market, there are limited opportunities for employees and in Competitive Labor Market; all of them have similar skill sets. To these, ‘attitude and behavior’ of the employees (Clarke 2008) are other factors that also play a significant role in employment paradigms.

By integrating career development literature and evolving organizational forms, the Career Grid Typology by Sullivan (1998) is examined to understand the paradigms of career patterns.

CAREER GRID TYPOLOGY



Sherry Sullivan’s Career Grid Typology, plots employability onto 2 dimensional continua. Horizontal scale that measures the “Internal Work Values” are defined as the seemingly stable goals that individuals attempt to achieve throughout their careers. The focus is more on intrinsic attributes such as autonomy, satisfaction and challenges in the job, rather than the extrinsic outcomes. Vertical scale measures the Transferability of Skills that is defined by how transferable or organization specific an individual’s knowledge, skills and abilities are (Baker & Aldrich 1996; Bird 1996; Waterman, Waterman & Collard 1994).

Employees having high internal work values give more importance to passion over profits, as they personally ascertain what they do (Mohrman & Cohen 1995). Employees with low internal work values pursue economic rewards as their driving force and immediate career outcomes such as promotion, pay, and status (Sverko & Vizek-Vidovic 1995; London & Stumpf 1982), giving more importance to profits over passion. Alongside, employees having highly transferable skills are not bound to the organization and are highly marketable, since their skills are transferable such that they can be applied to different organizational settings. Employees with low transferable skills are organizationally bound, and as their competencies are less useful in different organizational settings (Becker 1964; Hirsch & Shanley 1996). Employees with high

transferable skills are not organizationally bound and their competencies can be useful in different organizational settings.

Based on the grid, employees can be categorized infourquadrants:

X Axis: Transferability of Skills	Y Axis: Internal Work Values	
	Low (Profit seeking)	High (Passion driven)
Low Transferable skills	Traditional These employees rate low on both the internal work values as well as transferability of skills, they are driven by extrinsic factors like profits and promotions and do not move to other job or organizations due to lack of transferable skills. They have strong identification with the firm.	Self-Directed These employees are low on the transferability of skills making them complacent in the jobs or organizations that they are in, however they are driven by the passion and love for their job which makes them stay in the organization.
	Provisional These employees are low on the internal work values as they are more profit seeking and high on transferability of skills making them job hoppers seeking tangible benefits.	Self-Designing These employees rate high on both the axis due to which they are the types whose passion drives them and it's that passion for work that makes them learn skills specific to their interest rather than organization specific.
High Transferable skills		

Employability therefore becomes the individual's primary responsibility for his on-going employment, for managing his career across jobs and organizations (Baruch, 2001); while the employer provides opportunities for his development by offering work only as long as the person is needed. In a world witnessing increasing flexibility and flex, branding works as a fix (Hearn, 2008). Individuals should undertake personal branding to develop their human capital by investing in continuous learning; enhance their social capital through visibility, which gives them access to financial success and economic profitability (Khedler 2014).

NEED FOR PERSONAL BRANDING

Brand is of a transactional nature (Hines 2004) and thereby your professional audience such as clients, colleagues, family, neighbors, and even the man on street (Montoya 2005) participate in the creation of your personal brand. Personal branding as a concept is not new (Potgieter, et al., 2017). Like employability, personal branding phenomenon has progressed over time and is seen in the clarity the concept has got with time. Peters' in (1997) motivated everyone to be CEOs of their own companies; in (1999) he added the aspect of 'sign of distinction' to stand out. Further (Roffler 2002) shared that personal branding was about finding the 'big idea' that is core to you. It is a strong personal identity based on a clear perception about what you stand for (Kaputa, 2003). Thus it should consist of those various activities that individuals undertake to make themselves better known in the market, usually, though not exclusively, for the reasons of obtaining beneficial employment (Shepherd, 2005) and to ensure you get out in front of the pack (Arruda, 2005).

Thus, Personal branding is the perception of others based on the values and qualities, reflection of beliefs, expression of what and how one does it. Resulting into all the expectations and associations made by others with the individual (Arruda et al., 2007; Rampersad, 2009; McNally, and Speak, 2011; Montoya, and Vandehey, 2005; Peters, 1997; Potgieter, et al., 2017). Everyone has a personal brand from birth, but not all are aware of it. It is vital to manage your personal brand, and if you do not manage your personal brand, others will manage it for you (Kaputa 2003), and which might not be desirable.

