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**Definition and application of an External Employer
Branding Strategy Framework – Associação Académica de
Coimbra – O.A.F.**

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Organizational Consulting

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BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Department of Human Resources and Organizational
Behaviour

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Acknowledgements

This project represents the end of an academic chapter, and it reflects my resilience, hard work and desire to create value. It is the result of the combination of two of my passions: Employer Branding and Associação Académica de Coimbra. It made it possible to achieve my dream of leaving my mark at an organization that I have been closely related to since I was a child and of which I am part today, as an employee.

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Abstract

Today, companies are fighting for the best talent in the market, recognizing their workforce as a competitive advantage. However, talent is scarce and organizations need to find ways to attract, develop and retain their employees. Employer Branding is the concept behind this idea and is the key strategy for companies to succeed in this “war of talent”. This project aims to define an Employer Branding strategy, focused on the external dimension, applied to Associação Académica de Coimbra – Organismo Autónomo de Futebol, which is struggling financially. It emerges from the current situation of the organization and from some internal changes already in progress, and it focus not only on specific recommendations but mainly on the development of a full strategic framework to adopt. To solve this challenge, an internal analysis was carried out through meetings, discussion sessions, surveys, interviews, and job experience, complemented with the outside perspective of professionals and with literature, both on Employer Branding and Strategic Planning. The results are summarized in two main points: (1) the construction of a strategic framework; and (2) on its application to the club’s reality. It allowed to define the fundamentals of Académica and set the long-term vision and goals it wants to achieve with this strategy. Thereafter, they were translated in specific initiatives and in measurement indicators, being fully detailed on their concept, timeline, logistics, investment required and expected return. This strategy for Académica was set in full alignment with its needs and reality, covering simple and pragmatic initiatives, guaranteeing its feasibility.

Key-words: Employer Branding, Talent, Human Resources Strategy, Strategic Framework, Key Performance Indicators

JEL classification system: J24, O15

Resumo

Atualmente, as empresas lutam pelo melhor talento no mercado, reconhecendo nos colaboradores uma possível vantagem competitiva. No entanto, o talento é escasso e as organizações precisam de encontrar formas de atrair, desenvolver e reter os seus colaboradores. O Employer Branding é o conceito por trás desta ideia e é a estratégia certa para as organizações que pretendem ter sucesso nesta "guerra de talento". Este projeto visa definir uma estratégia de Employer Branding externo, aplicada à Associação Académica de Coimbra - Organismo Autónomo de Futebol, que se encontra em dificuldades financeiras. O projeto surge da situação atual da organização e de mudanças internas já a decorrer, tendo o seu foco não só em recomendações específicas, mas também no desenvolvimento de uma estratégia a implementar. Para solucionar este desafio, foi efetuada uma análise interna através de reuniões, questionários, entrevistas e experiência profissional, complementada com literatura e uma perspetiva externa de profissionais, tanto sobre Employer Branding como sobre Planeamento Estratégico. Os resultados podem ser resumidos em dois pontos principais: (1) a construção de um plano estratégico; e (2) a sua aplicação à realidade da Académica. Este processo permitiu definir os pilares do clube e estabelecer a visão e objetivos a longo prazo a alcançar com esta estratégia. Foram posteriormente traduzidos em ações específicas e em indicadores de avaliação, sendo detalhados no seu conceito, tempo, logística, investimento e retorno esperado. Esta estratégia foi estabelecida em total alinhamento com as necessidades e realidade do clube, abrangendo iniciativas simples e pragmáticas, que garantam a sua viabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Employer Branding, Talento, Estratégia de Recursos Humanos, Plano Estratégico, Indicadores de Desempenho

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Topic presentation

This project results from a longstanding relationship between the author and the studied organization – Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F.¹ – and from a deep growing interest on the Employer Branding concept, due to past professional experience and insightful classes attended during the academic course. Given the current context, both from the organization, which is facing internal changes, and from the world, that is being confronted with new Human Resources challenges every day, the opportunity to contribute with a practical project with real impact has arisen. The project gains more relevance as its importance was recognized by the organization and it had full support and collaboration from top management since the first day, in every stage of the process.

The world is changing rapidly and the ability of companies to adapt may become the key factor for success. And, in the 21st century, one of the most relevant strategic approaches for organizations is the capacity to attract, develop, motivate and retain talent (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). Talent is currently seen as a critical element that makes the “distinction between economies or companies that grow and innovate and those that struggle to survive” (Cohen, 2001). Attract and retain talent is considered one of the most important strategic tools to solve the current challenges of globalization (Brown & Tannock, 2009).

However, there’s a problem with talent, as it started to become scarce in quantity and quality given the worldwide demand for it. It was in 1998 that McKinsey & Company brought the term “war of talent” to every company agenda, claiming that “better talent is worth fighting for” (Chambers et al., 1998). Furthermore, according to Beechler and Woodward (2009, p.275), there are four main factors that justify it – “(i) global demographic and economic trends; (ii) increasing mobility of people and organizations; (iii) transformational changes to business environments, skills and cultures; and (iv) growing levels of workforce diversity.”

Since the term “war of talent” was coined in the end of the 20th century, companies from all sectors started to develop and strategically manage their image, seeking to become more attractive to potential applicants. It became clear for organizations and economies that the

¹ From this point onwards the name of the club may be referred to as Académica

perception of these talents was highly relevant and created the need to improve their own branding as employers (Aldousari et al., 2017; Goffee & Jones, 2009).

The concept of Employer Branding emerged more or less at the same moment, being introduced for the first time in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow. It represented exactly what companies were starting to understand and looking for. Amongst several definitions, Xia and Yang (2010, p.536) made a clear explanation of it, stating that Employer Branding “provides a strategic framework that incorporates both marketing and human resource management” in order to attract, develop and retain these talents. Employer Branding is commonly segmented in two dimensions: Internal and External (Biswas & Suar, 2014). While Internal Employer Branding focus on the employee’s perspective about the company, the External Employer Branding focuses on outsider’s perception of the firm as employer. Both play an important role on the effectiveness of the strategy and the consistency between them is fundamental to enhance the outcomes (Backhaus, 2016)

For the last 20 years, Employer Branding strategies have been developed by firms, studied by researchers, and both are in agreement in relation of its benefits. Companies that developed Employer Branding strategies have presented higher levels of commitment, satisfaction and productivity compared with the ones without or with a partial strategy. The results from the past couple decades evidenced the true value of an Employer Branding strategy and made it very clear for all organizations: if they are looking to attract and retain the best talent, to guarantee sustainable profitability and gain competitive advantage on its competitors, companies must be involved in the development of the Employer Branding strategy (Aldousari et al., 2017). Despite the existent guidelines, models and theories, the most suitable Employer Branding strategy will always depend on the company context and characteristics (De Stobbeleir et al., 2016), which must be also included in the strategical approach of every company.

Founded on November 3, 1887, Associação Académica de Coimbra is the oldest professional football club in Portugal and in the Iberian Peninsula. In 1984 it became an independent organism from the student’s organization with the aim to professionalize their football, changing its name to Associação Académica de Coimbra – Organismo Autónomo de Futebol.

With an umbilical connection to Coimbra and, first and foremost, to its University, Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. is commonly known as “students”, not only because its origins date back to the creation of Academia Dramática, still in the middle of the 19th century, that later would give birth to the Associação Académica de Coimbra, but above

all because, throughout its history in football, it has been noted for the use of players who, besides of their sportive achievements within the four lines of the pitch, also stood out in other areas of society after having completed their studies in Universidade de Coimbra. Owner of a unique History, Académica, also known as "Briosa", for the committed way its players played each game, has always distinguished itself from the others as being more than a football club. In 1968/1969, in the final of Taça de Portugal, Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. was in the front line to claim a better country, placing itself next to the students in the fight against the regime. Symbol of courage and irreverence, Académica played in four more finals of Taça de Portugal, having won two: in 1938/1939, in the first edition, after beating Benfica 4-3 and more recently in 2011/2012, after beating Sporting 1-0. Throughout its history, Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. has participated in four European competitions: Inter-Cities Fairs Cup, UEFA Cup Winners' Cup, UEFA Cup and the Europa League. In 1966/1967, Académica was even vice-champion, having finished the national championship in the second place. It currently stands on the second division of professional football in Portugal, after being relegated in 2016.

Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. is a SDUQ - Sociedade Desportiva Unipessoal por Quotas, meaning it's run by a model where the club detains all the social capital, supported by its members (which pay an annual fee), who elect, every four years, a new management team to be in charge of the strategy of the club, to manage its employees and to run its operations. This elected board of directors is composed by one President and several Vice-Presidents, that remain at the top of the hierarchical structure of the organization, being responsible for managing the rest of employees, divided into two segments: one directly linked with football, which include football players, coaches and technical staff; and a second one made by support areas, which includes several teams and departments, from administrative services to marketing or finance. Currently, Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. has Pedro Roxo as its President and seven Vice-Presidents, responsible for coordinating different areas. The support structure includes 26 employees and presents itself as an aged workforce, with an average age of 48.2 years old, and with high levels of seniority, since, in average, an employee has been in the organization for 15 years. The structure presents few levels of management and supervision positions, reflecting a relatively flat structure.

In the last decade the financial situation of the organization has started to get worse, from poor sporting seasons, increasing debts and declining revenue sources. The situation has deteriorated when, in 2016, the club dropped to the second tier of Portuguese football, which represented major revenue cuts, mainly coming from sponsors and television broadcasts, due

to the lower coverage and attractiveness of the competition. Additionally, the Portuguese banks decided to stop lending money to football clubs, which made the situation even more difficult to reverse. From the data presented in the official accountancy report provided by the club, the numbers reflect the current financial instability lived in the organization. When in 2017 the total liabilities amounted 5,146,646.96€, two years later the total amount went up to 7,520,422.08€, representing an increase of 46.1%. The value of the club assets remained roughly the same, not compensating the sharp growth in liabilities. Currently, the club is facing additional difficulties as the pandemic covid-19 brings more restrictions, blocking the sale of game tickets, which represents one of the most important income sources. As the club struggles to maintain its activity, the Board of Directors is working to find viable solutions at the short term, involving potential investors, which must always need the approval of the majority of the club members. At the same time, several internal changes within the organization structure, culture and strategy are being made, being the main reason behind this paper focusing primarily on the external dimension of Employer Branding.

