# THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SUBJECTIVATION APPARATUS IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

## A MARCA EMPREGADORA COMO DISPOSITIVO DE SUBJETIVAÇÃO DAS ORGANIZAÇÕES CONTEMPORÂNEAS

## LA MARCA EMPLEADORA COMO DISPOSITIVO DE SUBJETIVACIÓN EN LAS ORGANIZACIONES CONTEMPORÁNEAS

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This theoretical article aims to explore the employer branding strategy as a subjectification device in contemporary organizations, analyzing its impact on workers' identity and behavior.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** We conducted a selective literature review that theoretically underpins the dynamics of employer branding in the context of contemporary capitalism. We explore the gap in integrating Marketing and Organizational Studies, adopting a critical approach and selecting seminal sources to contextualize this phenomenon within current capitalist dynamics.

**Results:** The results highlight employer branding not only as a Human Resources strategy but also as a worker subjectification device. This critical approach expands traditional analyses of the brand's role in the organizational environment.

**Limitations/Research Implications:** Limitations include the need for empirical studies to validate theoretical conclusions, emphasizing the complexity of employer branding and the importance of conscious approaches in people management.

**Practical Implications:** The study emphasizes the importance of conscious approaches in people management and in building employer branding to promote a sustainable and ethical organizational culture.

**Social Implications:** The manuscript addresses the formation of worker subjectivities, questioning the role of organizations in shaping these subjectivities and pointing to the need for more ethical and socially responsible practices.

**Theoretical Implications:** The study contributes to Organizational Studies by highlighting gaps in the literature and proposing a critical analysis of employer branding strategy, challenging conventional perspectives.

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**Originality/Value:** The study's originality lies in the critical approach to employer branding as a subjectification device. It contributes to Organizational Studies and suggests ethical practices in people management.

**Keywords:** Employer branding. Subjectification device. Organizational strategy.

**RESUMO**

**Objetivo:** Este artigo teórico tem como objetivo explorar a estratégia da marca empregadora como um dispositivo de subjetivação nas organizações contemporâneas, analisando seu impacto na identidade e comportamento dos trabalhadores.

**Design/Metodologia/Abordagem:** Realizou-se uma revisão seletiva da literatura que embasa teoricamente as dinâmicas da marca empregadora no contexto do capitalismo contemporâneo. Explorou-se a lacuna na integração entre Marketing e Estudos Organizacionais, adotando uma abordagem crítica e selecionando fontes seminalistas para contextualizar esse fenômeno dentro das dinâmicas atuais do capitalismo.

**Resultados:** Os resultados destacam a marca empregadora não apenas como uma estratégia de Recursos Humanos, mas como um dispositivo de subjetivação do trabalhador. Essa abordagem crítica amplia as análises tradicionais sobre o papel da marca no ambiente organizacional.

**Limitações/Implicações da Pesquisa:** As limitações incluem a necessidade de estudos empíricos para validar conclusões teóricas, ressaltando a complexidade da marca empregadora e a importância de abordagens conscientes na gestão de pessoas.

**Implicações Práticas:** O estudo destaca a importância de abordagens conscientes na gestão de pessoas e na construção da marca empregadora para promover uma cultura organizacional sustentável e ética.

**Implicações Sociais:** O manuscrito aborda a formação de subjetividades dos trabalhadores, questionando o papel das organizações na modelagem dessas subjetividades e apontando para a necessidade de práticas mais éticas e socialmente responsáveis.

**Implicações Teóricas:** No âmbito teórico, o estudo contribui para os Estudos Organizacionais ao destacar lacunas na literatura e propor uma análise crítica da estratégia da marca empregadora, desafiando perspectivas convencionais.

**Originalidade/Valor:** A originalidade do estudo está na abordagem crítica da marca empregadora como dispositivo de subjetivação. Contribui para os Estudos Organizacionais e sugere práticas éticas na gestão de pessoas.

**Palavras-chave:** Marca empregadora. Dispositivo de subjetivação. Estratégia organizacional.

**RESUMEN**

**Objetivo:** Este artículo teórico tiene como objetivo explorar la estrategia de la marca empleadora como un dispositivo de subjetivación en las organizaciones contemporáneas, analizando su impacto en la identidad y comportamiento de los trabajadores.

**Diseño/Metodología/Aproximación:** Realizamos una revisión selectiva de la literatura que fundamenta teóricamente las dinámicas de la marca empleadora en el contexto del capitalismo contemporáneo. Exploramos la brecha en la integración entre Marketing y Estudios Organizacionales, adoptando un enfoque crítico y seleccionando fuentes seminales para contextualizar este fenómeno dentro de las dinámicas actuales del capitalismo.

**Resultados:** Los resultados destacan que la marca empleadora no es solo una estrategia de Recursos Humanos, sino también un dispositivo de subjetivación del trabajador. Este enfoque crítico amplía los análisis tradicionales sobre el papel de la marca en el entorno organizacional.

**Limitaciones/Implicaciones de la Investigación:** Las limitaciones incluyen la necesidad de estudios empíricos para validar conclusiones teóricas, resaltando la complejidad de la marca empleadora y la importancia de enfoques conscientes en la gestión de personas.

