

APRIL 25, 2023

# Breaking the Silence: Unveiling the Truth Behind Pluralistic Ignorance



## **The Deal with The Effect Of Pluralistic Ignorance When Trying To Develop Strategies To Improve Employer Branding**

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I am writing this short blog for business owners, line managers and HR staff trying to set up their businesses to become more competitive in the employment market but finding it difficult to move their teams ahead. It addresses the difficulty of attracting and retaining talent on two levels. Firstly, it provides some very brief insights into the characteristics of a winning company in the war for talent. Secondly, it provides a simple tool and process to deal with one of the many obstacles business owners and practitioners may experience to get consensus and alignment to implement obvious improvement strategies. These are ideas that business owners and practitioners can use to overcome difficulty and get some action going. Consultants and facilitators may also find this helpful. Please note that I do not suggest this as an end-to-end solution.

Let me explain the issues first and then share some tools and processes that I found helpful in our practices.

The war for talent is lately one of those popular conversation topics, and it is on the lips of everybody. There are more conference presentations, articles, books, and suggested solutions by experts on what companies can do to win the talent war than I have seen over the past 30 years.

In this context, I work with clients often to support them in developing strategies to improve their competitiveness within the labour market. Now we know that part of the solution would be to ensure they have outstanding employer branding because candidates and employees are attracted to companies when they believe that employment at a selected company will provide functional, economic, and psychological benefits. There is much more to improve your employer branding than just throwing money at the problem by paying better than the competitors.



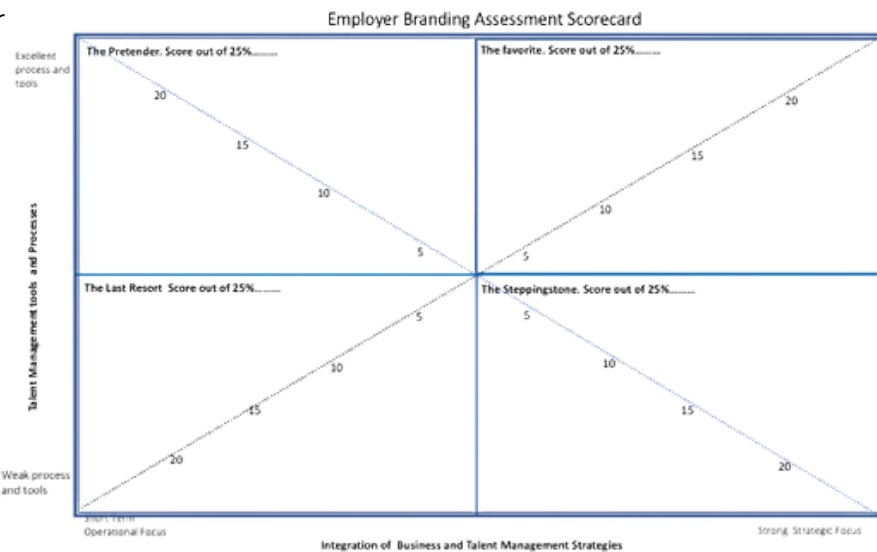
However, part of the solution is improving inclusiveness and transparency, which is also a partial solution. While working with many clients over the years, one condition stands out to effectively improve a company's employer brand, i.e., the ability to fully integrate talent strategies with the business strategy and be congruent in applying talent-based information when making critical business decisions.

This is easier said than done because business is complex and always logical. Companies consist of the same complex dynamics in society because it is a micro-society comprising members of the broader community.

This reality means that implementing any intervention takes a lot of work.

Typically step one in creating a better employer brand is to get the significant stakeholders to understand and agree on how well they perform and set a strategy to improve their employer branding and, simultaneously, improve business results.

That is where I have seen an interesting phenomenon sticking its head out and derailing any progress with step one, called pluralistic ignorance.