As mentioned previously, the History of Académica is deeply linked with the city's university, as the majority of the players and structure members were also Bachelor or Master students. However, due to the professionalization of the club over the last decades, the connection between the two entities have weakened. Despite the recognized potential of this connection from both parts and the fragile situation of the club, only small and occasional initiatives were carried, deprived of any well-structured strategy or other follow-up initiatives. In fact, in the last couple of years there were only 3 initiatives identified as relevant by the Board of Vice-Presidents: (1) free entrance in the games for students in academic attire; (2) joint Associação Académica de Coimbra anniversary celebrations; and (3) sale of merchandise in several academic events and parties. With an historical connection to one of the most important universities in the country, with over 20,000 annual students, there exists a perceived opportunity to explore, which will be the main basis for the current project

1.2 Project aim

As Académica faces several limitations and tries to re-organize, the possibility to face the connection to the university context in a different way was identified by the organization as well as the opportunity to work the image of the club as an Employer. Therefore, the aim of this project is **the development of a solid Employer Branding strategy, focused on the external dimension**, as the organization is already working on internal changes. The possibility of

creating such a strategy to attract and develop university talent and to be closer to academic context may become again a competitive advantage of Académica, opening the possibility to refresh its image and perception within the students, seeking to become a more attractive workplace, which may be fundamental to renew its workforce. Furthermore, it can bring other benefits, as reduced recruitment costs, increased engagement with the student community, increased attendance in football matches and, more interesting, the development of events, initiatives and projects that it would not otherwise carry out due to lack of resources.

To fully understand the concept and better develop an external Employer Branding strategy for Académica, the project has been divided in two different stages, even though they will be further presented in an integrated perspective: a first one where we will contrast the theoretical content with real perspectives and practices of several professionals and companies; and the most important stage, where the framework will be defined and applied, through the internal analysis carried out with the support of Académica structure.

For the first stage, the following theoretical review questions were set.

(Q1) Do companies share the same perspectives and goals on Employer Branding? (Q2) Which process do companies follow to set an Employer Branding Strategy, at an external level? (Q3) What are the best practices to attract and develop talent? (Q4) How are companies adapting their strategies to current context, with covid-19 pandemic? (Q5) How do companies measure and track their results?

For the following and most important stage, the following research project dimensions were set.

(Q1) What objectives Académica wants to achieve with a new External Employer Branding Strategy? (Q2) What strategic framework can Académica adopt to define its External Employer Branding Strategy? (Q3) What should be the strategy adopted by the organization, taking into consideration its current context? (Q4) How can Académica track or measure the results obtained with the strategy defined?

The following chapter will analyse and review relevant literature both on Employer Branding and Strategic Planning, providing the theoretical basis for the framework and proposed strategy for Académica. Afterwards, the methodology to (1) assess several companies' reality and (2) define and apply the strategic framework that will be explained, offering further details relevant to the process and to the current context of the organization.

The fourth and fifth chapters will include the framework and its application, presenting the proposed External Employer Branding strategy for Académica, looking to answer the research project dimensions stated above.

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Employer Branding

2.1.1 Concept

Employer Branding has become an important topic of research in the last decades as many organizations and industry practitioners start to develop their talent, their employment brand and realizing its potential as a competitive advantage (Ambler, 1996; Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011; Sengupta, 2015)

The term emerged from the previous constructs and principles on branding in the Marketing field, which have been applied later to Human Resources. It was defined for the first time, in terms of its benefits, by Ambler and Barrow (1996, p.187) as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”. The two authors were not the only ones to realize that the effort companies put in to develop products and brand differentiation could also be applied to Human Resources Management and were not alone placing its definition with a direct linkage to previous brand marketing techniques. Employer branding has also been defined as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity” and “a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors” (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, p.502). In fact, in early interest stages, the Human Resources community was mainly focused on the analysis of these marketing constructs and its possible appliance in Human Resources, predicting its positive outcomes (Backhaus, 2016)

Today, independently from the size and typology of the organization, Employer Branding has become an important and complex Human Resources strategy for companies, who are actively seeking to attract, retain and develop talent (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sengupta et al., 2015). Aligned with this perspective, Sullivan (2004) defined the concept as “a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm”. Besides having the goal of displaying an attractive image as an employer for current and potential employees, Backhaus (2016) claims the literature has shifted from its early stages and includes now the desire to be an “employer of choice”, which is clearly present on Martin, Gollan and Grig (2011, p.3618) definition of

Employer Branding – “a generalized recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing a high quality employment experience, and a distinctive organizational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others”. Without losing the connection to its fundamentals based on marketing techniques, it’s possible to realize that literature on Employer Branding has, in fact, progressed over the years, adopting a more contemporary approach, adjusted to the current Human Resources challenges organizations face.

2.1.2 Employer Value Proposition

Besides conceptualizing Employer Branding, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) also resumed the process to three main steps, starting with the development of an Employer Value Proposition (EVP), which is a pillar construct in the topic being addressed. The following two steps are related to the promotion of this value proposition, established by companies, both to potential applicants and current employees. Therefore, firms market their EVP to an external (labour market) and internal (firm) audience to improve key HR outcomes (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Backhaus, 2016; Tumasjan et al., 2019). The second and third step will be further analysed, with a deeper review to internal and external Employer Branding literature.

The term EVP corresponds to the central message of an organization, expressing its positioning as an employer and what it has to offer to its employees, including financial and non-financial elements, such as challenging tasks, innovation, work-life balance or firm reputation, amongst others (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Corporate Leadership Council, 2004; Tuzuner & Yuksel 2009). The concept was also defined by Michington (2018, p.48) as “a set of tangible and intangible employments benefits provided by an organization in return for the skills, capabilities and experiences an employee brings”. Pawar and Charak (2014, p.1) provided complimentary information, affirming that EVP is a “straightforward statement” that should be at the center of all other organisational processes.

The benefits of defining an Employer Value Proposition were explored by several researchers, who are in agreement of its benefit for companies. EVP is a differentiation factor of success for any organization that seeks to attract, retain and develop talent, bringing competitive advantages in the labour market (Bell, 2005; Gering & Conner, 2002). The reason behind its true value, relies on the impact it has on organizations, employees and potential candidates, which includes improvements on employee commitment, improved attractiveness and cost reduction (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019; Bell, 2005; Herger, 2007).

In accordance to the literature, EVP is as a key element for any Human Resources strategy, having impact both internally and externally, allowing firms to differentiate from competitors. Thus, it's of the utmost importance that companies "actively meet employees' expectations to encourage continuous loyalty, commitment and engagement with the organization" (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019, p.388).

2.1.3 Internal and External Employer Branding

Following the second and third steps of the Employer Branding process, defined by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), it is relevant to establish the difference between Internal and External Employer Branding, since firms promote their image as an employer within and outside of their organization (Aldousari et al., 2017).

Despite literature and research on Internal Employer Branding started later, it has received more attention in recent times, as employees started to be seen as organization ambassadors through their own behaviours, according to Knox and Freeman (2006) and Maxwell and Knox (2009). Internal Employer Branding has been defined as one by which a firm develops a culture of trust with its employees through a set of moral corporate values that employees identify with or through the fulfilment of their psychological contracts (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015). Internal Employer Branding has also been defined as a "set of strategic processes that align and empower employees to deliver the appropriate customer experience in a consistent fashion (MacLavery, McQuillan & Oddie, 2007, p.3), or in a simpler way, as a process of promoting the company brand values amongst employees, as described in a survey conducted in 2005 by the Canadian Marketing Association.

The Internal Employer Branding process entails a diverse range of methods, initiatives and strategies that have been studied by several authors, including systematic career management, work life balance (Deery 2008), brand consistency across all touch points, livingness the corporate values, training support, leadership practices, reward and recognition programs, recruitment practices (MacLavery, McQuillan & Oddie, 2007), amidst others. The 2018 and 2020-2021 Global Talent Trends by Mercer, provided a complementary perspective on the subject, with some of the more recent trends, amongst other topics, on what employees most value and what companies are starting to work on internally. Topics as work life balance, flexibility in time or in workplace, working with purpose and, last but not the less important, well-being and mental health are major trends that companies need to focus. And both studies are very clear in the shared conclusions they sent – independently from how the economies and

the work environment evolves, “ultimately, as long as organizations focus on the well-being, growth and diverse needs of their people, they’ll ignite the engine that runs their business”.

With the goal of developing a workforce fully “committed to the set of values and organizational goals established by the firm”, as Backhaus and Tikoo stated (2004, p.503), Internal Employer Branding has become vital for enhancing organizations competitiveness and success, since it brings more engaged and committed employees, proving that it is worthwhile for companies to increasingly invest in it (Vatsa, 2006).

On the other hand, External Employer Branding (EEB) has been the focus of the majority of researchers who have studied the non-employee perspective on employers (De Stobbeleir et al., 2016). This phenomenon happens as External Employer Branding is deeply linked to the earlier Marketing constructs, given that applicants behaviour works similarly to consumer behaviour, in several aspects. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) explained that, as social identity theory suggests, job seekers will be more attracted to the companies they identify the most, based on the job attributes they value. Lievens (2007) provides complementary information, stating that applicants also consider both instrumental functions (e.g. remuneration) and psychological benefits (e.g. work environment and culture) when they evaluate potential employers.

Following this line of thought, External Employer Branding has been defined as the development of “organization’s employer image, i.e. an outsider’s mental representations of attributes related to an organization as an employer”. In a more simplified manner, External Employer Branding corresponds to the “employer image management” developed by a firm (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016, p.410). Following the shift in literature explained in the beginning of the chapter, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) picked the concept of becoming an “employer of choice” as the purpose of External Employer Branding, as it allows companies to attract the best possible talent. In accordance, reaching that target audience is one of the primary goals of EEB, as well as to support and enhance the corporate brand. There’s a wide range of practices related to this dimension of Employer Branding, from the more traditional communication channels, with general advertisement (Collins & Han, 2004), to more recent and contemporary approaches to attract talent, through digital presence (Parry & Tyson, 2008; Wilson HCG, 2019). These practices will be detailed further in the chapter.

Having established both concepts, it is of the utmost importance to understand their connection and how they relate with each other. Studies from Knox and Freeman (2006) and Lievens et al. (2007) find that there are significant differences between the two perspectives. If there are incongruences between them, firms can face a deficiency situation or an excess mismatch, i.e “when employees perceive the internal situation as worse than what the external

employer brand image suggests” or “where a company is perceived more positively by insiders than by outsiders”. Both situations are not ideal as they bring consequences on the employees’ performance and attractiveness of the firm (De Stobbeleir et al., 2016, p.9). However, without devaluing Internal Employer Branding, several researchers support the idea that the investment on External Employer Branding might bring better results in the short term. Findings from Lievens et al. (2007) show that if the external image of a firm is attractive, employees will tend to identify more strongly with it. Furthermore, the study from De Stobbeleir et al. (2016, p.24) states that “regardless of the perceived internal situation, when an employer is perceived more favourably by external stakeholders, absenteeism in that organization will be lower”. Nevertheless, firms should seek for a complete Employer Branding strategy, investing both internally and externally, as the 3-step process defined by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) indicates. As Vatsa (2006, p.10) affirmed, External Employer Branding may not be effective if Internal Employer Branding “is not accomplished with agility, as most of the potential employees turn to existing employees for a candid advice on joining the company.”