**Implicaciones Prácticas:** El estudio destaca la importancia de enfoques conscientes en la gestión de personas y en la construcción de la marca empleadora para promover una cultura organi-

zacional sostenible y ética.

**Implicaciones Sociales:** El manuscrito aborda la formación de subjetividades de los trabajadores, cuestionando el papel de las organizaciones en la modelación de estas subjetividades y señalando la necesidad de prácticas más éticas y socialmente responsables.

**Implicaciones Teóricas:** En el ámbito teórico, el estudio contribuye a los Estudios Organizacionales al destacar lagunas en la literatura y proponer un análisis crítico de la estrategia de la marca empleadora, desafiando perspectivas convencionales.

**Originalidad/Valor:** La originalidad del estudio radica en el enfoque crítico de la marca empleadora como dispositivo de subjetivación. Contribuye a los Estudios Organizacionales y sugiere prácticas éticas en la gestión de personas.

**Palabras clave:** Marca empleadora. Dispositivo de subjetivación. Estrategia organizacional.

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary context, the relationship between work and subjectivity has garnered increasing interest and research within Organizational Studies. As the demands of the job market evolve, organizations strive to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive environment. In this scenario, the employer brand emerges as a significant and influential factor in shaping workers' identities and subjectivities (Maheshwari et al., 2014; Nóbrega, 2016; Ritson, 2002; Veloso, 2018).

Employer branding refers to the Marketing and People Management strategy aimed at enhancing an organization's image as an attractive employer. It encompasses not only tangible aspects, such as salaries and benefits, but also intangible elements, such as organizational culture, company purpose, and employees' experiences as "owners" of the brand that employs them. Employer brands seek to attract and retain talent, establishing a unique identity that differentiates the organization from others in the labor market (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus, 2004; Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Clavery, 2020; Minchington, 2010; Parvin, 2021; Sezões, 2017; Tanwar & Pra-

sad, 2016).

To support this proposition, we draw on literature concerning employer branding in marketing and adopt a critical approach to the phenomenon. This study aligns with Organizational Studies, incorporating insights from authors such as Gorz (2004), Gaulejac (2007), and Pagès et al. (2001), who provide a critical perspective and adopt Deleuze's (1996, 2005) philosophy to scrutinize the concepts of employer brand, subjectivation apparatuses, and capitalist subjectivity of contemporary workers, thereby identifying gaps in this field of study.

By understanding employer brands as subjectivation apparatuses, this study aims to contribute to the theoretical and practical development of Organizational Studies, offering a perspective that integrates the symbolic and subjective dimensions of work. Additionally, it seeks to critically analyze the prevailing notion that the employer brand is essential in cultivating a workforce that is engaged and aligned with the organization's values and objectives. Thus, we explore, in a comprehensive and contextualized manner, the complexities and contradictions involved in constructing employer brands while raising questions about their actual impact on employee engagement and the creation of a healthy and productive work environment.

To this end, we propose a new approach to understanding the employer brand. Rather than viewing it solely as a Human Resources (HR) strategy, we approach it as a subjectivation apparatus for contemporary workers. According to Deleuze (1996, 2005), subjectivation apparatuses are complex networks encompassing institutions, practices, discourses, norms, and power relations. They shape subjectivities and modes of existence, establishing boundaries, distributions, and connections through lines of segmentarity, codes, and flows. In other words, they influence how people think and live, creating boundaries, patterns, and interactions through various forms of organization and communication.

These devices are found not only in formal institutions but also in spheres such as family, education, culture, and media, playing a crucial role in the production and reproduction of power

relations, social norms, and individual/collective identities. This study aims to understand how the employer brand functions as one of such apparatuses in contemporary organizations and how this conceptualization influences the formation of workers' identities and subjectivities. The goal is to provide a critical and reflective perspective for people management professionals, encouraging a thorough and conscious analysis of the employer brand and its implications for labor relations dynamics.

This paper makes three significant contributions to the field of Organizational Studies: i) it identifies a gap in the literature regarding the employer branding strategy analyzed through a critical lens, ii) it facilitates future approaches to the organizational brand as a management apparatus, and iii) it allows an exploration of the complex relationships between employer branding, people management, and organizational culture.

Regarding methodology, a selective literature review was conducted in 2023. This approach was chosen to provide theoretical support for the discussion, though it is not intended to be an exhaustive review. The careful selection of sources aims to explore the specific gap identified, offering a robust theoretical foundation for the topic. Instead of limiting the review to publications from the past five years, fundamental and seminal works were included, irrespective of their publication date, to contribute significantly to understanding the phenomenon.

The following sections present a selective review of the literature on employer branding, exploring its concepts, dimensions, and implications for the subjectivity of contemporary workers. This approach prioritizes conceptual discussion and the proposition of a new theoretical framework, aligning with the study's objectives. Subsequently, the subjectivation apparatus and its role in shaping workers' identities are discussed based on the concepts of Foucault and Deleuze. Finally, the employer brand is characterized as an apparatus and a research proposal is presented, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between the employer brand and the subjectivity of contemporary workers.