Personal Branding primarily used for distinguishing oneself from the others for gainful returns finds many avenues where it is extensively used. Literature notes its use in celebrity, sports, politicians and entertainment industry (Rein et al. 2006), business CEOs (Chen et al., 2016), researchers or research scholars (Trefzger & Dünfelder, 2016). In personal life as noted by (Whitty, 2008), personal branding is heavily used for dating. Other forms of internet-based self-expression applications like online-chatting, personal websites, blogs and gaming witness usage of personal branding by the participants wanting to leverage technology for standing out of the crowd (Schau & Mary C. Gilly, 2003) and deploying strategies of constructing a 'digital self' for projecting a digital likeness for associating newer forms of possession. In his book (Turkle, 2011), go to extend to say that computers are changing the self's evolution, relationships, politics and sex to create new sense of identity.

The Web 2.0 has opened multiple platforms and avenues for communication, eliminating identity cues of demographic boundaries of age, appearance, gender, race, physical ability and socioeconomic status. In the empirical study conducted by (CHEN, 2013), demographics have not shown any significant difference in the awareness and acceptance of Personal Branding phenomenon.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND PERSONAL BRANDING

With the rise of social media, personal brands are being built not just for professional consumptions but more for social consumption. Digital mediums like Facebook, YouTube, Google, Twitter, Blogs, Myspace and other online applications have made it difficult to not have a personal brand (Khedher, 2013). Technological disruptions are changing the face of communication and brand communities (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002), as brand-consumers are responsible for creating and negotiating the meanings of relationships between customers and brand. Where Twitter (Brems, Temmerman, Graham, & Broersma, 2016), offers an opportunity for the person to become a news or opinion-hub to increase his/her market value, YouTube (Pace, 2008), is leveraged as DIY (do-it-yourself) medium for self's storytelling. Moreover, mediums like YouTube (CHEN, 2013) eliminate the barriers of one-way communication by brands; example Television commercials (Szmigin, Canning, & Reppel, 2005), into a relationship that exchanges emotions to a bidirectional social bond.

Given the intense competitive markets with highly qualified post graduates passing-out from the management institutes year-on-year, a well thought-off personal branding exercise comprising of combinations of strategies of self-awareness and self-promotion, can help graduates and their institutes differentiate their graduates from competitors beyond utilitarian and functional characteristics. (Shepherd 2005) in his study states that Personal Branding is a process fundamentally an 'inside-out' that captures the existing strengths and uniqueness of an individual in relation to his/her target audience. Rather than trying to sell 'new and improved' version of self, personal branding is about recognizing the inner and authentic you and proclaiming it to the world. Taking the case of marketing graduates, (Jackson 2014) suggests that employers look for 2 skill sets in marketing graduates, first – knowledge of marketing theories and second – hard and soft skills called as employability skills. He further emphasizes that if employability skills are not provided to the marketing graduates', they may not have distinctive advantage over other college majors for securing jobs and continued success thereafter. (Rampersad, 2008), sights the importance of having a Personal Brand for the entry level jobs by which a graduate employee would give the employers clear idea about his/her skills and values that differentiate him/her, such that employers can get professionals he can trust and believe.

PERSONAL BRANDING MODELS FROM LITERATURE

Numerous academicians and self-help gurus have proposed theories and models on the topic of personal branding and all of them have their unique model to share.

In the Personal Branding website article, the personal branding self-help guru William Arruda (Arruda, n.d.) has shared the 3 step process flow for anyone to build their Personal Brand. First step is to *Unearth Your Brand*, where he appeals the personal branders to first know themselves and their competitors. Second step is to *Express Yourself*; where Arruda asserts that just like any product brand, the personal branding practitioners should also be conscious of their projections by aligning all their action, appearances, communications and all aspects of their activity towards the formulated 'brand', to an extent that he says, 'Live and Breathe your brand'. Finally, to gauge the impact of the entire effort, he wants the personal branding practitioners to *Evaluate and Evolve*. With 'Evolve', he emphasizes the personal branding practitioners to remain relevant to the target audiences by modifying the step # 2 by evaluating alterations required in the communication, actions, appearance as per the need-be.

