

PERSONAL BRANDING AS AN ELEMENT OF EMPLOYEES' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Today, in the knowledge based economy, making systematic, thought-out actions aimed at professional development by employees is not a matter of choice, but a necessity in the case of success-oriented people. However activities which are generally identified with development of professionals such as their knowledge, skills and abilities development, are not enough to succeed on the market – people as professionals need to be visible, recognizable and appreciated. To this end people should undertake actions aimed at building their own strong, authentic personal brands. The paper deals with personal branding as an element of employees' professional development. In the first part of this paper the essence of employees' professional development is briefly described. Then the concept of personal branding is discussed, including issues such as its definition, determinants and criteria for effective personal branding, as well as benefits that a strong personal brand brings to its owner and the audience. In the following part of the paper the framework of personal branding and tools for building a strong personal brand are presented. Paper also presents results of the research carried out on working extramural students of Pomeranian University in Słupsk. The research was to determine whether employees take actions aimed at building own personal brand, as well as to know their knowledge and attitude towards this process. The final part of the paper includes conclusions resulting from theoretical consideration and conducted research.

Key words: professional development, employees, personal branding.

Classification JEL: M12 – Personnel Management.

1. Introduction

Changes occurring in today's world, which are connected with a development of knowledge-based economy, force people who want to be competitive on the job market and achieve professional success to plan and consciously shape their professional development from the very beginning of their professional career and at its every stage.

Professional development plays a very important role in human life and stems from people's natural need for developments and achievements. It is a long-lasting process that covers almost the entire length of human life and has various stages. Although it is an individualised process and progresses different for every person, it is always connected with the development of knowledge, skills, abilities as well as personal characteristics that relate to one's professional work. One of the tools of conscious and mature building professional career and achieving professional goals by employees is personal branding.

The main research problem of presented paper is a personal branding. The objectives of the study are: (1) identification of activities undertaken by research participants aimed at building a personal brand; (2) learning about participants' knowledge and attitude towards personal branding. To achieve these objectives, a questionnaire survey was performed in May 2015 among working extramural students of Pomeranian University in Słupsk, Poland. The theoretical part of this paper is written on the basis of a literature as well as verified internet resources devoted to a personal branding. The research part of this paper is written on the basis on research conducted for the purpose of this study (written questionnaire) with open, semi-open and closed questions. In this paper the methods of descriptive and quantitative analysis were used, including structure indicators.

2. The essence of professional development

Nowadays organizations operate in a turbulent environment, in which changes occur permanently and are often unpredictable. The results of constantly changing conditions for the functioning of organizations are reflected in the expectations that employees at different positions are faced with. To fulfil expectations employees must develop their own knowledge, skills and personality traits systematically as well as shape their attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, today the old adage that *the one who does not progress moves back* takes on a particular meaning, especially with reference to knowledge workers.

There is not one, widely accepted definition of professional development. For the purpose of this paper it is assumed that professional development is a directed process of changes in one's consciousness, which emerge as a result of correlative influence of subject-matter and entity on one another in the search of one's place in the division of labour, creative transformation of oneself and their material, social and cultural environment (Czarnecki, 2007: 39).

Professional development of the employees is prerequisite for the development of organizations operating in a knowledge-based economy. It plays specific functions, such as (Sutherland & Canwell, 2007: 181–182):

- Broadening knowledge which one may find useful in problematic situations, especially in conceptual work;
- Experience-based learning which consists in gaining practical knowledge through self-observation and observation of other employees as well as in putting new solutions into practice;
- Development of new attitudes and beliefs is reflected in the change of hitherto views, restructuring the system of values, principles and conducts;
- The possibility of reconstructing professional qualifications, especially with reference to individual competences of an employee, their diagnosis and elevation;
- Cooperation and contribution towards development of personnel, which are connected with sharing knowledge and skills, utilising other employees' knowledge mutual learning and acting (coaching, mentoring, peer-tutoring).

Professional development of the employee yields benefits for both the employee and the organization which he works in. An employee who takes care of his professional development is becoming a high level professional and thus his competitiveness on the job market increases. Consequently, he can satisfy his various needs both basic (e.g. physiologic functions, safety) as well as higher level needs (e.g. sense of belongings, self-actualisation).

It should be also emphasized that employees with their knowledge, skills and involvement in their work are a fundamental determinant of the competitiveness of the organizations which they work for. „Professional development helps build and maintain morale of staff members, and is thought to attract higher quality staff to an organization” (Business Dictionary). That is why organizations should both enable their employees to develop professionally as well as support and encourage them to take action in this area. If it is to happen the employee's development goals cannot be contradictory to the goals of the organization which he works in.