## What is Pluralistic Ignorance?

Pluralistic ignorance is where group members privately hold beliefs or attitudes that differ from what they express publicly in the team or working group. This behaviour often leads to a false impression that they believe no one else shares their privately held ideas. They then express views that they think the rest of the team feels. This effect is that the group often addresses the wrong issues and seldom does a good root cause analysis to identify the real problems to address. As frustrating as it is, a good leader or facilitator must use strategies to prevent the group they are working with from falling into the pluralistic ignorance trap when trying to solve challenging problems.

Below you will find one of the many tools I use when working with groups to assist them in dealing with the issue of pluralistic ignorance. I would typically ask members to use the matrix below to assess their company's strength in attractiveness and or use it in conversations with at least two other people in the organization to obtain a rating on how people perceive the company to be. Bringing these conversation results back allows members to express opinions more openly because they present structured information rather than feeling they may express their own wrong opinion. It also addresses, by implication, some corrective action when the team starts discussing the presented information as revealed through the rating of their employer branding.

However, it is vital to inform participants that it is possible that all the behaviours can be present at the same time in a company as departmental differences may be at play at any time in one company. The sum of the different assessments reflects the company's status more accurately anyway. I hope this helped develop some insights into the typical issues experienced in improving your employment market competitiveness. Feel free to use change, play with the suggested concepts, and share your insights in a future blog. If you prefer a personal discussion, please get in touch with me anytime.

contact us!

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Employer Branding Assessment

|                                       |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Talent Management tools and Processes | <p><b>The Pretender. Score out of 25%.....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent tools are available to plan for talent management but there is no integration with the business plan. The strategic plan and talent plans exist in silo's</li> <li>• Significant investment in talent management tools but it is not well used by leaders because accessibility to information is an issue.</li> <li>• There are no cross checks to ensure the talent management plans are actually executed / improving the company's capability to outperform competitors.</li> <li>• Technology developments are still the primary driver of success.</li> <li>• Business expansion and innovation is still hampered by not having enough skilled people available.</li> <li>• There may be some gossip that favoritism is driving career progression rather than performance</li> </ul> | <p><b>The favorite. Score out of 25%.....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The strategic business plan include the plans to build the employee competence in key corporate processes.</li> <li>• The talent management practices are matured and provide opportunity for cross functional moves and or promotions.</li> <li>• The company deliver on their strategic business goals because they have talented and competent people driving business results.</li> <li>• The workforce is viewed as a strategic asset.</li> <li>• The business plans are supported by integrated people, process and technology plans are integrated to drive performance excellence.</li> <li>• Talent management practices like succession management, training and performance management are matured and well established.</li> <li>• The labor market view the company in a positive manner and as a potential employer – no shortage of applicants.</li> </ul> |
|                                       | <p><b>The Last Resort Score out of 25%.....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vacancies are treated as upset conditions in the business and not as strategic opportunities to grow the company's capability.</li> <li>• Ability to deliver business results are restricted because of a lack of skills</li> <li>• Focus on finding people with experience to fill the vacancies – little training of internal resources.</li> <li>• Drive is to fill vacancies as quick as possible.</li> <li>• Action is more important than planning.</li> <li>• Competencies required for critical jobs are not identified.</li> <li>• No corporate support for employee competency growth.</li> <li>• Talent planning is not part of the business plan.</li> <li>• People are regarded as a cost</li> <li>• The labor market view the company as a last resort to work for</li> </ul>          | <p><b>The Steppingstone. Score out of 25%.....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good talent and skills are recognised when there is a need to fill vacancies but there is no formal process in place to ensure this happens in a coordinated fashion.</li> <li>• A few talented people are continuously moved around to go and fix problems.</li> <li>• Each manager is responsible to ensure they have competent people thus internal poaching is a growing concern.</li> <li>• No consistent process to manage cross departmental moves and promotions.</li> <li>• Critical vacancies is still hurting the business performance.</li> <li>• Tools and talent management practices are mostly informal or very reactive or cheap and simple tools are preferred.</li> <li>• The labor market view the company as a good stepping stone.</li> </ul>  |
| Excellent process and tools           | <p>Short Term Operational Focus</p> <p>Integration of Business and Talent Management Strategies</p>   |  |
| Weak process and tools                | <p>Strong Strategic Focus</p>   |  |