In their second book on the topic (David McNally, 2003), have given a more detailed road map that suggests to "become more of who you are", by adding dimensions that are "Distinctive, Relevant, and Consistent", followed by adding more authenticity by defining your brand's "Purpose, Vision and Values". They suggest that all the efforts taken by personal branding practitioners should align with the employer's brand.

Four phases that lead to creation of a strong personal brand shared by Rampersad (2008a) emphasizes the importance of values and perceptions of the brand practitioner towards projecting the desired image through a personal brand that is authentic and truthful. In the first phase, personal brand practitioner should identify the personal ambition, personal mission and vision and what differentiates him from others i.e. self-knowledge and self-awareness. The second phase is about formulating your personal brand by defining your brand promise that defines your future actions, behaviors and other guiding principles. Phase three, is about formulating the personal brand balanced scorecard by way of identifying critical success factors, objectives, performance measures, setting personal targets and persona improvement actions. The final phase is about the action where personal branding process begins the implementation of your personal ambition, personal brand and personal balanced scorecard.

Academician (Khedher, 2015) also suggests a three stage plan for building a Personal Brand. The first step is based on Perrier Bourdieu's theory of investing in cultural capital and social capital within established organizational fields, brand practitioner identifies the cultural capitals namely educational degrees, certification courses, trainings etc. that he has. In the second step, based on Goffman Dramaturgy of *'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life'*, the practitioner should be managing impressions by artifacts, verbal and non-verbal behaviors in every day, every interaction to be consistent with the brand. Finally, in the third step, based on Schon's Reflexivity theory, personal brand practitioner should be assessing the personal brand by requiring reflexivity-in-action and reflexivity-on-action.

Any newer concept first attracts cynicism from the outsiders and with deeper understanding gains acceptance and adoption. Similar is the case with personal branding phenomenon, discussed below are few conflicting views that the personal branding practitioner should weigh before embarking onto it.

CONFLICTING VIEWS

The personal branding phenomenon has attracted some negative light in the literature, it gets in conflict with critics on moral grounds of self-commoditization (Shepherd 2009), issues to do with privacy of the information, appropriate publicity or the lack of it, unwanted attention and negative feedback (Gratschew 2016). Some detailed shortcomings of the phenomenon are:

Life-as-company philosophy: according to (Walker 2000), similar to how it is fashionable for corporations to respond to change by continuously redefining its mission, individuals have to self-market to make perfect

sense in a world. Like corporations, people have started to learn to think in short term. Individuals as against corporations are prone to poaching and advancement offers, giving rise to a potential conflict of interest between the individual's advancement and that of the corporation with whom they are employed, thereby a conflict in needs and rights of the employers and that of the employees.

Brand failures: The stance made by (Peter's 2003) promises that 'everyone has a chance to stand out'; is contested by (Haig 2003) since having personal brand cannot itself guarantee success, since brand failures in mainstream businesses are very well known off.

Natural self's consistency with the 'Brand You': personal branding author Peter Montoya and consultants William Arruda, suggest that personal brand is about "your strengths, values, goals and personality that tells people who you are, what you do and why you're unique" (Montoya 2005). "Express yourself and what you stand for to everyone you come into contact with", (Arruda 2005) "branding is something you've got to live daily to reap the benefits". These advices from the experts suggest the drift that individuals can no longer be their multiple personalities in life with varying attitudes and contrasting goals (Shepherd 2005).

Law of diminishing returns: as highlighted in the editorial review for the book by Andrusia and Haskins's (2000), questions the advantage of personal branding for late adapters. The early adapters shall benefit from the art of personal branding, however the law of diminishing returns will sooner or later set in, with no comparative advantage to enjoy when a majority pass-out from universities prepared with their Personal Brand Statement.

Is Personal Branding Management Fashion / Fad? (Danny Miller, 2004) classified Management techniques and concepts as fads or classics. Where, a *fad* has "no lasting influence on business practice" a *classic* is "more durable practice and technique". Personal branding is criticized for being a management fashion however, (CHEN 2013) through his empirical findings states that personal branding is here to stay.