## The Employer Brand

The significance of the human element in organizations is widely acknowledged in Organizational Studies, as employee performance is crucial to a company's success (Backhaus, 2004; Parvin, 2021). As competition intensifies and market demands increase, the quest for job opportunities becomes more dynamic, with individuals becoming increasingly selective in choosing their workplaces (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

The employer brand promotes an image that portrays the organization as an exemplary employer (Itam, Misra, & Anjum, 2020). Indeed, it has a substantial influence on the corporate environment, requiring collaboration between People Management and Marketing departments (Ritson, 2002; Veloso, 2018). This strategy involves promoting a strong brand image that stands out in the market as an ideal workplace (Maheshwari et al., 2014).

Building an employer brand is closely linked to HR's primary function – recruiting talent (Boxall & Purcell, 2011) – and aims to generate psychological mobilization among employees, fostering an emotional bond between them and the company. Ambler and Barrow (1996) highlighted the employer brand's ability to attract and retain talent, defining it as a set of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by work, as well as the values employees perceive in the company.

The employer brand positively influences factors such as employee loyalty and affinity with the employer (Davies, 2008). Braga and Reis (2016) assert that the company's strategy must align with internal planning, the employee value proposition, and communication channels. Lievens (2007) underscores the importance of applying the organization's core values through brand personality traits, integrating these values into the organizational culture to nurture employees, making them "ambassadors" for the organization (Gilani & Jamshed, 2016). These ambassadors propagate the brand's positive image through various channels (Arachchige & Robertson, 2013) and advocate for the brand (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016), conveying its values to poten-

tial candidates through their behavior and social media presence (Oltramari, Cordova, & Tonelli, 2019). These associations created by the brand influence the company's image as an employer, shaping candidates' perceptions of prestige and social approval (Terrin, 2015).

The employer brand offers functional, economic, and psychological benefits to employees, akin to the experience of a product brand for consumers. These benefits include development opportunities, financial rewards, a sense of belonging, talent attraction, brand advocacy, employee motivation and engagement, and a competitive market advantage (Dabirian, Paschen, & Kietzmann, 2019; Nóbrega, 2016).

Many organizations aim to create an employer brand that is recognized as a desirable place to work. Clavery (2020) emphasizes the necessity of aligning the employer branding strategy with business objectives to captivate the external market and elevate the status of both the company and its professionals. Consequently, employees seek to add recognized brands to their CVs to enhance their marketability. Brand performance significantly influences employees and candidates (Nascimento, 2013).

According to Sezões (2017), the core of the employer branding strategy is the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) – a set of benefits and rewards a company offers employees in exchange for their work and dedication. It involves a combination of associations and commitments made by the organization to harness the employee's skills and expertise. This approach acknowledges that the concept of product and service value extends to HR, involving desirable and differentiated attributes promoted by the company (Minchington, 2010).

Companies can design an EVP to attract scarce talent by communicating benefits such as competitive pay, opportunities for training and professional growth, and considerations related to the company's reputation (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). The process of attracting people to organizations is highly influential, employing carefully planned micro-actions to meet individual desires and lead them to personal fulfillment, making them believe the organization facilitates this process (Siqueira, 2006). From this perspective, se-

duction becomes an intrinsic part of discourse, with underlying meanings in persuasive strategies that are implicit in communication (Vieira, 2014).

A consolidated brand enables the organization to achieve success and garner fans who will generate free publicity and stimulate competition among the most qualified professionals eager to join. As Gaulejac (2007) suggests, these professionals will invest their libidinal energy in the service of the brand. Therefore, it is essential to conceptualize the employer brand and explain its connection with the contemporary worker.

## The Employer Brand and Contemporary Workers

Advertising has transformed the perception of brands from material and commercial entities into immaterial and emotional constructs, acquiring an almost spiritual dimension (Gorz, 2004). This new mentality has permeated the management process, leading executives to view companies as living organisms endowed with "personality" and values. This characterization reflects a fetishistic apparatus, as described by Marx (2002, p. 81), functioning as "a defined social relationship established between men, taking on the phantasmatic form of a relationship between things" (Pagès et al., 2001).

The fetishistic process of personifying organizational brands has gained momentum with digital platforms such as LinkedIn. Previous surveys have identified LinkedIn as the most popular platform (Ferreira Fernandes, 2014) and a key channel for recruitment (Blasco, 2012) due to its extensive coverage of professionals from various industries and a wide variety of positions and profiles of senior executives from recognized companies (Pagès et al., 2001).

To paraphrase Gorz (2004), who analyzes brands in consumer society relative to the products they launch, companies have come to understand that they cannot be passive in recruitment processes. Instead, they must proactively promote their brands to become desirable and sought after by workers, as this willingness is crucial for driving the production chain of the capitalist system (Pagès et al., 2001).

In this context, the desiderative disposition of workers is mobilized by the belief that "one must always be more effective and productive in order to survive" (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 75). Pagès et al. (2001) argue that organizational discourses can contain implicit messages that lead individuals to believe that by embracing the organization's goals as their own and dedicating themselves intensely to achieving them, the organization will reciprocate, thus fulfilling their individual desires. This dynamic is considered essential for stimulating the job market. Just as consumers seek products and services that meet their desires and needs, companies seek professionals who can meet their demands and enhance their image and business (Bellou et al., 2015).