Both organizations and employees can trigger the initiative of specific actions in the area of professional development. In other words, the employee can take actions focused on professional development based on intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. The reasons why people take such actions may be of a different nature – fear of losing a job, will to change a job, desire for promotion, willingness to be better than others, desire to increase self-esteem, desire to develop own interests and so on. However, there may be various reasons at different

stages of their professional careers. In this context, the huge importance of motivating workers to take actions aimed at professional development should be emphasized (*Blašková, 2010; Blašková & Blaško, 2011; Tršková, 2015*).

A. Wach-Kąkolewicz points out the fact that professional development is often a part of personal development. Extraprofessional activities often penetrate indirectly professional area and therefore, enrich the employee's competences with new knowledge, skills which are not necessarily directly connected with the job, although they may be useful at a given moment of its performance. The aforementioned author emphasizes that it is difficult to analyse one's professional development without the analysis of their personal development as these processes are parallel at a given stage of life, they penetrate one another and have mutual impact (*Wach-Kąkolewicz, 2008: 57*).

One of the elements of employee's professional development is building an authentic, strong personal brand.

3. The essence of personal brand

The author of the concept of personal branding, T. Peters, in 1997 wrote in the *Fast Company* magazine: "Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are the CEOs of our own companies: Me, Inc.... To be in business today, our most important job is to be the head marketer for the brand called 'You' [...] Being CEO of Me Inc. requires you to grow yourself, to promote yourself, to get the market to reward yourself" (*Peters, 1997*).

In the following years it is emphasized more and more often that possession of the personal brand is important not only in politics and the media, but also in professional life (*Trzeciak, 2015: 29*). A number of publications dedicated to personal brand and its strengthening have appeared, but most of them are popular science publications or guidebooks describing how to quickly and efficiently build a personal brand. People (e.g. coaches) and organizations (e.g. consulting companies) that are interested in selling their services related to personal branding are those who write about it the most often.

How to define a personal brand? According to H. K. Rampersad, who is a recognized authority on personal branding, "*personal brand is the synthesis of all the expectations, images, and perceptions it creates in the minds of others when they see or hear your name*" (*Rampersad, 2008b: 34*). Referring to the understanding of the brand from the viewpoint of management sciences, K. Wojtaszczyk & F. Maszewski (*2014: 456*) define personal brand as the sum of benefits (values) that it brings to all parties (the owner of the brand as well as other stakeholders, such as employers, family, friends) having contact with the brand owner.

Personal brand embodies a host of intangibles that include identity (elements that make a person recognizable), image (perception of a person by others) and reputation (the socially propagated and aggregated opinion of a person), (*Williams, 2014*). „When applied to personal brand, an individual's expression of identity is communicated through the person's skills, actions, values and beliefs, which are then interpreted by others. The interpretation process leads to the perception of the individual's external image and may also influence the identity of the individual. To the extent with which the individual's communications are interpreted consistently across multiple stakeholders reflects that individual's reputation. That reputation is then perpetuated as an environmental factor that will lead to a set of outcomes for the individual" (*Williams, 2014*).

Personal brand effectively communicates individual's distinct value and sets him apart from his competitors (*Morton, 2012: 70*). It is the result of time devoted to reflection (*Malinowska-Parzydło, 2014: 12*): What life I want to have? What I live for? What is important to me? Am I committed to this by doing what I do and by the way I live? Is my brand a unique diamond, or trashy glass?

Everyone has a personal brand, but most people are not aware of this, that's why they do not manage it strategically, consistently and effectively (*Rampersad, 2008b: 34*). People managing their personal brand skilfully are successful people, known for their passion, achievements, decency and communication based on respect (*Malinowska-Parzydło, 2015*). They are recognizable in a particular environment, and contacts with them (the experience of their appearance, behaviour, lifestyle and interpersonal skills) arouse positive associations (*Białopiotrowicz, 2009: 26*).

Summing up, personal brand distinguishes an individual from other people. If it is positive, strong and recognizable, it becomes a kind of identifier, a promise of expected benefits, a carrier of desired values, an emotional bond between the owner of the brand and the audience (client, co-workers, superiors, potential employer etc.).