2.1.4 Benefits of Employer Branding

The vast majority of research done around the topic is consensual on the benefits Employer Branding brings to organizations. Aldousari, et al. (2017, p.165) stated that in the long run, the “outcomes for attracting, empowering and motivating actual and potential employees” are clear and companies who already have good EB strategies are deeply aware of it.

The impact of Employer Branding occurs both internally and externally, at multiple and interconnected levels. It has been observed improvements in employee engagement, satisfaction, motivation, loyalty, identification with the company and even cohesiveness within the staff (Davies, 2008; Schlager et al., 2011; Xia & Yang, 2010). These improvements provide a more satisfactory working environment as well as higher levels of commitment, which, in turn, lead to improved employee performance and higher organization productivity (Aldousari et al., 2017; Ambler & Barrow, 1996). At last, all of the outcomes originated by Employer Branding strategies developed by firms have positive indirect effects on profitability (Gaddam, 2008), which is the ultimate goal of any organization.

The unanimous message around Employer Branding and its benefits is clear. It is essential for companies to develop and implement an Employer Branding Strategy as it is a key-element for the success of their organization (Aldousari, et al., 2017; Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019; Xia & Yang, 2010).

2.1.5 Employer attractiveness and best practices

The scarcity of talent is real and the ability to attract and later retain talent is critical (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). Due to this context that every company faces, organizations must develop the right plans and efforts to be able to attract the best candidates (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014) and implement an effective strategy to achieve this goal. Given that, not only is important to understand the concepts behind it, but also the specific practices carried out across the last years and decades, in order to understand how companies have been dealing with this “war of talent”.

Regarding the external dimension of Employer Branding, the concept of communication is fundamental. Balmer and Greyser (2003) have divided the communication of a company in three different levels: primary communication includes the effect of the company performance, product or service quality and known policies and employee behaviours; the secondary level includes the planned communication policies of the company, from traditional communication channels as advertising to systems of visual identification; and last but not the least, the third level which encompasses the communication effect of third party elements, that includes word of mouth or media interpretation. Further analysis will be made upon the second level of communication identified above, focusing on the specific practice’s companies may adopt.

Amongst all sectors, companies have been creating strategic communication plans, defining specific actions and initiatives to reach to current employees and potential new applicants (Neill, 2016). Despite new trends and ways of developing their brand image, researchers have identified over the years the most used and most effective procedures.

Looking at the best practices, more traditional ways of communication have been identified, as they have been used for a long time by companies. They cover a wide range of policies as general advertisement through newspapers, posters or brochures, public relations or sponsorships (Collins & Han, 2004). The last one has been explored in different approaches, since some companies choose to sponsor relevant events in campus, sponsor scholarships, or negotiate naming rights on the campus (Collins, 2007; Sharif & Islam, 2017). One of the most used practice is the presence at information sessions and career fairs which, according to Cable and Yu (2006, p.829), correspond to “information-exchange events where recruiters from different companies gather in a common location, and interact with job seekers”. The two researchers have studied the impact of career fairs and widely recommend it to companies, as it was seen as richer and more credible than other policies, besides providing instant feedback and tailored interaction with job seekers. They conclude their point claiming that while face-to-face communication could be more expensive, the outcomes could be greater as it seems to be more effective.

However, traditional communication channels are not the only way companies can reach students and potential applicants. According to Fortune 500 Employment Brand Report (2019, p.4), by 2020, persons from 18 to 35 will represent more than 50% of the workforce, reminding companies that these new generations “never knew a world without technology”. Being present in everyone’s life, organizations must adapt and include digital tools in their attractions strategies and policies (Parry & Tyson, 2008). When it comes to the digital, two main channels stand out: web site and social media. The same report from Wilson HCG (2019), reached an undisputable conclusion - career websites are one of the most important elements when attracting talent. It has been proven that it influences the attitudes towards the organization, the perception of the company as an employer and further intentions of pursue employment. Factors as the navigation usability, amount of information and aesthetics have been defined as critical for the consequences on attractiveness and, due to its proven benefits, it’s a highly recommended strategy for any company (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007; Cober et al., 2003). On the other hand, social media has been growing on its popularity not only for personal use but also for professional purposes. Because of that, social media presence has been related to reputation perception and application intention, through the showcase of employee information and tailored and interactive content (Sivertzen et al.; 2013; Wilson HCG, 2019). The most used platforms are Facebook and LinkedIn, the latter being considered more formal and professional, being a useful tool for both candidates and recruiters. The best practices often represent a strong presence on both platforms as well as on other social media platforms, requiring a conscious use of it, once it represents a key source of information for outsiders. (Caers & Castelyns, 2010; Rienties et al., 2012)

2.2 Strategic Planning

2.2.1 Process

Strategic Planning has been studied and described for several decades, through different schools of thought, as a key element on business management. According to Bryson (1988, p.74), the concept corresponds to a “disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions shaping the nature and direction of an organization’s activities”. In accordance, Steiner (1979) also described strategic planning as a consistent effort to define the company purpose, goals and policies in order to establish strategies that, consequently, allow the organization to accomplish its objectives.

The process and list of steps to follow varies from author to author and each company should adapt the model to its context and characteristics (Steiner, 1979). In 1994, Mintzberg defined a three-step model for strategic programming that involves: (1) codification, which means to clarify and express the strategies in terms sufficiently clear to render them formally operational; (2) elaboration, that corresponds to the translation of the strategies into sub strategies and overall action plans; and (3) conversion of strategies, which comes to the consideration of the change effects on the organization's operations. Other models, as the ones presented by Bryson (1988), Steiner (1979) or Mintzberg et al. (1998) include different steps, but there are typically some common elements between them. In their research, Boyd and Reuning-Elliott (1998) studied the most shared and important items of the process and reached to a list that included: (1) mission statements, (2) trend analysis, (3) competitor analysis, (4) short and long-term goals, (5) action plans, and (6) ongoing evaluation.

As a result, strategic planning is often used by management teams and it has been proved that leads to better business performance (Prahalad & Hamel, 1994; Wolf & Floyd, 2017), as it increases efficiency and optimizes resources (Arend et al., 2015).

2.2.2 Strategic Analysis

The process of strategic planning often starts with the analysis of the context of each organization, which involves the company's external and internal situation (Kaplan & Norton, 2014). The external environment concerns with the industry context, involving the relationship with competitors, clients and suppliers. On the other side, the internal environment refers to the organization itself and embodies three main elements: goals and values; resources and capabilities; structures and systems (Grant, 2010).

The analysis of the external environment can be carried out through several frameworks and different contexts. Kaplan and Norton (2014) and many other authors refer the PESTEL analysis as one of the most common models to evaluate the macro context, which includes political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors. Furthermore, Michael Porter's five forces model is also mentioned as one of the most useful and practical tools to assess, more specifically, the industry context where the organization is inserted in. Porter (1979) claims that the competition context in an industry is defined upon five basic forces: (1) threat of new entrants; (2) bargaining power of buyers; (3) bargaining power of suppliers; (4) threat of substitute products and services; (5) rivalry among existing competitors.

On the other hand, the internal analysis provides a deeper analysis to the organization context, as it goes through its internal resources and capabilities, providing a solid basis to

establish a competitive advantage (Grant, 2010) and develop a suitable strategy that “leverages internal strengths to pursue external opportunities, while countering weaknesses and threats” (Kaplan & Norton, 2014, p.6). The SWOT framework became a key tool for support decision-making in businesses, being used in different contexts and approaches since 60’s and 70’s. It provides a summarized diagnosis, through the analysis of internal and external environment of the organization and strategic reflection (Helms & Nixon, 2010). The framework identifies four main elements - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats - where the first two are related to the internal environment of the firm, and the other ones are related to the organization external environment (Grant, 2010).

2.2.3 Definition of strategic goals

Following the strategical planning process described in the beginning of the chapter, the establishment of goals appears as one of the most important steps. Goals represent the organization beliefs on the desired or needed situations, being critical to the management process (Doran, 1981). The distinction between goals from objectives is highly relevant in this context. While goals tend to be settled in broader terms and are typically formulated at a strategical level, objectives are usually more specific and formulated in a tangible operational extent, providing support to the defined goals (MacLeod, 2012).

To better formulate goals, Doran (1981) introduced the SMART approach, stating that ideally, they should be Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic and Time-related. However, he reminded that in some situations it is not possible to quantify each one, as it may hinder their establishment. Organizations should adapt and adjust their targets, having in mind that it’s the combination between them and the action plan that creates real impact.

Steiner (1979) added complementary and useful literature on the definition of strategical goals, affirming that organizations may define their goals upon a different number of information sources, from past performance, market trends, industry context, internal analysis, available resources or already implemented strategies, always guaranteeing consistency with the macro strategy of the organization. Furthermore, the author affirmed that “best results are achieved when those who are responsible for achieving objectives have some role in setting them”, claiming the importance of involving teams in the goal definition process, as they become more motivated.

2.2.4 Measurement and monitoring

Kaplan and Norton (2007) believed that companies are not managing and improving their performance, if they are not measuring the progress towards the stated goals. Thus, it's essential that firms regularly monitor and evaluate the defined measures that connect the operational activities with the company strategy (Mauboussin, 2012).

Despite being such an important process, developing a measurement system can become a complex procedure. The most critical aspect consists on the identification of the most accurate and representative indicators of the process, commonly known as KPI - Key Performance Indicators (Franceschini, Galetto, & Maisano, 2007). This concept represents metrics that measure the performance of an organization, of a unit or an individual, on its operational or strategic activities, which are critical for the success of the firm (Kerzner, 2017). On the same direction, Parmenter (2010, p.307) defined KPIs as “a set of measures focusing on those aspects of organizational performance that are the most critical for the current and future success of the organization”. The definition of this indicators and performance targets allows organizations to better monitor and achieve their strategic objectives (Bishop, 2018).

After the definition of the Key Performance Indicators and other metrics, they can be displayed through several tools as dashboards, reports or scorecards. The last one stands out in the business management world as they are commonly used to guarantee the alignment of the operations activities with the business strategy. The purpose is to maintain the focus on a single strategic plan, monitoring “real-world execution and mapping the results of that execution back to a specific strategy” (Kerzner, 2017, p.157). One of the most known adaptations of the scoreboard is the balance scorecard that puts the definition of the company's vision and strategy in the centre of the model. Afterwards, the goals and objectives are defined taking into account that initial basis, in a system of cause-effect in for main dimensions: financial; internal business process; learning and growth; and customer. The strategic map is finalized with the definition of detailed measures, targets and initiatives, guaranteeing the operationalization of the strategy, as seen in figure 2.1 (Kaplan & Norton, 2007).