Professionals thus constitute a form of added value that enhances the status of brands. Hiring talent is a strategic move used by companies to strengthen their brands and secure a competitive advantage (Oltramari et al., 2019). Gaulejac argues that this utilitarian logic transforms society into a production machine and worker-subjects into agents at the service of production – a mere resource for organizations. "The individual subjected to management must adapt" (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 82). The aim is to instill in workers an identification with the brand, molding them to its values and encouraging them to internalize these values as their own. This process is facilitated by the fact that contemporary subjects are shaped in all areas of life to serve capital (Pagès et al., 2001).

This desiderative disposition is fueled by the very logic of competition, wherein "each actor seeks to maximize their utilities" (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 77) in the pursuit of status and success within the capitalist system of consumer society. The desire for a higher standard of living, luxury goods, social recognition, and wealth accumulation are potent incentives that drive individuals to engage in the production chain, working, consuming, and being "consumed" (Pagès et al., 2001).

In this context, "consumed-consumers" choose brands they perceive as prestigious and desirable, while workers seek companies that can enhance their professional image and confer status. The allure of working for a renowned brand or in a prestigious sector compels professionals to conform to the requirements of these organizational brands to secure positions within them (Oltramari et al., 2019). According to More (2022, p. 26), the employer branding strategy "consciously and voluntarily constructs imaginary systems to shape thoughts and induce behaviors indispensable to the functioning dynamics of the organization." This is because "management tools are not neutral" (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 104; Pagès et al., 2001).

Supporting this notion, we recognize that by associating the brand with the "employee," whom HR often refers to as a "collaborator," the worker-subject is further shaped by the organization's "internal marketing" strategies. These strategies, in some respects, treat the worker as a customer of the brand and the job as the product they consume. Consequently, work products must be designed to attract, train, and motivate employees while aligning with the company's overarching objectives (Berthon et al., 2005). Development opportunities that enhance employability and empowerment provide the worker with "autonomy"– enabling them to fully commit to their work and become functional, compliant, and productive – while fostering a more effective psychological contract (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Nieto, 2006).

As Gaulejac (2007) suggests, work is portrayed by employer brands as enriching and stimulating, with the worker's desire for success and recognition constantly solicited. Through employer branding and internal marketing (or endomarketing) strategies, "desire is exalted by a demanding and rewarding Ego Ideal" (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 113). Thus, the employer brand becomes a locus of fulfillment for the subject (Pagès et al., 2001).

By systematically exposing employees to the employer brand's value proposition, the organizational culture is molded to align with the company's objectives, fostering a unique culture focused on conducting business according to its vision (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In essence, the internal strategies to co-opt workers aim to cultivate and reinforce a common ethos grounded in corporate values, thereby solidifying the employer's brand (Pagès et al., 2001).

Professionals are selected not only for their technical skills but also for their image and

reputation, which are cultivated to compete for a prominent position in the job market. In this context, "consumer culture" and "culture of the self" are intertwined through the language of commodities, governed by the logic of economic profit, associating personal fulfillment with efficient management to create a self that enjoys the recognition of a reputable brand. There is a reciprocal relationship: self-fulfillment in exchange for complete adherence and intense psychological engagement (Pagès et al., 2001).

In practice, the employer branding strategy extends beyond merely attracting talent; it permeates all facets of the organizational experience, creating an environment where the identity, aspirations, and individual achievements of the workers are seamlessly integrated into the narrative and purposes of the employer brand. This profound interconnection between subject and brand fosters a symbiotic relationship in which the employee's success is inextricably linked to the organization's success.

## Worker's Identity as a Capitalist Subjectivity Territory

In contemporary society, the concept of the subject as a unified, stable, totalizing, and universal entity, as understood by Descartes during Modernity, has been deconstructed (Agamben, 2010; Deleuze, 1996; Guattari, 1995; Hall, 1997). Contemporary philosophy, particularly the works of Deleuze and Guattari, highlights the crisis of this unified subject. Indeed, these authors have emphasized the dissolution of the unifying and stable self.

Deleuze and Guattari (1995; 2010) challenge the traditional notion of the subject as a cohesive and indivisible entity. In works such as *Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus*, they explore the multiplicity and complexity of subjectivity, breaking away from the idea of a fixed and unified self. For them, the subject comprises flows, desires, affections, and relationships in constant flux.

This perspective on a dissolving subject exposes a crisis in the fixed and stable identities that characterize modernity (Agamben, 2010). The unified and stable subject, once considered the center of knowledge and action, is now being questioned and challenged. The social, cultural, and political transformations of contemporary times have disrupted the notion of a fixed and universal identity (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996). This crisis of the unifying and stable subject paves the way for a more fluid and plural understanding of subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari (1995; 2010) propose the concept of a subject in constant becoming, perpetually transforming and creating. They emphasize the multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and experiences that constitute contemporary subjectivity.

Contrary to the emphasis on identity-based logic, Deleuze and Guattari highlight "totality," "unity," and "foundation" as dominant characteristics of metaphysical and representational philosophy. They celebrate becoming, transience, multiplicity, diversity, and difference as elements offering an alternative understanding of life. For Deleuze and Guattari (1995; 2010), subjectivity is polyphonic and plural. They argue that no structuring or dominant instance determines subjectivity according to a univocal causality. Instead, subjectivity interacts, varies, produces meanings and counter-meanings, and operates collectively and heterogeneously (Guattari, 1995).