Strong personal brand brings a set of benefits to its owner. It (*Rampersad, 2008a*):

- Stimulates meaningful perceptions about the values and qualities that the brand owner stands for;
- Tells others: who the brand owner is, what he does, what makes him different, how he creates value for them, and what they can expect when they deal with him;
- Influences how other people perceive the brand owner;
- Creates expectations in the mind of others of what they will get when they work with the brand owner;
- Creates an identity around the brand owner which makes it easier for people to remember who is he;
- Gets the brand owner's prospects to see him as the only solution to their problem;
- Puts the brand owner above the competition and makes him unique and better than his competitors in the marketplace.

A strong personal brand increases competitiveness of an individual on both internal (organization which they work in) and external (local, regional etc.) job market. Greater competitiveness on the internal job market brings employees better prospects for promotion, the possibility of greater decisive and executive autonomy. It also increases one's authority, thus it is easier for a person to hold managerial positions and manage others. It inspires trust for oneself based on transparency, clarity and coherence of decisions and actions. In other words, strong personal brand facilitates the process of making professional career with all its benefits of professional and personal nature.

Life decisions of a person with authentic, strong personal brand arise from a deliberate self-concept and strategy of his own development. Personal brand should always reflect a true character of an individual, and should be built on his values, strengths, uniqueness and genius. An individual that is branded in organic, authentic and holistic way possess a personal brand that is strong, clear, complete, and valuable to others (*Rampersad, 2008a*).

3.1. Building a personal brand

Building a personal brand is called personal branding, which is neither easy nor short-term process. Personal branding is „about influencing others, by creating a brand identity that associates certain perceptions and feelings with that identity” (*Rampersad, 2008a*). It “[...] entails capturing and promoting an individual's strengths and uniqueness to a target audience” (*Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011: 39*). It enables people to determine who they are and how valuable they can be to various organizations.

The aim of personal branding is to achieve a positively perceived recognition. Personal branding is a powerful career management tool (*Morton, 2012: 70*) therefore building a personal brand is the subject of action of people who are success-oriented and focused on the conscious and targeted development of their own careers. ”The modern career paths

provide more opportunities to shift into different directions in organizational structure and are not rigidly defined periods of employment at different positions, making it easier to progress for gifted employees” (Matuska, 2014: 63).

As D. Lair and colleagues state, nowadays “success is not determined by individuals’ internal sets of skills, motivations, and interests but, rather, by how effectively they are arranged, crystallized, and labelled – in other words, branded” (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005: 308). Personal branding is particularly useful in respect of people who have something important to say in their domain, want to share their knowledge and experience on a wide forum, and have the potential to do it in a way that gives both satisfaction to them and real benefits to their audience (Żurakowska, 2011).

Building a personal brand requires a proper perception of oneself and others by a self-brand creator. As shown in Figure 1, vision, self-knowledge, self-learning, thinking, mindset change, integrity, happiness, passion, sharing, trust and love are essential in the process of building an authentic, not apparent personal brand.



Figure 1. Building authentic personal brand (based on: Rampersad, H. K. 2008. A new blueprint for powerful and authentic personal branding. *Performance Improvement*, 47(8): 34 – 37)

H. K. Rampersad distinguishes criteria for effective authentic personal branding which include (2008a):

- Authenticity – personal own brand must be built on true personality;
- Integrity – one must adhere to the moral and behavioural code set down by his personal ambition;
- Consistency – one needs to be consistent in his behaviour;
- Specialization – one should be focused on one area of specialization;
- Authority – one should be seen as a recognized expert in a certain field and perceived as an effective leader;
- Distinctiveness – one should be distinguished on the basis of his brand;
- Relevance – what an individual stands for should connect to what his target audience considers to be important;
- Visibility – one must continuously, consistently and repeatedly take actions aimed at being seen and remembered by the audience;
- Persistence – personal brand should be developed organically and needs time to grow;

- Goodwill – personal brand will bring better results and endure longer if an individual is perceived in a positive way;
- Performance – if an individual doesn't perform and improve himself continuously, personal branding will be a sham.

The analysis of the aforementioned criteria allows describing an individual, who possesses authentic personal brand as self-aware, aware of his own desires, goal-oriented, constantly working on himself and own development, motivated, ambitious, persistent and hardworking, able to communicate his strengths, trustworthy due to his professionalism and credibility, perceived by the environment as an expert in a given domain.

However, even the possession of most of the listed above features does not guarantee professional success. It is not enough to possess the aforementioned features – one must be able to present them. Only positive personal brand, which is widely recognized, will yield benefits for its owner as well as for widely understood environment. Here the question arises – do people actually take well-thought-of actions focused on building strong, authentic personal branding?

3.2. Personal branding framework

How to create personal brand successfully? The answer to this question is not easy, because every person is different. There are no and cannot be two identical personal brands, because the essence of each brand is what distinguishes its owner from other people. Each path leading to the creation of a strong, authentic personal brand is different, literature brings, however, some frameworks enabling its effective building.