Translating Vision and Strategy: Four Perspectives

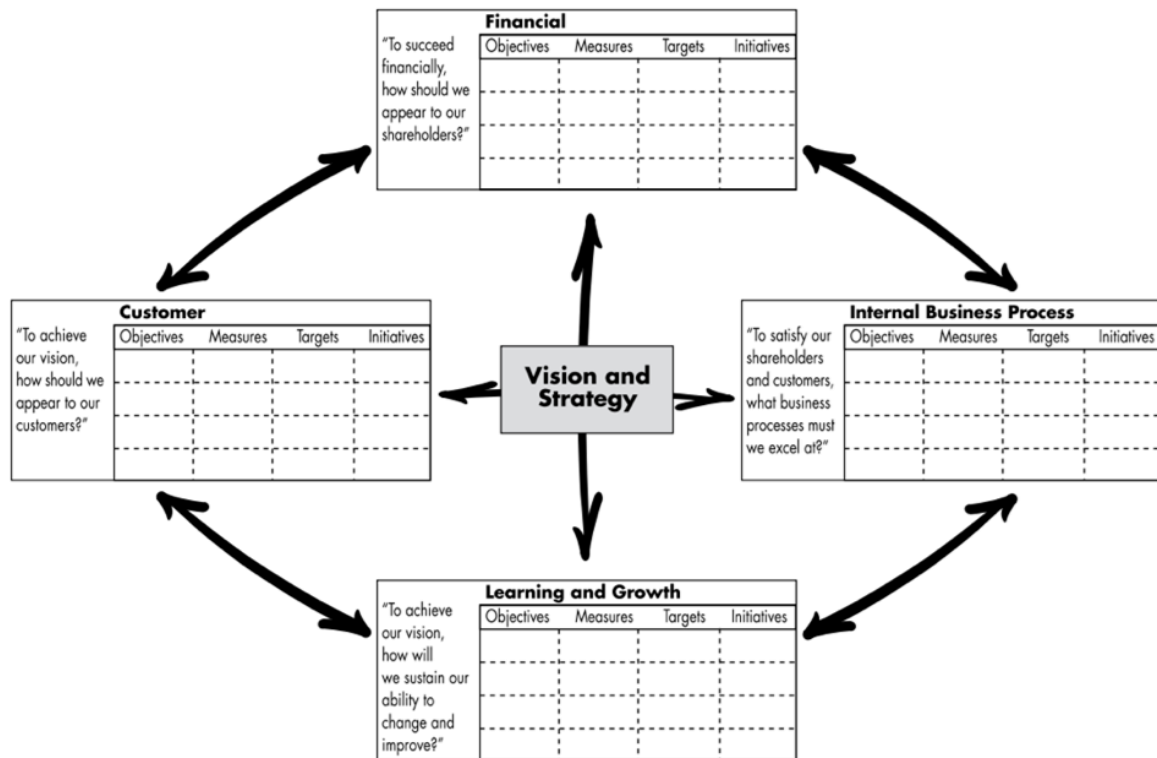


Figure 2.1 | Balanced Scorecard strategic map. Source: Kaplan & Norton (2007)

Besides the definition of Key Performance Indicators and the use of scorecards to analyse the performance of the organization towards its strategy, there's a complementary tool to assess the results and operational activities. The same authors, Kaplan and Norton (2014) also claimed that companies can hold three different types of meetings to monitor and learn from the obtained results. In first place, they identified department and business function meetings, at a micro level, as important moments to identify and solve problems that have arisen or persist. At a macro level, strategy management meetings should be held to review the adopted scorecard and the respective indicators and initiatives, in order to evaluate progress and spot obstacles to strategy execution. Later, there should exist a more general and strategic meeting to "assess the performance of the strategy itself and adapt it if necessary". All of the meetings should have different scopes, frequencies and, as recommended by the authors, different attendees.

In the next chapter the author will detail the methodology used in order to achieve this project's aim, ensuring, along the process, the integration of all the data collected during the literature review made above.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Project research

The methodology of this project has been segmented in two different dimensions – the first one regarding the instruments and tools adopted to contextualize and develop the project; and the second one, focused on the design of a strategic framework to be further applied in chapter 4.

Regarding the methodological approach, different instruments were used, mainly focused on collecting qualitative data, giving to the investigation a flexible approach. The process of defining and applying an External Employer Branding strategy framework required an in-depth knowledge of the topics addressed, covered, in first place, by the literature review on Strategic Planning and Employer Branding in the previous chapter. Additionally, the history, structure and context of Académica was considered to be highly relevant, providing crucial information for adapting the strategy to reality, which was described in Chapter 1.

To complement the literature covered in previous chapters and to get an updated perspective on the current practices and challenges, the author formally interviewed eight professionals, holding managerial or Human Resources positions, where the majority works directly the Employer Branding of their organizations. The author used a diverse approach, interviewing professionals from small and medium companies to large enterprises listed in the Portuguese stock market, from different activity sectors, providing richer data, used in the next dimension of the methodology – designing a strategic framework. The interviews were all conducted through digital platforms due to current pandemic restrictions and followed a semi-structured script. All the professionals authorized the inclusion of the information exclusively for this paper. Details regarding the professionals interviewed and the interview script can be found on Annexes A and B.

Furthermore, the author attended 3 national events and 1 international event related to Employer Branding, being present at 11 different workshops and being in contact with numerous speakers, hosts and participants. Direct contact and informal conversations were established with Brett Michington, the founder and CEO of the international event - Employer Branding Day – that reunited more than 1000 Employer Branding professionals from 55

different countries, providing interesting information regarding the topic. Details regarding the events and workshops attended can be found on Annex D.

The knowledge regarding Académica results from the 23 years of membership that linked the author to the studied organization, complemented with a 4-month curricular internship in 2020 and further full-time experience as an employee of the club. During the development of this paper, the author was hired as Operation's Director, which allowed (1) daily contact with all the employees and their experience; (2) regular interaction with different departments and managerial positions; and (3) full access to internal data and documents, relevant for the process. Despite having other purposes not directly linked with this paper, individual interviews and numerous meetings were conducted with each employee and Vice-Presidents, representing more than 50 hours of data collection, providing insightful information for current project. As Human Resources Consultant and later as Operation's Director at Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F., the author was inherently connected with some strategic and Human Resources initiatives, gaining further knowledge of the organization.

To get a deeper understanding of the context within the organization human resources and the relationship with students and the university, several formal meetings and other informal moments were conducted with the Vice-Presidents of Human Resources and Institutional Relationships – Gustavo Mota and Fernando Pompeu, respectively – which end up being the most relevant persons in the organization for the addressed issue.

Finally, to get the full picture of Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. brand, its strength and presence at the university context, five students that are leaders of different university organizations in Coimbra were interviewed, whose organizations represent jointly more than 5000 students in the city. Their perspectives were complemented with a Marketing survey conducted by Académica during February 2021, gathering more than 280 answers regarding the brand and its strength.

The use of these different instruments provided enough information to contrast the literature review with reality and existing practices, as well as the required knowledge of the current context of Académica, leading to the second dimension of this project methodology.

3.2 Designing the Employer Branding Strategic Framework

The research presented previously allowed a deeper understanding on different dimensions of the Employer Branding concept, but also the theory and the ground basics behind the definition of a strategic planning process, used in any company or sector. From the three step Mintzberg

process or from the research that studied some of the most common steps used in it, there seems to exist some core elements that make part of a shared framework. However, it is important to complement this theoretical knowledge with the reality and understand how it fits in the specific topic in study, Employer Branding. The different interviews conducted with Human Resources professionals from different companies allowed the author to guarantee this alignment with reality.

After compiling and analysing all the inputs given by the professional regarding the process of defining an Employer Branding strategy, the answers proved to be very similar and in accordance with theory, only with some variations in the number of steps taken. Almost all the companies approached, from Startups to Stock-Listed companies, usually start with the definition of a strategy for the company or for the specific area, where an internal analysis is made, as well as the definition of a clear path and vision for it. From there, all the companies had the goal setting as a middle step, varying in the periodicity chosen, from short to medium or long term goals. Afterwards, all of them moved to the core element of the process, which is the action plan, where companies plan their activities and initiatives, in order to achieve the defined targets. Finally, one of the most important elements highlighted by the Human Resources professionals, was the final stage of the process, which corresponds to the monitoring and analysis of the results, even though some of the professional did not listed it as part of process.

To this framework of four shared components – strategy, goals, action plan, monitoring - some companies added different steps as part of their different strategies, being two of them considered relevant for this project. From the studied organizations, both companies Sonae and Nmbros B.V raised an important step performed when developing the strategic plan, which is the analysis of trends and best practices in the field. According to these organizations, it's a simple step that allows them to be updated every year and guarantee high quality standards in their plan, before starting defining the initiatives. Additionally, Jerónimo Martins, Sonae and Network Me explicitly define and segment their target audiences. From defining the key universities and courses to creating personas and segment their target, these three companies claim to purposefully take this step in their process, to maximize their results and be more efficient in their approaches, with the aim to have a higher alignment with their objectives.

Having contrasted both theory and reality in Strategic Planning and Employer Branding, a final framework for this project was chosen, which will be developed in the next chapter. The author looked for a complete process, integrating information from previous researchers and the inputs from the interviewed professionals, with the purpose of guaranteeing a well-

structured process, adapted to Académica’s reality. The framework will respect the following steps, as illustrated in figure 3.1 – (1) *Internal analysis*; (2) *Best practices and trends*; (3) *Mission and vision*; (4) *Short and long-term goals*; (5) *Action Plan*; (6) *Measurement*.

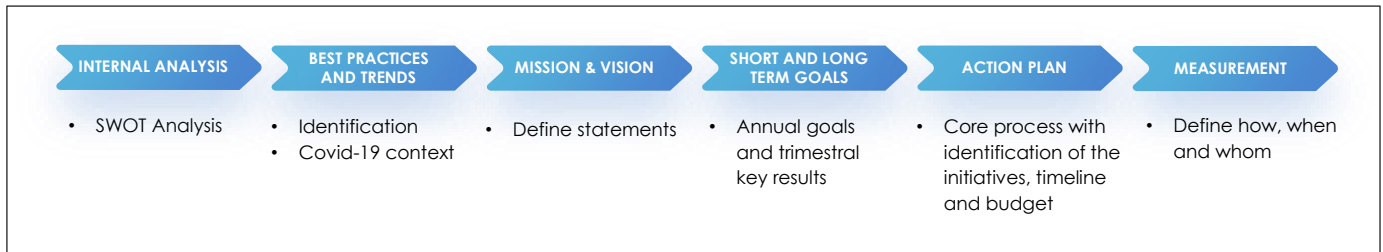


Figure 3.1 | External Employer Branding Strategy Framework. Source: author

(1) Internal Analysis

The Employer Branding strategic process will start with an internal analysis of Académica through a SWOT analysis, developed from the several meetings carried out with the Vice-Presidents of the organization and from the author’s professional experience at the club. The aim is to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Académica in order to further develop a strategy and an external Employer Branding plan adjusted to the real context of the organization. Even though this analysis could provide a lot of information that, at first sight, seems to not be related with an Employer Branding strategy, it will represent an important foundation for the following process.