These authors recognize that subjectivity is perpetually in flux, as there is no inherent essence that defines an immutable and constant being. Instead of a unified, fixed center, subjectivity comprises a continuous flow of exchanges, movements, and differences. Nevertheless, the ritual of morality continues to search for a center where none exists. For Guattari, subjectivity involves encounters and interactions with others through alterity. He defines subjectivity as the conditions that enable individual and/or collective instances to emerge as self-referential existential territories, either in adjacency to or in delimitation with a subjective alterity (Guattari, 1995).

Thus, subjectivity necessitates constant movement through various powers, alliances, and transformations, resulting in the creation of new forms of expression in a machinic manner. Deleuze and Guattari (1995; 2010) view subjectivity as composition and creative work, challenging pre-established norms and rules. They introduce concepts such as rhizome, territories, deterrito-

rialization, ritornello, smooth space, molar lines, fold, event, and immanence to counter the language based on identity and similarity (Castro, 2009).

The authors challenge the notion of a unified, essentialized, and universal subject, proposing instead a conceptual space filled with embodied intensities, events, immanence, movements, and shifts led by larval subjects. They argue against the binary opposition between pure universality and individual particularities, advocating for a world comprised of impersonal individuations and pre-individual singularities. For Deleuze and Guattari (1995; 2010), subjectivity is understood as multiplicity – a complex network of connections and relationships. They use the concept of "rhizome" to describe this multiplicity, contrasting it with the hierarchical and centralized structure of a tree. The rhizome represents a decentralized, non-linear system where elements are connected horizontally, allowing for multiple entry and exit points (Castro, 2009).

Within the rhizome, subjectivity emerges through processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Deterritorialization occurs when established structures, norms, and fixed identities are questioned and disrupted. This movement away from established territories creates space for new possibilities and transformations. Conversely, reterritorialization involves the formation of new territories, which can be seen as forms of stabilization and organization emerging from deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1995).

Territories extend beyond physical spaces to include systems of meaning, power, and control (Deleuze & Guattari, 1995). They can be both individual and collective, characterized by lines of stratification that set boundaries, though these can be challenged and transformed through lines of escape, which open up new forms of subjectivation. Thus, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1995), subjectivity is intertwined with the processes of territorialization and deterritorialization. It arises from the connections and flows within these movements and is continually reconfigured. Subjectivity is not static or predetermined but is a construct in constant flux, shaped by a multitude of factors and forces.

The territories of subjectivation should not be seen as political-geographical boundaries imposed on social movements or as remnants of relativized referential centers (Deleuze & Guattari, 1995). Instead, they are finite speeds that generate composition, shape embodiment, and have singular and provisional contours in constant movement. These territories underpin behavior and represent the pragmatic convergence of various practices and investments across social, cultural, aesthetic, and cognitive domains. "Unlike Hall, Deleuze and Guattari do not equate subjectivity with identities, which they consider territories of **capitalist** subjectivity" (Kroef, 2010, p. 18). For them, subjectivity is produced and reproduced under the hegemony of values associated with capital.

This capitalist subjectivity also entails a form of subjective impoverishment:

> In particular it involves situating the concrete incidence of capitalistic subjectivity (the subjectivity of generalised equivalence) within the context of the continued development of the mass media, Collective Equipment and the information revolution – a subjectivity which seems likely to blot out, with its greyness, the faintest traces and last recesses of the planet's mysteries (Guattari, 1995, p. 22).

The current historical period is characterized by an impoverishment of subjectivity, reflecting a reduction in the variability of the processes that constitute the subject. This impoverishment results from a hegemonic mode of subjectivation driven by capitalist values. Guattari (1992) calls for a radical reversal of this sterile and monotonous valorization process.

Guattari advocates for the reclamation of the multiplicity and complexity of existence, emphasizing the expansion of valuation modes in contemporary life. He proposes moving beyond the sterile dichotomy of use value and exchange value towards a comprehensive axiological framework that incorporates diverse machinic modalities of valorization, including "the values of desire, aesthetic values, ecological, economic values [...]" (Guattari, 1995, p. 55).

Capitalist subjectivity exemplifies a form of subjectivation that seeks to standardize heterogeneous elements through overcoding, the-

reby producing narrow and reductive meanings. Its objective is to perpetuate the dominant logic of capital. Capitalist territories represent benchmarks of reference and recognition, characterized by a self-contained subjectivity based on predefined identities (Castro, 2009).

This capitalist subjectivity exerts control over signs through the production of meanings and models. Stereotypes are produced akin to assembly line outputs, becoming integrated into individual lives and shaping behaviors by allocating individuals to recognized identities. This process leads to homogenization, where differences are subsumed and categorized into identities defined by age, gender, and ethnicity, each with predetermined and predictable behaviors. This constitutes a movement of capture, normalization, and trivialization of subjectivity, thereby creating territories that establish identity frameworks.

The potential for escape and the creation of new relationships and meanings, breaking from established patterns, characterize the movements of deterritorialization and lines of flight, driven by creative processes of singularization through difference. These singularization processes form machinic assemblages of desire and collective enunciations, generating new meanings within capitalist codes. Simultaneously, reterritorializations occur, representing the re-appropriation of deterritorializing processes, resulting in captures that seek to regulate predictable conduct and behaviors based on equivalence.