Managing ones' self and life is a guaranteed way of achieving professional success (Arruda 2003) and happiness (Rampersad 2009; Schawbel 2009). The stance is here to stay as the most ardent critics of personal branding come together in one voice to conclude that "[a]ccessible and affordable personal branding is here to stay" (Conley 2008); "potentially crucial idea" (Shepherd 2005), personal branding being called as a "sociocultural intuition" (Lair et al. 2005). As the author (Zarkada 2012) very ably showcases in her work that personal branding is not commodification of the 'person' but of 'hope'. Hope of standing out from crowd, being acknowledged, feeling unique, and a solution for obscurity and loneliness.

NEED IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

With mushrooming amount of services provided by self-help books, career advisors, websites and self-proclaimed gurus that Shepherd calls 'enthusiasts', being the primary source for advice on the subject, (Shepherd 2005) questions that "is it beyond the wit or ambition of mainstream marketing to put its own seal of approval on these [self-marketing and personal branding] potentially crucial ideas?" Literature highlights three important gaps that are making it all the more imperative for mainstream to embrace personal branding for employability enhancement.

- Low coverage in academic marketing literature - (Shepherd 2005) has attempted to explore the current popular interest in self-marketing and personal branding from marketing as an academic discipline, however, the challenge he feels is absorption of these concept into the ever-broadening pantheon of marketing along with attending their advocacy and practice for conceptual and practical issues.
- Kaputa (2003) "if you don't brand yourself, others will, you're giving the power to other people to brand you if you don't do it yourself". Since self-brands are created not born, if you do not initiate the process

of branding yourself the way you want to be perceived by others and making moves accordingly, others will do it the way they perceive you. Making personal branding an inevitable endeavour.

- Attention Economy – as observed by (Davenport and Beck 2001), emergence of technology such as cell phones and the internet easily available and cheap on pocket, pose a significant challenge for having the voice heard in ever-increasing attention economy. Empirical research has yet not contributed enough to contradict this claim (Shepherd 2005).

CONCLUSION

Seeing employability and personal branding literature, some notable themes that come out are indicate that the Personal Brand should be authentic to the real you, while being distinctive and consistent. There should be an alignment between your Personal Brand and that of the employer has or target audience. Finally, introspection, self-awareness and reflection are tools to learn from the hindsight; whereas as market analysis, matching employer's needs and understanding future trends are foresight, that helps the personal brand remain relevant. Some of the strategies that can be deployed for gainful results of employability by adopting personal branding activities are discussed below.

Life-long learning mindset- In an effort to upgrade and modify one's employability, employees are expected to learn, un-learn and re-learn the knowledge that they have. As (Clarke 2008) highlights, the conventional concept of education pertaining to particular job profile or profession has been overwritten by the life-long learning concept. (O'Donoghue and Maguire, 2005, p. 439) states that consequently life-long learning has now become 'a potent survival tool' rather than an optional extra. Quoting (Arruda 2007), 'whatever direction you take, make sure your brand continues to be authentic, differentiated and consistent.'

Personal branding an answer to Employability- Personal branding is more than just online presence. It is first about you as a person and only second as your online self. In-depth understanding through various personal branding activities is vital for creating and maintaining the personal brand. Personal branding can be a meeting point for candidates and recruiters for gaining visibility and selling point for recruitment. Personal branding efforts can help identify competencies and experience necessary for transition from campus to corporate and expose graduates to those types of critical workplace skills that employers look for. It is a platform for cultivating a collaborative partnership between industry and academia by greater involvement of graduates in enhancing their employability and greater involvement of employers and industry for getting right fit of talent for organizational requirements.

The study is further important for the society, with a view to enhance the socio-economic equality among the society. Changing organizational structures, emergent career outlines and the gradual corrosion of job and career security have increased the emphasis on employability and thus changing the modern employment relationships (Clarke 2008). As employers are not able to provide career and job security, it is then the employees who require finding other ways to move through the career paths to ensure on-going employment. Rather than being observed as an abrogation of employer responsibility (Baruch 2004), employability could be taken as a rational response to the transactional nature of employment contracts in the 21st century. The shifting emphasis even suggests that employees, not the employer have been the instigators pushing for greater self-control over careers.

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