(2) Best practices and trends

As some of the interviewed professionals mentioned, this step is substantial to ensure an updated perspective before defining the action plan. It gains higher relevance in the current pandemic context, where covid-19 brought numerous limitations regarding external Employer Branding initiatives. In this regard, the literature previously presented will be complemented with the data collected during the interviews with Human Resources professionals as well as with the ones made with the students leading university organizations in Coimbra, who can bring a closer look on what has being done so far by other companies in the city and university.

(3) Mission and vision

The mission and vision statements are one of the most important pillars of any organization and, consequently, of any strategy. Despite the mission of Académica being shared among all of the departments of the club, the vision will be set specifically for the Employer Branding

area, pointing to the direction the club wants to go and intents to achieve in this field. The two statements will be formulated together with the Vice-Presidents, guaranteeing full alignment with the general view of the top management team. To this process, the latest onboarding manual, produced every year for the youth athletes and the 2021 Digital Marketing Strategy for the club will be consulted, as they have already important information to have into consideration.

(4) Short and long term goals

One of the most important elements in any strategic plan is the definition of goals to achieve. As presented previously in the literature review and complemented with the insights of the interviewed professional, this step will provide factual milestones to attain across time, guiding the action plan in the desired way. Once again, all the goals will result from the experience within Académica and meetings with several Vice-Presidents that will validate the path chosen. The goals will be defined in an annual perspective and will be divided into key results to reach in each quarter, always trying to respect the SMART approach, presented above. This framework choice also results from Académica 2021 Digital Marketing Strategy Plan, that introduced the annual goals, divided into quarterly key results in the first year. It is also relevant to recall that the whole process is an integrated workflow, which means the goals should be directly linked to mission and vision statements and, thereafter, the action plan and measurement approach should go towards the defined goals and key results.

(5) Action Plan

The core step of this project will be the action plan, where all the initiatives will be set in order to achieve the strategy idealized by the club. This might be the most relevant process as it will determine how Académica will attain its goals in the Employer Branding field. The framework for the action plan will include (1) which objective and key result it will help to reach; (2) a description of the initiative, (3) the estimated time frame for each action, (4) an estimated budget and (5) the main KPIs associated to each initiative, as figure 3.2 shows.

The action plan will correspond to the stage where the information gathered from all sources will be integrated, in order to generate a complete and solid external Employer Branding Plan. This includes all insights collected from the literature studied to the events and interviews with Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F Vice-Presidents, its employees, interviewed Human Resources professionals and university organization's leaders in Coimbra.



Figure 3.2 | Action Plan Framework. Source: author

(6) Measurement

Last but not the least, is the monitoring phase which has proved to be fundamental for the validation of the whole process. It is consensual amongst professionals that the only way to know objectively if the strategy is working and what could be improved, is to measure and track results. This step is deeply linked with the framework of goal setting, since following a SMART approach and defining annual goals, with quarterly key results, will allow a direct and factual evaluation of the whole strategy. This final stage will define how, when and whom will be responsible for the monitoring of the external Employer Branding strategy of Académica.

This will be the framework chosen to develop the external Employer Branding strategy of the football club. It results from multiple sources of information that allows to combine both theory and reality, aligning some of the best practices in strategic planning with the current context of Employer Branding and Académica. In addition to this framework, a validation stage will be carried out, to verify the match between the results and the expected outcomes, proving its level of success. The results and application of this framework can be found in the next chapter.

Application of the Employer Branding Strategic Framework

4.1 Internal Analysis

The first step of the Employer Branding Strategic Framework starts with the internal assessment, through a SWOT analysis, made in collaboration with several Vice-Presidents of the organization, summarized in figure 4.1. As previously stated, it is an important tool that provides a global look on the current resources and capabilities of the club, as well as the points of improvement and challenges that Académica might face in the near future.

Additionally, a brief marketing survey was conducted during February to assess the strength of the brand and its communication, which provide complementary statistics to the analysis and superficial insights on the supporter’s perspective, shown in figure 4.2.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History and legacy, that results from the sportive achievements, social and political intervention and connection to the students in the past; • Earned respect and sympathy for the club nationwide, as there are not any major rivalries or conflicts with other competitors, which are common in the environment; • Strong reputation as a brand, with a large network of fans and high levels of engagement; • Strong digital presence and awareness, being a well-known brand in digital platforms and one of the most followed club in social networks in Portugal; • Well-established values and principles, transmitted internally and externally, reflected on the permanent corporate social responsibility initiatives; • Excellent formative vocation, both on sporting and social levels, leading to multiple recognitions on this field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial instability, bringing liquidity constraints for short term liabilities, consequently affecting the resources available; • Aged workforce, which has proved to be highly resistant to change and limits the capacity to innovate and be agile; • Lack of expertise. In numerous departments, the lack of personnel turnover and entry of more qualified employees, led to outdated practices and a slow workflow; • Unprofessional management, that results in hierarchical disorganization, lack of working methodologies and poor internal communication. • Communication on digital channels. Despite having a strong digital presence and one of the largest base of followers, it still communicates poorly with its fans, lacking more dynamic and interactive content and also communicating relevant information on time;

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of direct competitors in the football sector in the Centre Region of Portugal, as well as the absence of symbols and references in the city, providing space to grow and strengthen its presence and identity; • Large spread community across the world that the club can take advantage of, seeking to retain and promote loyalty among the supporters; • Exploitation of digital as a source of revenue, mainly through social media where it has already a strong awareness and very few work done on how to capitalize it; • Historical connection to Universidade de Coimbra and its 20.000 annual students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor sporting performances, as it's the core business of the organization, which has led Académica to remain in the second tier of professional football in Portugal, where there are less opportunities of revenue; • Declining investment of partners and sponsors, which has become a reality, potentially limiting the future resources of the club; • Rapid professionalization of the football industry, which contrasts with the club reality and may be harmful in the coming years, unless there exists the ability to keep up with industry trends; • Highly conservative view of club members and supporters, that might restrict some changes, as they hold the power to approve or decline structural and strategical decisions of the organization.

Figure 4.1 | SWOT analysis. Source: author

	Supporters <i>< 24 years old</i>	Supporters <i>24 – 49 years old</i>	Supporters <i>≥ 50 years old</i>
Satisfaction with communication	7.08	6.84	7.09
Probability of recommending the brand to a friend	8.93	9.46	9.84
<i>Methodological Notes</i>	<i>Answered in a scale from 1 (Very Unsatisfied) to 10 (Totally Satisfied). Survey conducted by Académica in February 2021 to 280 club supporters.</i>		

Figure 4.2 | Satisfaction with communication and brand. Source: author

Both instruments provide insightful information on the club reality and enhance the opportunity and importance of investing in Employer Branding. The SWOT analysis provided a solid perspective for the future, as Académica is a strong and well reputed brand in Portugal and worldwide, which has also been confirmed by the results of the survey conducted with club supporters. However, the fast-paced environment, which is the Portuguese football sector in recent years, combined with an aged and low-skilled structure, require an effective strategy on different areas of activity. The survey provides complementary data, showing weaker results

on communication within the club followers and, overall, a less positive perception in the younger age group, compared to others. All of these conclusions provide support for the urgent need of investing in an Employer Branding Strategy, which could play an important role on a substantial improvement of this indicators.

4.2 Trend Analysis

The ability to attract talent has become one of the most challenging practices of Human Resources professionals and the best and most effective practices are constantly changing. The theoretical knowledge provides solid basis but is not enough for the demanding task of reach young talent, in a world that sees technological advances every day and, more recently, deals with a worldwide pandemic that brought many restrictions. Thus, it is of the utmost importance, to identify the current trends regarding External Employer Branding near Human Resources professionals in Portugal.

There exists a group of practices that have been identified by several professionals, from different sized companies, as the current trends on how to reach young talent, which are playing a role in their company's Employer Branding strategy. Having a closer look at these tendencies, it is possible to segment it according to the place where they occur – University Campus, Company and Digital, as described in figure 4.3. The current trends range from well-established practices in the field, such as career fairs or internships, to more contemporaneous approaches, like ambassadors' programs or open days. However, it's in the digital channels that companies have been innovating and trying to find the best approaches to interact with young talent. For Employer Branding purposes, the use of social media it's still very recent, leading to multiple ways of exploiting it, raising challenges that goes from the regularity of publications to the content type or which social media should companies invest in. LinkedIn and Instagram lead the choice of employers in this regard and new potentials trends within social media will keep appearing as there are already companies that are creating content to young talent in accounts specifically made for this purpose, separated from the main social media accounts of the company. The major goal of employers with this approach is to communicate information and interact with potential candidates as much as possible, finding a way to show the employee value proposition of the company, in a regular basis.