These concepts are grounded in a theoretical perspective that eschews binary oppositions and fixed identities. Affirming identity entails adhering to the modern logic that dichotomizes reality and representation. This concept of representation, analyzed by Foucault, separates the human being as both the subject of knowledge and the object of understanding. Representation becomes the organization of nature's chaotic manifestations through the projection of the Other onto the Same, ensuring the legitimacy of knowledge and consciousness through similarity. To affirm identity is to equate the Other with the Same.

In this context, Deleuze and Guattari (1995) reject the logic of identity and representation, aiming to destabilize the fixed territories of capitalist subjectivity and foster processes of singularization that resist normative impositions and value difference. Here, identity is intertwined with dialectical logic, introducing difference into identity as a negation of sameness. This perspective seeks to uphold the unity of opposites, with identity maintaining primacy. Difference becomes essential for identity to sustain its primary significance.

Representations function as original territories where elements are aggregated and confronted by the criterion of equality. This identity promises a return to the origin or historically constructed center, creating a rebound with the original territory through equivalence. Both representation and identities bolster capitalist logic by investing in immobility through framing. Capitalist logic incorporates differential elements that evade existential identity territories, transforming them into components to be operated through equivalence or homogenization within a new standard. This process involves capturing and domesticating differences and integrating them into a system of equivalence that serves capital's interests.

As the subjectivity of the contemporary worker is perpetually influenced by the operations of capital, the act of buying and selling merchandise demonstrates its ability to transcend its mere utilitarian function and acquire symbolic and value dimensions (Iray Carone, 1985). Through its specific modes of organization and exchange, merchandise, via its mechanisms, shapes human perceptions, desires, and behaviors, thus influencing the subject's relationship with the world.

**The Apparatus: Foucault and Deleuze**

The problematization of the subject is a central theme in Foucault's philosophy (1980). He argues that "One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework" (Foucault, 1980, p. 117). Foucault proposes an analysis that transcends the traditional concept of the subject as an autonomous, centralizing agent, seeking to understand how

the subject is constituted and shaped within specific historical contexts. This approach enables a critical examination of the power relations involved in the production of subjectivities, revealing the multiple possibilities of existence and agency for subjects in their interactions with social and historical structures.

Foucault (2004) emphasizes the importance of studying the concrete practices through which a subject is objectified. These practices aim to describe the forms of strategic rationality involved and to delineate the field of possible experiences and how the subject must experience themselves within it.

By stating that these practices make the subject its own object, Foucault points beyond a purely epistemic relationship, where knowledge is constructed about the subject. He proposes analyzing an operation of subjectivation that, while enunciating the truth about a subject, coercively binds them to a specific identity. In other words, Foucault is interested in understanding how social practices and discourses not only produce knowledge about a subject but also exercise coercive power by imposing identities and norms of behavior. These practices of subjection constitute a form of social control that influences how subjects perceive themselves and relate to each other. Foucault seeks to unveil the mechanisms by which identities are shaped, and subjects are subjected to a particular regime of truth. This analysis goes beyond mere knowledge production, aiming to understand how power manifests itself in the constitution of subjects and the regulation of their experiences. To this end, Foucault introduces the concept of the apparatus, or dispositive:

> What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements (1994, p. 194).

In this context, an apparatus is a complex network of elements that interrelate to produce and regulate forms of knowledge, power, and subjectivity. Consequently, the apparatus is permanently inscribed in a power dynamic that produces modes of subjectivation (Castro, 2009). Apparatuses consist of various elements (Foucault, 1994), both explicit and implicit, encompassing what is said and what remains unspoken within social practices and relations.

The apparatus encompasses both the discursive and the extra-discursive levels, rendering this issue less significant (Muchail, 1985). In other words, the apparatus is responsible for articulating what is said and what is not said, encompassing the discourses that generate knowledge and the forms of power exercised. Therefore, the apparatus plays a fundamental role in connecting the discursive and extra-discursive, forming a network of relationships and interactions. It is the way these elements connect and influence each other, creating a complex web of power, knowledge, and social practices. This network organizes, shapes, and disciplines social relations and subjectivities, establishing norms, values, and practices that regulate and govern individuals.

An apparatus is not an abstract entity. It is a network of knowledge/power relations with specific historical, spatial, and temporal locations. Its emergence is always linked to an event that brings it to light, necessitating an understanding of its conditions of emergence as it modifies previous power relations. The apparatus is intrinsically tied to society, just as society is tied to the apparatus, making it essential to consider their interrelationship.

Deleuze (1996, 2005), in his approach to the apparatus, emphasizes the lines of force that run from one singular point to another, forming a web of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. He views the apparatus as a network of relationships crossing different social domains capable of producing specific subjectivities. Deleuze focuses on analyzing the configurations and operations of the apparatus in different contexts and its potential to generate transformations.