On the basis of definition presented by K. Y. Wong & E. Aspinwall (2004: 95), for the purpose of this paper a personal branding framework is defined as a structure or a set of guiding principles which is depicted in such a way to provide guidance and direction on how to build a personal brand. Such a framework secures links between theory and practice (Dale, 2003) and forms the underlying basis for action (Popper, 1996).

Personal branding framework improves the awareness and understanding of the personal branding and enables people to look at this process from a broader perspective. It also facilitates the self-management of the implementation process and helps to coordinate making efforts in a more systematic and controlled manner (Figurska, 2012: 64).

Personal branding frameworks presented by various authors are more or less extensive. The framework presented by Patel & Agius (2014) is quite detailed as it distinguishes eight stages of this process, and each of them is elaborated down to the level of specific actions:

1. Building own personal brand vision – by stating who the individual is and where he wants to be, listing others worth emulating, developing own professional image.
2. Defining own target audience – by building relationships, determining the person that will pay, the man that influences the person that pays the individual, and his supporters, giving back to supporters by asking questions.
3. Building own online and offline assets – by building social communities, creating domain buying strategy, building a professional website and a blog, building a blog audience, providing offline assets (business cards etc.).
4. Building own brand through outreach – by building relations leading to opportunities, getting exposure by guest blogging, article contributions and interviews, building own brand using linked-in, controlling own personal brand with online advertising.
5. Getting free press coverage – by using services that connect sources or experts with journalists, using services that journalists use to get input from experts for articles.

6. Connecting with mentors – by finding mentors using different sources: family, friends, colleagues, bosses and extended network etc., approaching mentors and earning their respect, making a mentor want to work with the individual.
7. Brand monitoring – by controlling over own name, removing less-than-ideal search listings, using tools that help the person to monitor his brand, handling negativity.
8. Being unique – by defining what makes the person unique, developing own personal story that separates a person from others, creating a personal elevator pitch that wins over people the person meets, building presentations for telling own story, getting speaking opportunities, being yourself.

H. K. Rampersad (2008a) developed a personal branding framework which is based on his personal branding model. He calls this model a *holistic blueprint and roadmap* which is to help people formulate and implement an authentic personal brand identity. This model consists of four phases, which are the building blocks of a strong authentic personal brand:

- Defining and formulating own *personal ambition* in an exciting and persuasive manner and making it visible;
- Defining and formulating an authentic, distinctive, relevant, consistent, concise, meaningful, exciting, inspiring, compelling, enduring, crystal clear, ambitious, persuasive and memorable *personal brand promise*, and using it as the focal point of own behaviour and actions;
- Developing an integrated and well *balanced action plan* (Personal Balanced Scorecard -PBSC) based on personal ambition and brand to reach life and brand objectives;
- Implementing, maintaining, and cultivating own ambition, brand and PBSC effectively.