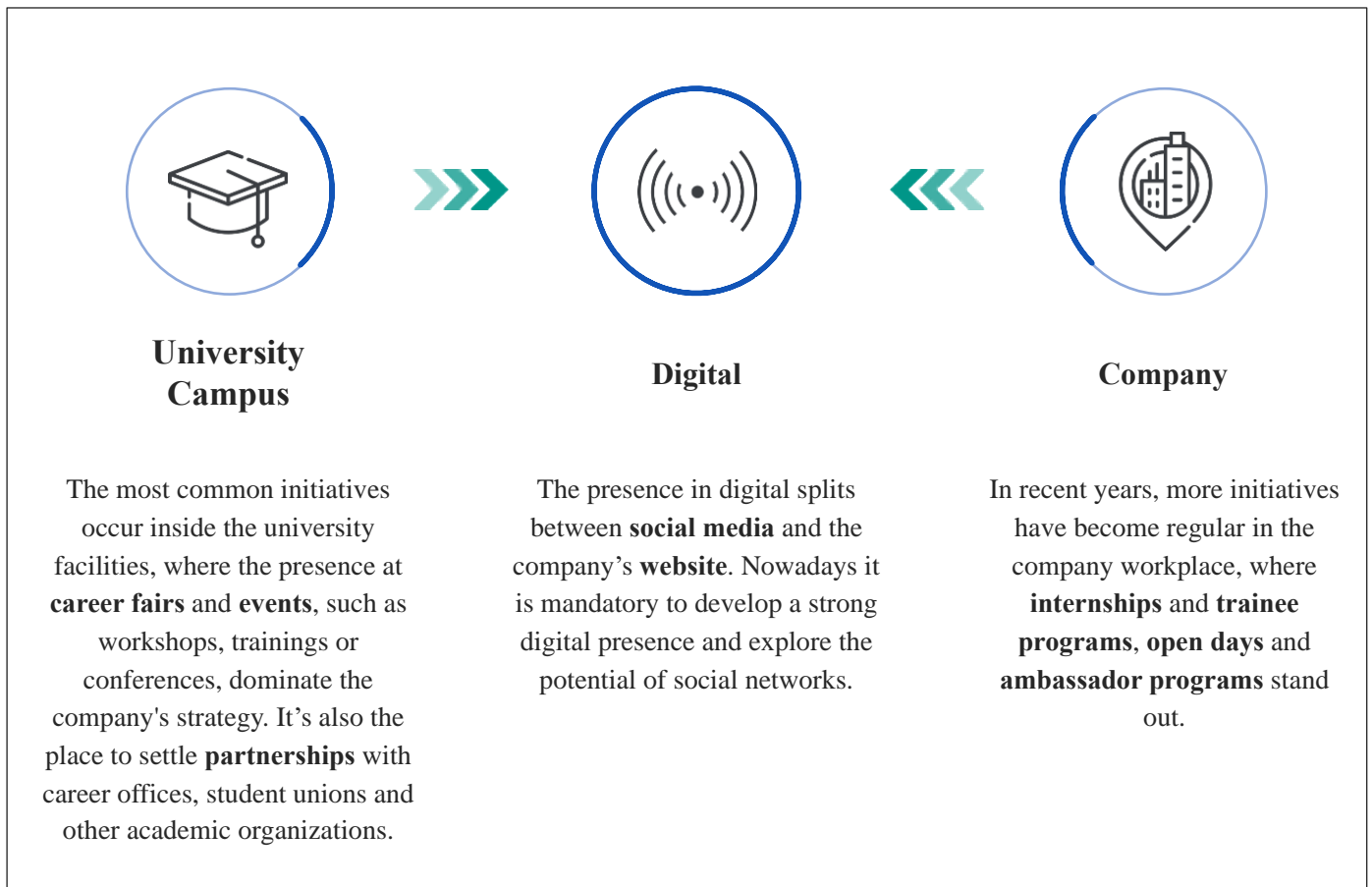


Figure 4.3 | Trends in External Employer Branding strategies and the shift caused by covid-19. Source: author

Despite being already one of the significant trends in External Employer Branding strategies, the digital channel has become the most important way to reach young talent since the last year, as the pandemic covid-19 forced companies to make a dramatic shift in their approach. Even though the Human Resources professionals were not prepared for covid-19, this radical event in the world did not necessarily change the trends described above in this paper. Instead, it has compelled companies to adapt and move forward what they were doing on university campuses and in their workplace to digital channels and tools. With improvements in sight, regarding the future of the pandemic situation, it's expected a slow return in the company's approach but the importance of the digital in External Employer Branding has come to stay.

4.3 Definition of Mission and Vision

The fundamentals of the organization have been set and changed over the years, resulting from the constant change in the board members, but also from the changes the sector have been noticing. Despite that, the mission of the organization has kept practically untouched over the

club's history, due to its solid identity and its own values, which have been strengthened until the present day. The focus on the sporting development of its athletes will always be at the core of the club, without ever neglecting their civic formation, which is well anchored in the organization's identity. Its mission is consensual among everyone. On the other side, the vision for the future has been topic of debate for the last decades, dividing perspectives and rarely reaching a consensus. The current situation is critical for the near future, and it is challenging to identify the right path for the coming years.

Due to the importance of these pillars for any strategic plans of the club, conversations with the Vice-Presidents and employees with managerial positions were held in order to understand their perspective on the subject, to guarantee full alignment with reality. Furthermore, the welcome handbook given to all athletes of the club in 2021 and the Digital Marketing Strategy Plan for 2021, done simultaneously with a Digital Marketing Agency, were consulted, as these documents already worked on these fundamentals. It was agreed by all stakeholders that the vision for the club should be ambitious and reflect the main targets to reach as an organization. It should state clearly what is the priority of Académica for the next three years and be expressed in a simple and objective way, to be easily remembered by everyone involved. The vision statement was discussed and approved later on, being presented in figure 4.4.

VISION BY 2024 | *Académica should establish itself as one of the 5 most valuable football club brands in Portugal.*

Figure 4.4 | Vision for Académica to be achieved by 2024. Source: author

To finalize the set of fundamentals and provide a linkage to the Employer Branding strategy, three planned long-term goals were set by the author, as well as the core-target associated with them, fully displayed in figure 4.5. These strategical points are a complement to the global mission and vision of the organization, which should provide the necessary focus and direction for the Employer Branding strategy. They represent the major goals to be attained within the action plan and the specific initiatives which will be described in the course of the chapter. The achievement of these strategic long-term goals, in combination with other departments goals, should largely contribute for achieving the vision of the club. Being a practice present in many companies' Employer Branding strategy, the target audience was also

set, but, due to the specific context and objectives of Académica, it ended up being rather generic, lacking segmentation. The mission and vision of the organization as well as these strategic pillars for Employer Branding were summarized in the Organization Fundamentals Board.

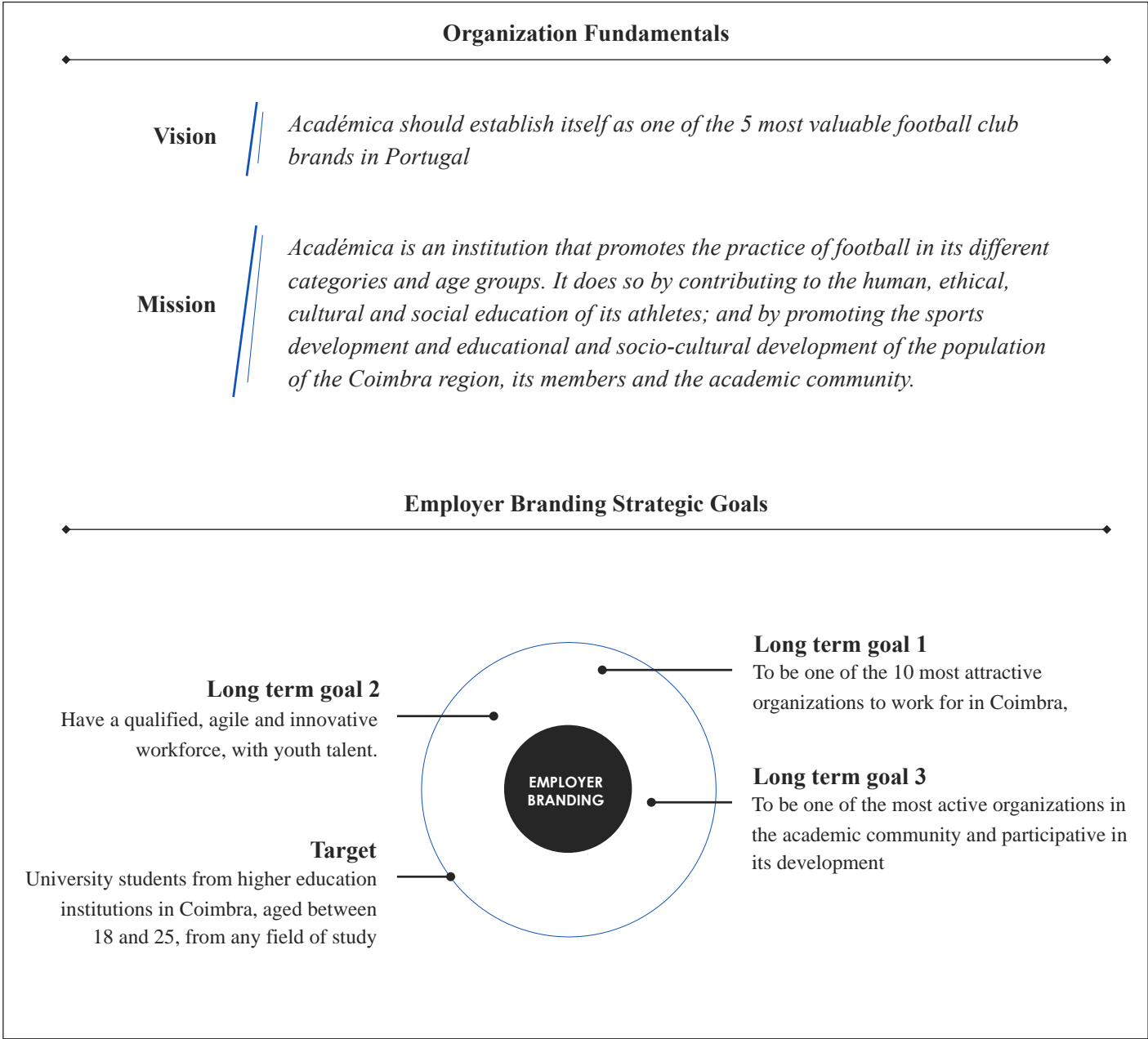


Figure 4.5 | Organization Fundamentals Board. Source: author

4.4 Definition of short and long-term goals

With the fundamentals set, the strategy itself starts with the definition of goals to accomplish, both for the near future as well as for the long term. The objectives of External Employer Branding strategies differ from company to company and their respective context, as HR

professionals explained during the interviews. Furthermore, it is also relevant to recall the approach introduced in 1981 by Doran, to guarantee well established and effective goals, leading to better results. The SMART model refers that, ideally, goals should be Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic and Time-related.

As presented above in the Organization Fundamentals Board, three main long-term goals were set for the External Employer Branding Strategy. These objectives give clear support to the vision set to Académica, contributing to its achievement in a positive scenario. Once again, it is important to state that these long-term goals will require action plans not only from an external perspective of Employer Branding, but also from an internal viewpoint, from developing the employee value proposition to the structure itself. Without this balanced work between the two dimensions, it will always be extremely difficult to achieve any long-term goals. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the strategy presented in this paper is entirely focused on the external dimension of Employer Branding, as internal structural changes are already taking place in Académica.

Besides the settlement of the three main long-term goals to achieve in 2024, six more objectives were stated in a short-term perspective, to be attained during the first year of the implementation of this strategic framework. These short-term goals are all directly associated to the long-term goals stated above, being split between them. This will allow a full alignment across the action plan and contribute to the achievement of the vision of becoming one of the five most valuable football club brands in Portugal.