Building on Foucault, Deleuze (1996, 2005) expanded and reinterpreted the concept of apparatus, bringing new perspectives and em-

phasizing its productive and creative dimensions. The author innovates by highlighting an essential aspect of the apparatus: its multilinearity. According to Foucault, the concept of apparatus encompasses a wide range of interconnected elements. These elements are united by lines that move and reorganize themselves according to the power dynamics at play, which are fundamental in articulating the components of the apparatus. Following Deleuze's approach (1996, p. 338), the apparatus:

> First of all, it is a skein, a multilinear whole. It is composed of lines of different natures. The lines in the apparatus do not encircle or surround systems that are each homogenous in themselves, the object, the subject, language, etc., but follow directions, trace processes that are always out of balance, that sometimes move closer together and sometimes farther away. Each line is broken, subject to changes in direction, bifurcating and forked, and subjected to derivations. Visible objects, articulable utterances, forces in use, and subjects in position are like vectors or tensors.

Deleuze (1996, 2005) argues that apparatuses are not merely power structures that discipline and control but are also machines for producing subjectivity. He highlights the significance of lines of force, which traverse these apparatuses, creating movements, connections, and possibilities of resistance. Deleuze introduces the concept of "lines of flight," which are ruptures and openings that destabilize apparatuses and allow new forms of subjectivation to emerge, thus characterizing apparatuses by their multilinear nature.

According to Deleuze (1996, 2005), the various elements that constitute an apparatus are interconnected by a multiplicity of lines, forming a dynamic and complex system. These lines are variable and subject to processes of unification, totalization, verification, objectification, and subjectification enacted by the apparatus itself. This dynamism and complexity are essential for the functioning of the apparatus. It is precisely within the lines of subjectivation that the production of subjectivity occurs. These lines respond to the lines of force present in the apparatus, which tend to enclose it within insurmountable contours. The lines of subjectivation provide a way of escaping the logic of power-knowledge established by the apparatus. Deleuze (1996, 2005) emphasizes that they function as lines of escape, where the self is not reduced to either knowledge or power but becomes a means of resisting established powers and knowledge.

The lines of subjectivation are autonomous within the apparatus, even though they are part of a mechanism for producing knowledge linked to the exercise of power. They represent a form of orientation and elaboration of the self, facilitating the passage from one apparatus to another. In the context of the apparatus, the lines of subjectivation coexist with other lines, such as lines of force, subjectivation, cracking, breaking and ruptures, all representing vectors of action that can induce variations or modifications in the configuration of the apparatus.

Each apparatus operates uniquely and responds to its own circumstances without a universal rationality governing them. Moreover, apparatuses are not static and eternal; they are constantly evolving, with lines in constant flux, potentially giving rise to new configurations of power-knowledge.

For Deleuze (1996, 2005), subjectivation represents a dimension that transcends established knowledge and power, enabling subjects to position and constitute themselves uniquely by turning the forces upon "themselves" and creating a line of flight from the constraints of the apparatus. This dimension of subjectivation can open fissures and possibilities for transforming apparatuses, signaling the emergence of new configurations and power relations. Deleuze views apparatuses as sets of heterogeneous and mobile elements that are continually interconnected and reconfigured. In this context, the subjectivity of the contemporary individual involves resisting forms of subjection. Rather than submitting passively, subjects engage in a process of resistance, seeking alternative forms of subjectivation. This form of subjectivity challenges power structures opens spaces of freedom, and constructs new ways of being and acting in the world.

## The Employer Brands as a Subjectivation Apparatus for Subject-Employee

Based on the theoretical framework presented in this article, which seeks to establish the employer brand as a subjectivation apparatus in contemporary organizations, it is essential to characterize this organizational strategy as an apparatus. According to Foucault (1995a, p.244), an apparatus can be understood as "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions." It is a type of formation that shifts and has the capacity to constantly rearticulate itself, exercising multiple functions Deleuze, 1996).

From a Deleuzean perspective, the employer brand is considered a subjectivation apparatus, as its function extends beyond merely attracting talent or promoting the company's image. It operates as a complex network of practices, discourses, and control mechanisms that shape the subjectivity of the worker-subject, aligning them with the organization's values, expectations, and demands – thereby facilitating the control of workers (Pagès et al., 2001). An apparatus is a machine for making people see and speak, it has lines of subjectivation that make the subject stop being what (s)he is in the flux, that is, what he is becoming (Deleuze, 1996).

As an apparatus, the employer brand performs several vital functions. Firstly, it acts as a visibility mechanism, highlighting specific aspects of the organization and its practices to be perceived and valued by the worker-subject. According to Deleuze, an apparatus is something like a machine which makes certain elements visible and conceals others (Deleuze, 1996). The employer brand creates an engaging narrative that seeks to evoke interest, identification, and aspiration among potential employees so that they are in constant change, as every apparatus is defined by what it holds in terms of novelty and creativity (Deleuze, 1996).

Additionally, the employer brand functions as an enunciation mechanism, delineating what is considered appropriate, desirable, and valued within the organization. Foucault states that the apparatus is a set of discourses, institutions, threats, regulatory measures that function to enhance, regulate, control, and direct the effects of power (Foucault, 1995a). The employer brand, therefore, defines the values, competencies, and characteristics that are expected and rewarded, contributing to the construction of the worker-subject's identity in relation to the organization.

Another vital function of the employer brand as an apparatus is to standardize and control. It establishes norms of conduct, behavior, and performance that are expected and reinforced within the organization. These standards produce the subjectivity of the worker-subject, influencing their self-perception, professional aspirations, and workplace relationships. It is a guidance that deviates from what is to apprehend the new, or what it becomes (Deleuze, 1996).