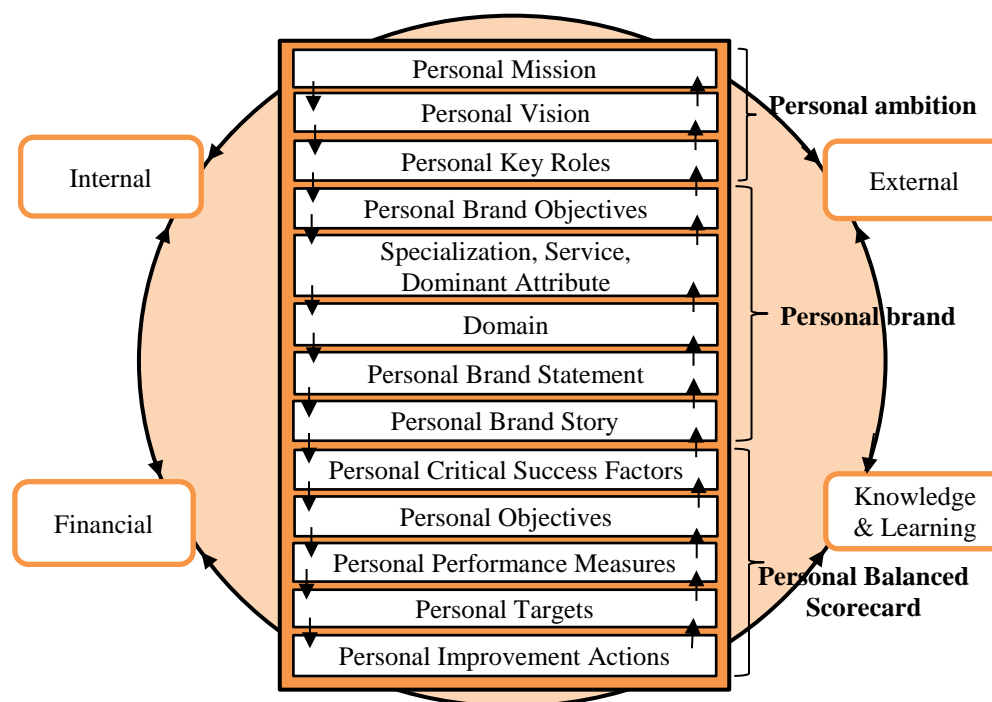


Figure 2. Authentic Personal Branding Framework by H. Rampersad (Rampersad, H. K. 2008. A new blueprint for powerful and authentic personal branding. *Performance Improvement*, 47(8): 34 – 37)

Presented in the Figure 2 authentic personal branding framework is intended to help people create a brand that builds a trusted image of themselves and help them enrich their

relationships with others, master themselves, unlock their potential, and develop self-esteem (*Rampersad, 2008a*).

Having taken everything into account it must be emphasised that building a personal brand is a tough, long-lasting process and it can be facilitated by well-established framework which reflects a person's comprehensive approach towards personal branding. Establishing personal branding framework allows to maintain coherence and logic while dealing with building a personal brand, and at the same time it considerably increases the possibility of achieving a professional success.

3.3. Personal branding tools

Effective building of a personal brand requires not only having good intentions, self-knowledge, defined life and career goals, consistency in action, but also knowledge and ability to use appropriate tools, including in particular information and communication tools (ICT), giving their users almost unlimited possibilities for establishing and maintaining professional and non-professional relations.

People should use a combination of traditional and online tools to build a personal brand effectively. Resume and professional biography are examples of traditional tools that should precisely communicate person's background, experience, education, accomplishments, and professional affiliations. More importantly, each should reflect person's personal brand and speak the language of value for his respective audience (*Horton, 2011*). The name and slogan, which are easy to remember and reflect the person, as well as visualization of the person through the proper selection of the customized logo and colours are important tools of personal branding too. Even what a person wears and how he wears it is an element of personal branding as it can speak volumes (subconsciously or consciously) to everyone the person comes across on a day-to-day basis (*Wright, 2009*).

Traditional tools of communication (e.g. letter, fax, telephone) are important, but technology and the development of social media caused that today everyone has a chance to show himself to the world, to communicate his own area of competence and build his expert status (*Bucki, 2013*). One of the main tools used in the process of building a personal brand is the internet because of its universality, availability, scope of actions and the pace of information transfer. The internet is a tool that allows people to create their own image arbitrarily. On the internet, a person can shape his image and steer his own identity in such a way that others know about him as much as he wants them to know (*Podkowińska, 2010: 106*).

In the process of self-promotion as a professional, one can use various information-communication tools such as:

- Blogs (e.g. Blogspot, Twitter) – contain separate blog posts in the form of text, pictures etc., usually in chronological order; when devoted to specific topics, blogs enable exchange of ideas between the author and readers and thereby foster the development of a given field of knowledge;
- Portals of professional networking (e.g. LinkedIn, Goldenline) – allow people to present their professional profile online, and share their achievements in a wider forum, enabling building a business network; showing careers of recognizable people who achieved success, these portals become a source of inspiration for other people;
- Discussion forums – are today one of the most popular methods of communication and enable people who are interested in a particular subject to establish valuable contacts, exchange information, views and opinions;

- Social networks (e.g. Facebook) – associate like-minded people, with similar interests, becoming a very good marketing tool and a great way to transfer specific information, share opinions etc.;
- Services including interactive content (Youtube, Slideshare) – allow people to promote themselves in the network by posting interactive content (videos, presentations);
- Sites to place photos (e.g. Pinterest, Instagram) – give people the opportunity to present themselves and their own interests, passions etc.;
- Video CV – is a great way to stand out in the crowd on the market, because in a short film a person can show not only his skills, but also personality, giving the CV's a new, more personalized dimension;
- Personal website – twenty-four-hour source of reliable, updated information about a person and his objectives, activities, achievements, passions etc.
- Electronic mail (e-mail) – commonly used tool that enables correspondence (sending and receiving text messages and multimedia) with other people.

These tools are essential in the process of building a personal brand by enabling effective communication, however traditional tools such as letters, fax, telephone, etc. have not lost their significance, and nothing can replace the importance of personal communication, both verbal and non-verbal.