Below, a summary of the short- and long-term goals can be found, accompanied by figure 4.6, with further details and information about them.

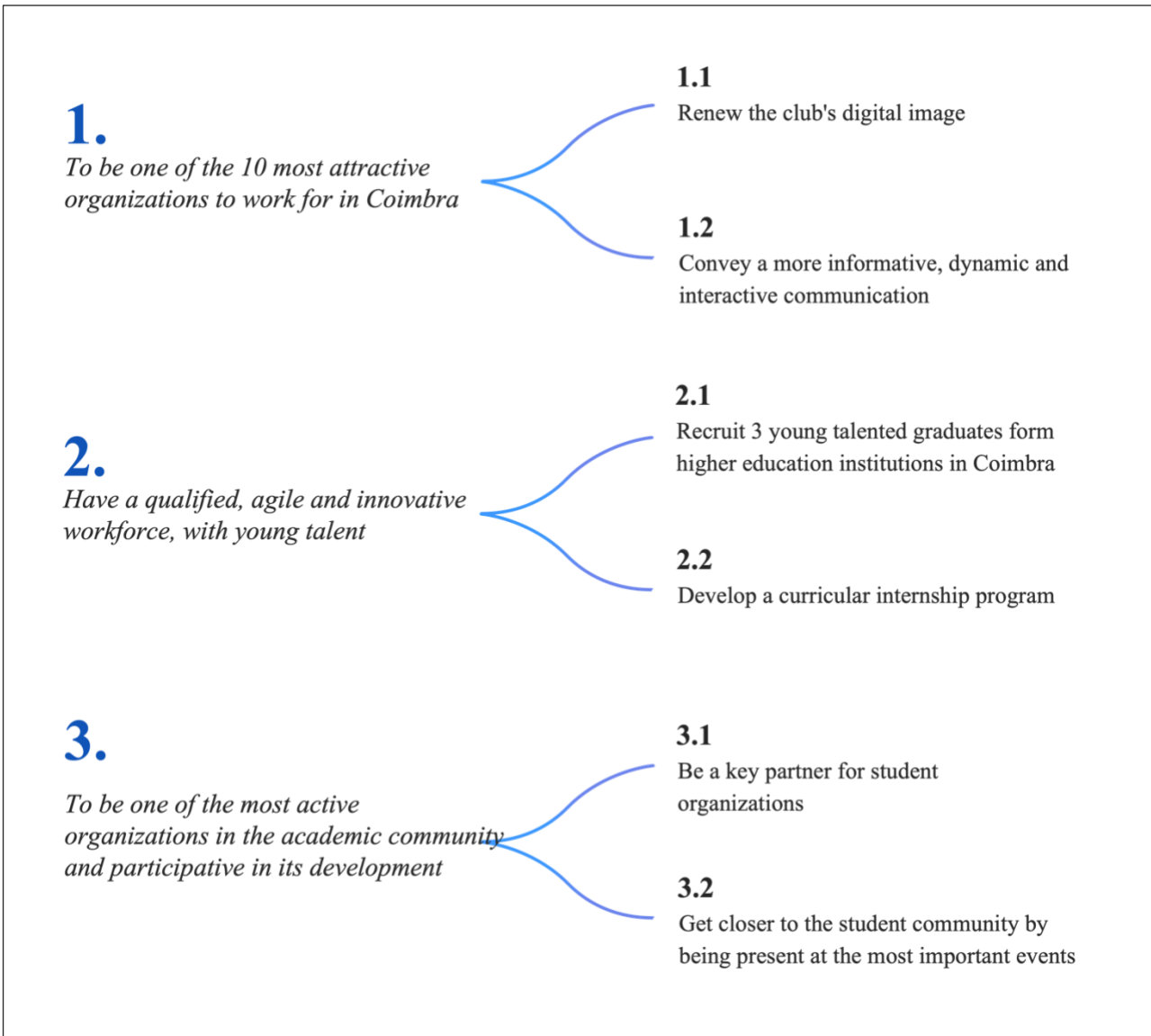


Figure 4.6 | Organization Fundamentals Board. Source: author

4.4.1 To be one of the ten most attractive organizations to work for in Coimbra

This ambitious long-term goal lays its roots on the two dimensions of Employer Branding, as working only of them will never bring effective results. Académica may communicate very well and interact with young talent in the future but without a strong employee value proposition and its application in reality, the efforts will be useless. And vice-versa. As stated previously, the focus of this project will be placed on the external initiatives, assuming that, at once, the internal dimension will be successfully developed by the club.

Thus, the real need behind this goal, in the external side of Employer Branding, is to guarantee an effective communication with students. The changes in image and communication of Académica should mainly rely on the digital channel, which is an approach adapted to the current reality and allows the club to reach and communicate regularly with the young talent.

Two short-term goals were defined - 1.1 *Renew the club's digital image*; 2.2 *Convey a more informative, dynamic and interactive communication* – and they were built upon the weaknesses and areas of improvement identified both by the club structure and students from Coimbra, during interviews. Although the goals may seem very generic, the solution for its achievement is perhaps effortless and is summarized in three topics, as found in figure 4.7: (a) to have a more youthful image; (b) to provide more informative communication; (c) to have simple and accessible communication channels.

The action plan regarding these short and long term goals will clearly reflect the points described above and will set its focus on three main projects, identified already as best practices, both by literature and Human Resources professionals. Therefore, the strategy will include actions within the website, social media and email marketing, which will be further detailed.

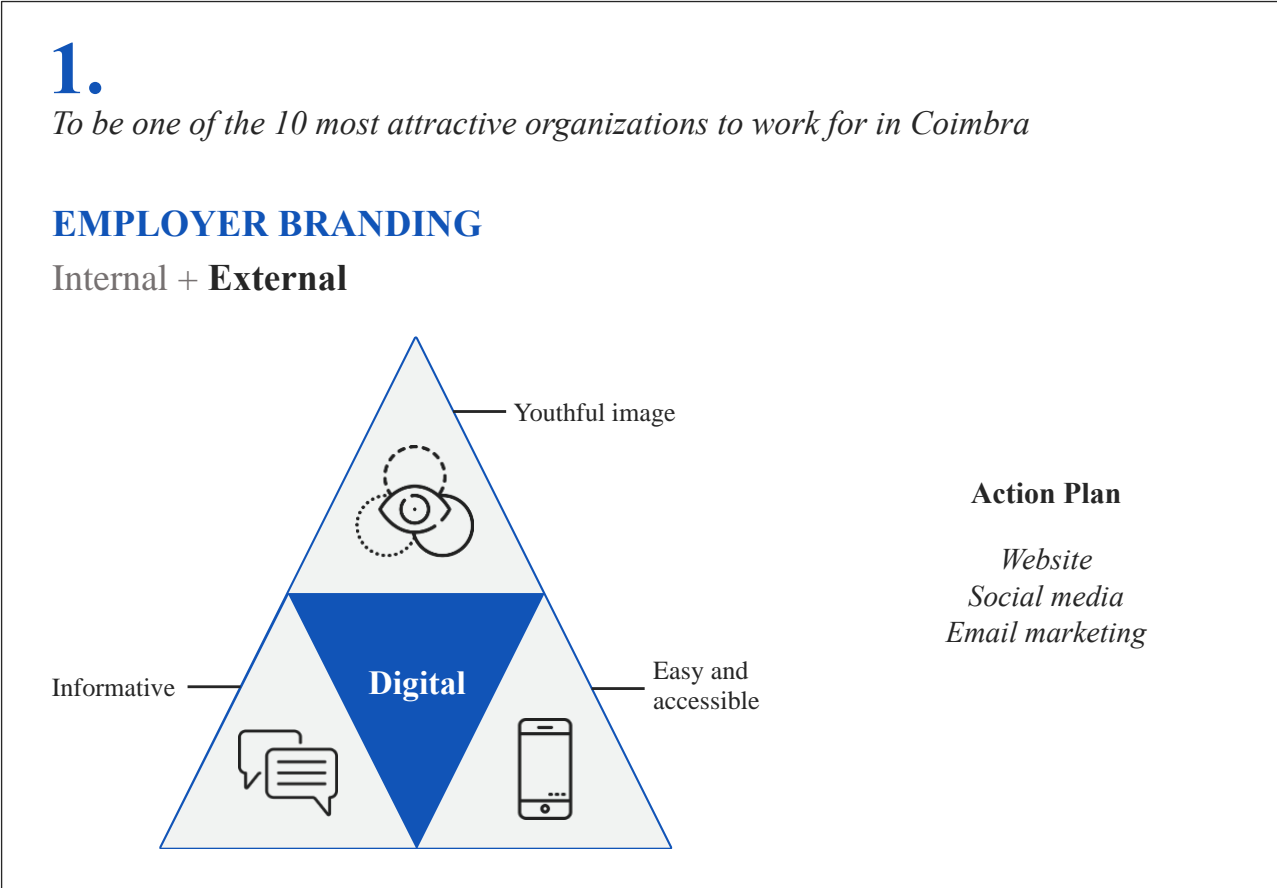


Figure 4.7 | Long term goal 1. Source: author

4.4.2 Have a qualified, agile and innovative workforce, with young talent

Identified as one of the most challenging subjects on the organization, the outdated workforce has brought some inertia to the club and difficulties to keep up with the fast-paced

professionalization in the industry. This goal requires the involvement of several fields besides Human Resources, from the financial side to the legal department. However, when we focus on the External Employer Branding strategy, there is one simple (still challenging) task to perform – attract and recruit the best talent.

Once again, two short-term goals were defined for the first year, in order to achieve the long-term objective of having a stronger and more agile workforce that the one Académica currently has – *2.1 Recruit 3 young talented graduates form higher education institutions in Coimbra; 2.2 Develop a curricular internship program.* The two goals can be directly linked with each other, meaning one can consequently led to the accomplishment of the other, but not necessarily. In this regard, three main steps will be required to be followed, presented in figure 4.8. First of all, identify the most important needs in terms of human resources in the organization, being both for lack of personnel and replacement effects. Afterwards, it comes the time for building up internally the characteristics, information and value proposition of the job or the internships. And finally, the communication of this process, which will be sustained in the action plan, with strong connections or partnerships with the career services from the different higher education institutions in Coimbra.