It is essential to recognize that the employer brand as an apparatus does not operate in a unidirectional and deterministic manner. While it influences the subjectivity of the worker-subject, there is also room for resistance, negotiation, and appropriation by employees. Deleuze points out that the apparatus induces subjectivities, but it also produces and is produced by them (Deleuze, 1996). Worker-subjects can reinterpret and recontextualize the employer brand according to their own experiences, values, and aspirations, creating spaces for agency and transformation.

Characterizing the employer brand as an apparatus in Organizational Studies opens an epistemological field that extends beyond the traditional concerns of Marketing. This broader perspective is justified by understanding that the employer brand plays a fundamental role in contemporary organizations, influencing not only talent acquisition but also people management, organizational culture, and work relations.

This shift represents a transition from a narrower episteme centered on marketing strategies to a broader and more interdisciplinary one. When we consider the employer brand as an apparatus, its influence extends beyond communication and market positioning to include people management practices, the construction of organizational identity, and the structuring of working relationships. This expanded epistemo-

logical approach allows for a more critical and complex analysis of the employer brand. Instead of focusing solely on marketing strategies aimed at attracting talent, we begin to investigate how the employer brand functions as a subjectivation mechanism, shaping employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Indeed, understanding the employer brand as a subjectivation apparatus provides a deeper insight into the organizational dynamics and power relations that permeate contemporary organizations. Consequently, it urges us to question conventional management practices, denaturalizing discourses and strategies built around them. In Organizational Studies, this perspective broadens the scope of analysis and highlights issues crucial for understanding contemporary organizations. This epistemological approach enables exploration of the complex relationships between the employer brand, people management, and organizational culture, challenging us to rethink traditional forms of knowledge and research in this field.

In light of the preceding discussion, numerous research avenues have emerged to deepen our understanding of the employer brand as a subjectivation apparatus in contemporary organizations. Beyond the previously proposed areas of investigation, additional research directions can enrich both academic and practical fields:

• Influence of Social Media on the Employer Brand: Investigate how social media shapes the employer brand, considering employee and candidate interactions and their impact on identity and subjectivity construction.

• Case Studies on Employer Branding: Examine innovative organizations in their employer brand-building efforts, analyzing methods, results, and challenges to provide insights into effective practices.

• Sectoral Impact of the Employer Brand: Compare how the employer brand influences worker perceptions across different sectors, such as technology, healthcare, and finance, highlighting sector-specific variations.

• Intercultural Perspectives: Explore how cultural values, norms, and expectations shape employer brand-building for global audiences.

• Evaluation Tools: Develop and test tools to measure the impact of the employer brand on worker subjectivity.

• Longitudinal Studies: Conduct research tracking the evolution of the employer brand over time, identifying trends and changes.

• Demographic Segments: Analyze the employer brand's effects on different age groups, genders, and ethnic backgrounds, emphasizing diversity in organizational identity.

• Corporate Social Responsibility: Investigate the relationship between the employer brand and social responsibility practices, examining the integration of ethical and social values.

Exploring these and other emerging themes will contribute to a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the employer brand as a subjectivation apparatus, enriching academic literature and offering practical insights for professionals in people management and organizational strategy. These suggested avenues reflect the complexity of the phenomenon and provide pathways to advance our understanding of the dynamics between the employer brand and the subjectivity of contemporary workers.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This theoretical article has achieved its objective of initiating a discussion on the employer brand as a subjectivation apparatus in contemporary organizations. Throughout the text, we have explored the dimensions of this phenomenon, considering both its practical implications and the underlying theoretical complexities.

Understanding the employer brand as a subjectivation apparatus, in light of Deleuze's theories (1996, 2005), offers a critical perspective that broadens traditional analyses of the brand's role in the organizational environment. Through this lens, we observe the connections between marketing and HR strategies, the production of individual and collective identities, and the power mechanisms that permeate this process.

By approaching the employer brand as a subjectivation apparatus, we propose a vision that transcends conventional notions of image and reputation building. This perspective has

allowed us to consider the dynamics of power, control, and regulation inherent in the formation of identities within the context of contemporary work.

Additionally, our proposal for a research agenda has outlined directions for future investigations, providing pathways to deepen our understanding of this phenomenon. Each proposed theme represents an opportunity for further study and reflection, contributing to the construction of a robust body of knowledge on the intersection between employer brand and subjectivity.

It is crucial to emphasize that while recognizing the strategic importance of the employer brand, it is equally vital to adopt a critical approach that questions assumptions and explores the ethical and social implications of this phenomenon. The subjectivation of workers, often facilitated through employer branding, must be examined carefully to avoid manipulative and alienating practices.

Consequently, it has been concluded that the employer brand is not merely a tool for attracting and retaining talent but an intrinsic element in the construction of professional identities. Its influence extends beyond the marketing aspect, permeating working relationships and shaping individual and collective perceptions.

As progress is made in the study of the employer brand as a subjectivation apparatus, academics, HR professionals, managers, and researchers are encouraged to continue exploring the subject. We believe that through a critical and reflexive approach, we can unveil the intricate relationships between brand, identity, and subjectivity in contemporary organizations.

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