Summing up, technology has enabled everyone in the world to build their own brand reputation through content, engagement and hard work (*Schawbel, 2015*). However, it should be remembered that the tool is just a tool, no matter how technologically advanced. Properly selected and skilfully used can help a lot in building a strong, authentic personal brand, but it will never replace the man with his knowledge, skills, determination and commitment in the process of personal branding.

4. Personal branding in the light of research

In May 2015 among working students of masters studies of Pomeranian University in Słupsk questionnaire research was conducted. The aim of the study was to determine whether the working people take actions aimed at building their own personal brand, as well as to explore the respondents' attitude towards building a personal brand. Respondents were asked a number of questions related to various aspects of the process of building a personal brand. They were supposed to point replies which correspond to the facts and provide answers to open questions. Then the analysis of the structure of answers was made.

102 people participated in the questionnaire survey. Table 1 presents proportional data illustrating the distribution of respondents' answers to particular questions.

One of the determinants of personal branding is a possession of a clearly defined objective, a vision of oneself in the future. Therefore respondents were asked if they have clearly defined career goal. Little more than ¼ of respondents replied affirmatively to this question, almost six out of ten stated that they 'rather; have such a goal defined, and others (15.69%) answered 'rather not'.

Not every person who has a career plan developed follows it in practice, therefore survey participants were asked how it is in their cases. 36.27% of respondents answered 'yes' to this question, and nearly 54% – 'rather yes'. People who 'rather not' realize their development plan comprised 1.96% of all surveyed people, and the rest of them (nearly 8%) could not give a clear answer to this question.

A person who wants to build his own personal brand effectively, must first of all know own strengths and weaknesses. Asked whether they know their strengths as employees, almost 53% of respondents marked the answer 'yes', and 45.10% – 'rather yes'. The same, small

percentage of the research group (0.98%) answered 'not' and 'rather not' to this question. In turn, asked on knowledge of their weaknesses, almost half of survey participants answered 'yes', and two out of five of surveyed – 'rather yes'. Do not know their weaknesses 2.94% of respondents, and 4.90% of them – 'rather not' know. Other survey participants were not able to give a clear answer to this question.

Table 1. Building personal brand in the light of the research (own study)

Statements	Answers (in %)				
	yes	rather yes	rather not	not	I don't know
I have clearly defined career target, a vision of myself in the future	25.49	58.82	15.69	0.00	0.00
I realize a development plan of my own career consequently	36.27	53.93	1.96	0.00	7.84
I know my strengths as an employee	52.94	45.10	0.98	0.98	0.00
I know my weaknesses as an employee	49.02	41.18	4.90	2.94	1.96
I know what I do better than colleagues (what makes me different)	34.31	46.08	10.78	2.94	5.89
I believe that I am competitive in the labour market	23.53	40.20	15.69	1.96	18.62
I know what I want others to think and say about me	41.18	44.12	8.82	3.92	1.96
I know what others think and say about me	11.77	57.84	20.59	1.96	7.84
I want to have a strong personal brand	77.45	22.55	0.00	0.00	0.00
I want to know more about methods and tools of building personal brand	56.87	32.35	8.82	0.00	1.96

To have a strong personal brand, one must have something that makes him different on the market. In other words, must be better than others in some field. That is why respondents were asked if they know what distinguishes them positively in comparison to other people. People who provided positive answers to this question constituted almost 1/3 of all respondents, and slightly more than 46% of the research participants stated that they 'rather yes' know what they do better than others. Every ninth respondent 'rather not' know, and 3% definitely 'not' know what makes them different on the market. The rest of the research group (5.89%) were unable to give a clear answer to this question.

Survey respondents were also asked whether they considered themselves to be competitive in the labour market. 23.53% of them replied affirmatively to this question, two out of five answerers believed that they 'rather yes' are competitive in the market. 17.65% of the participants of the research had the opposite opinion, indicating answers 'not' (1.96%) and 'rather not' (15.69%). The rest of respondents (18.62%) were unable to give an unequivocal answer to this question.

To build own personal brand consciously and effectively, people should know both what others (colleagues, clients, superiors, subordinates) think and say about them, and what they want others to think and say about them. Respondents were asked about these issues. Nearly 12% of survey participants know and 57.84% of them 'rather yes' know what others think and say about them. Every fifth respondent 'rather not' know, almost 2% definitely do 'not' know. Others (7.84%) pointed answer 'I don't know'.

In turn, when asked whether they know what they want others think and say about them, more than 41% of survey participants answered affirmatively to this question, and 44.12% of them stated 'rather yes'. A different opinion presented almost 13% of respondents indicating answers 'rather not' (8.82%) and 'not' (3.92%). The other surveyed were not able to give a clear answer to this question.

Respondents were also asked whether they are interested in both having a strong personal brand and broadening their knowledge about methods and tools of building a strong personal brand. All the respondents declared that they are interested in possessing a strong personal brand answering 'yes' (77.45%) and 'rather yes' (22.55%). However, a fewer survey participants are interested in broadening their knowledge about methods and tools of building personal brand. Those who definitely want to know more about it pose 56.87% of all respondents, and those who 'rather yes' want constitute almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of surveyed group. Every eleventh respondent declared a lack of interest in widening knowledge on this topic, and the rest of them (1.96%) were not able to give an unambiguous answer to this question.

People who want to have a strong personal brand are required to build a network of relationships. Therefore, respondents were asked which information and communication technologies (ICT) they use in the process of establishing and maintaining professional relationships. It was an open question and respondents were asked to list all ICT they use in the process mentioned above.

Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents (78 people) declared that they use the phone, while 53% of them – the internet. E-mail is used by 37% of survey participants, and subsequently: a computer (25%), face-to-face conversation (22%), fax (16%), communicators (10%), and traditional mail (10%). Integration trips, social networking and radiotelephone were listed by individual persons. Analysis of the above responses indicates that they are not mutually exclusive, for example, computer usage may mean sending e-mail, internet use, etc. What is more, some respondents listed communication tools, other – forms of communication.

It also seemed to be interesting how respondents perceive and characterize people with a strong personal brand, therefore they were asked to list features characteristic of such people. This question was the open one and respondents were free to answer. They were asked to list 5 features, but most of them were not able to list so many characteristics.

A whole range of characteristics listed by survey participants were logically divided into several groups. According to respondents a person with a strong, authentic personal brand (a number of indications in brackets):

- As a leader is: self-confident (20), determined (12), ambitious (11), independent (9), courageous (6), firm (5), possessing a strong character (4) and authority (3);
- In his actions is: punctual (20), hardworking (16), conscientious (15), reliable (12), consistent (10), persistent (9), organized (6), disciplined (6), involved (5), self-reliant (4), reasonable (4), active (3), solid (2) and effective (1);
- As a human being is: honest (16), responsible (13), trustworthy (8), optimistic (6), good (5) and loyal (2);
- As an expert is: creative (14), knowledgeable (9), intelligent (4), well-educated (4), competent (3) and professional (3);
- In his relations with others is: communicative (32), open (13), assertive (12), empathetic (12), helpful (7), open to cooperation (6), understanding (5), truthful (4), friendly (2) and benevolent (1).

Taking into account characteristics that were the most often listed by respondents, a person with a strong personal brand is first and foremost (figure 2): communicative (32), self-confident (20), punctual (20), hardworking (16), honest (16) and conscientious (15).

Respondents were also asked to list the benefits that having a strong personal brand brings to its owner (an individual) and the organization in which this person works. This open question gives respondents freedom of expression. They were asked to specify 5 benefits in both cases, but most of them could not list so many benefits.

Almost 12% of respondents did not name a single benefits that having a strong personal brand brings to its owner. The other survey participants listed the following benefits

(a number of indications in brackets): financial benefits (46), satisfaction (36), greater competitiveness on the labour market (28), development opportunities (15), respect (11), self-realization (10), self-promotion (9), the trust of an employer (8), career (7), professional opportunities (7), prestige (6), good job (6), a strong position in the company (6), better work results (6), stabilization (5), recognition (5), easier professional contacts (5), good relations with co-workers (4), high self-esteem (4), self-confidence (3), a sense of security (2), a higher social status (2), job security (1).

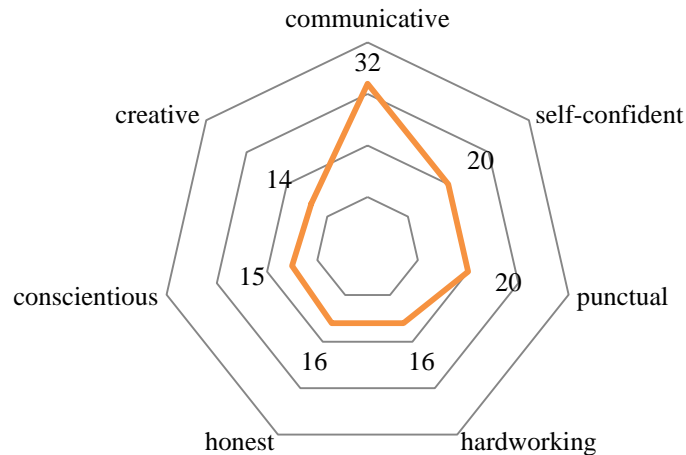


Figure 2. The most important features of a person with strong personal brand (own study)

In turn, the benefits that the employee's strong personal brand brings to the organization which he works in, were listed by about 80% of respondents, however most of them named only one benefit, and some of listed benefits were not related to organizations. According to survey participants, having a good employee (12), higher profits (12), greater prosperity (10), greater prestige (10), greater efficiency (8), good atmosphere (8), new contacts (7), employer's satisfaction (6), good publicity (4), development (4), better results (4), more clients (3), good example to other employees (2), higher competitiveness (2), good reputation (2) and increasing work standards (1) are benefits that organizations achieve by employing workers with a strong personal brand.

As one can see, survey participants list two and a half times more examples of the benefits for the personal brand owners (232 indications) than for organizations in which they work (95 indications).

8. Conclusion

Professional development challenges employees with new requirements, forces them to gain knowledge, new skills, shape and strengthen appropriate attitudes. Today people who do not develop themselves are left behind and have significantly smaller chances for professional success. If professional development is to be beneficial to the employee, it must be conscious and oriented as well as recognised and appreciated by the business environment (co-workers, superiors, potential employers, etc.). To achieve this, actions aimed at building personal brand should be taken by employees. However practice shows that a lot of people do not build their own, authentic, strong personal brand, so their professional development is casual.

The results of the survey show that both the respondents' knowledge about personal branding, as well as actions taken by them in building a personal brand, are not sufficient to achieve professional success.

First of all it should be noted that many respondents are not determined in their answers. People who want to build their strong personal brand need to be firm both in terms

of a direction in which they want to follow, and in taking actions enabling achievement of their objectives. Employees who 'rather' have clearly defined career target, 'rather' know their own strengths and weaknesses, or 'rather' know what they do better than others, are not able to build a strong, authentic personal brand. In other words, the man who 'rather' knows what he wants, does not have and will not have a strong personal brand.

The fact that more respondents unequivocally declare realization of their professional objective, than those who have clearly defined career goal, leads to the conclusion, that some people have a sense of achieving their professional objectives, which in reality are not clearly identified.

About half of the survey participants are convinced that they know own strengths and weaknesses, and $\frac{1}{3}$ of them definitely know what makes them different on the market. So one can assume that at least half of the respondents do not devote much time to reflection on themselves and let other people define their own identity. This means that they do not build their own personal brand consciously and their professional development is accidental.

There are much more respondents who know what they want others to think and say about them, than those who actually know what others think and say about them. But the lack of feedback on perceiving by others values and behaviours presented by the individual as well as decisions and actions taken by him in the process of his professional development, makes it difficult to determine whether these values, behaviours, decisions and actions are appropriate and bring expected effect in the form of positively recognizable personal brand.

Although all the respondents more or less decisively declare that they would like to have a strong personal brand, some of them do not show interest in expanding their knowledge about methods and tools of personal branding. It is as if they assume that the personal brand can be built automatically, without their consciousness and active participation in this process.

Many of characteristics of people with a strong personal brand listed by the respondents describe good, but not outstanding employees. It is interesting and at the same time alarming that only 9% of the respondents mention knowledge as characteristic of people with a strong personal brand. Perhaps the reason is that the knowledge possessed by an individual is not visible at first glance, although in reality knowledge is a basis of taken decisions, actions, as well as influences attitudes and behaviour presented by people.

Lack of involvement in personal branding can be partly explained by the fact that many individuals are not aware of the benefits that a strong personal brand can bring both brand owners and organizations in which they work. It is evidenced by the fact that most of the respondents have a problem with specifying mentioned above benefits. However one should be aware that employees who are not convinced of the benefits that can be achieved through possessing a strong personal brand, will not engage in its building.

Summing up, having a strong personal brand is becoming increasingly essential and is the key to personal professional success. However, as shown by the results of a study, most people do not attach much importance to this process. Those who want to achieve professional success, need to take their carrier into their own hands and not wait for what life will bring them.

Personal branding is a complex problem, the presented paper is only a basis for further considerations. The analysis of the survey results was made with full awareness of the limitations resulting from the relatively small number of respondents. Thus, although the generalization based on this research is not possible, the results are important information about personal branding and indicate the future directions of research.

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