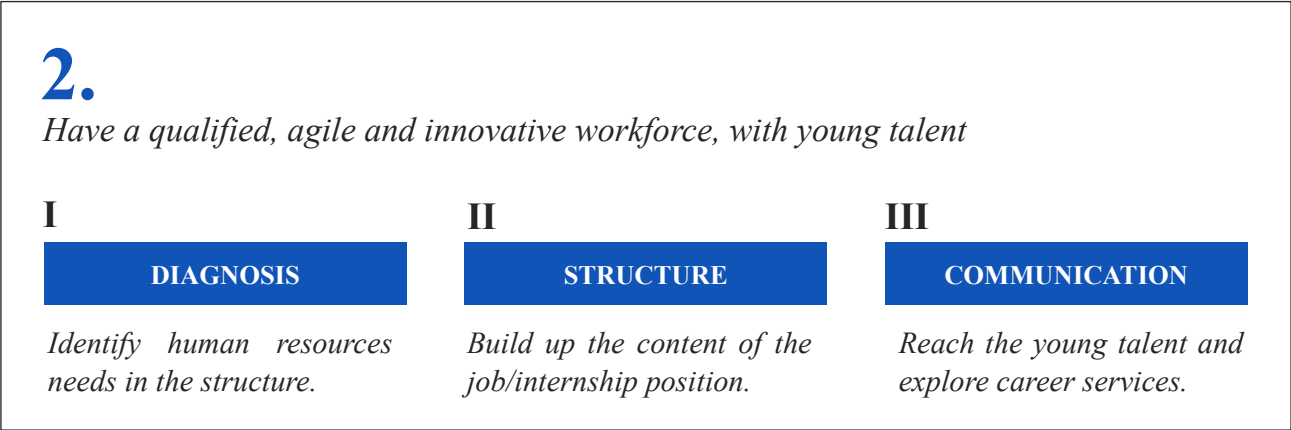


Figure 4.8 | Long term goal 2. Source: author

4.4.3 To be one of the most active organizations in the academic community and participative in its development

Last but not the least, this long-term goal can be seen as not fundamental for the vision of Académica at first sight but provides solid foundations for the previous objectives and reinforces the identity and legacy of the organization. Thus, it will certainly add value to Académica, as it touches on the strengths and opportunities identified on the initial internal

diagnosis, possibly enhancing one competitive advantage of the club, when compared to other players in the sector. Besides its contribution for the vision, it also brings major value to the organization purpose as it is fully aligned with the mission of the organization, which has remained similar to its genesis over a century ago.

To achieve this long-term goal, two main short-term goals were set and will be unfolded into several initiatives on the action plan - *3.1 Be a key partner for student organizations; 3.2 Get closer to the student community by being present at the most important events.* Both require a prior work of analysis and diagnosis of the organizations, events and initiatives that are worthy of being involved, as well as what students most value, in a search for the maximum return on investment (ROI) possible, aiming for an efficient management of resources – capital, time and human resources, as summarized in figure 4.9. However, at an early stage, during the first year, it is important to get involved in the field, to fully understand what works and what doesn't, as there is almost no experience or data to support some decisions. The action plan will, once again, reflect this approach and provide further information on the practical side of these goals.

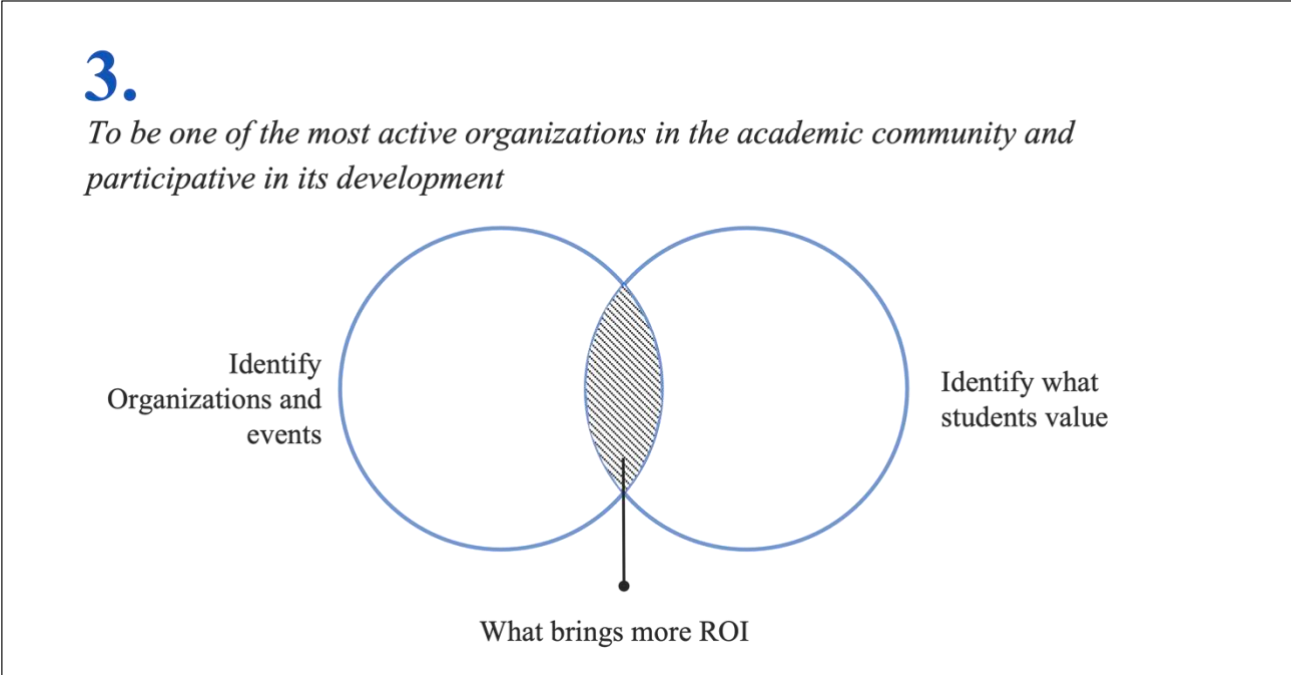


Figure 4.9 | Long term goal 3. Source: author

4.5 Action Plan

Considered by many the most important part of any strategy, the framework proceeds to the action plan, where specific actions and initiatives will be explained in detail, with all the logistics inherent to it. The action plan presented below is fully aligned with all the steps developed previously, with the aim of attaining both short and long term goals and,

consequently, the vision set for Académica. The whole action plan results from every source of information used in this project, described in the methodology chapter, which will ensure a real match with the needs and resources of the club, moreover the current trends and best practices in the Employer Branding field, in Portugal. Thus, the plan is made to be realistic and feasible, in order to be implemented in the nearby future. As Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. doesn't have a Human Resources department, all the initiatives which feature in the plan will be implemented by the club Marketing team, the author as Operation's Director and the Vice-President of Human Resources.

Below, a strategic map of the action plan in a Gant chart model can be found in figure 4.10, with a summary of every initiative, segmented by the three strategical long-term goals, with a calendarization of every moment.

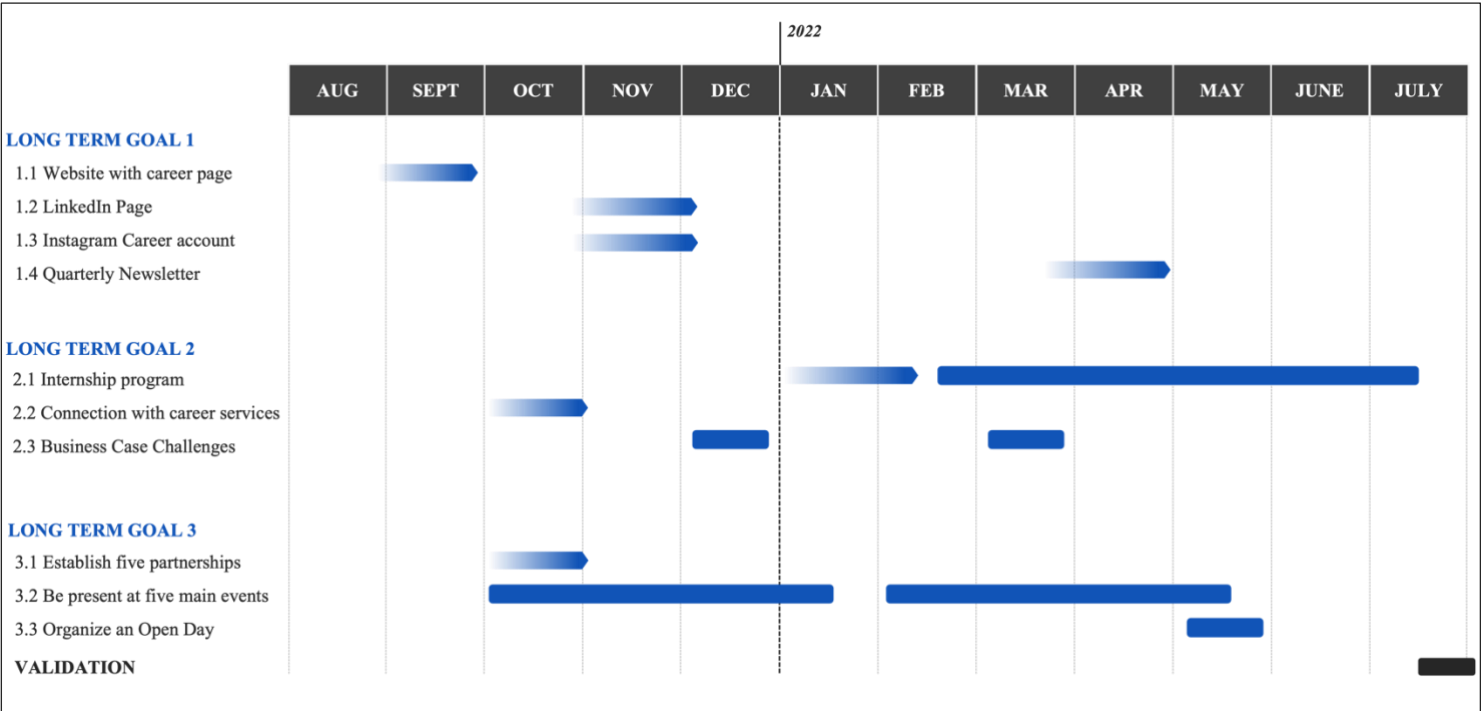


Figure 4.10 | Calendarization of the action plan. Source: author

Below every initiative will be described, justified, and linked to an objective, explaining the logistics - why, how, when and associated costs, whenever possible. The duly filled action plan framework, described in the end of previous chapter, can be found on Annex E.

Long Term Goal 1 - To be one of the 10 most attractive organizations to work for in Coimbra

(1.1) Develop a new website with a careers page

A need that has been long time identified by the club for different reasons is the website, which urgently needs a renewal and a visual improvement. The current website has not been changed for over a decade, which has made it obsolete, with limited functionalities, poor responsiveness and an outdated image. It is relevant to recall that websites have been recognized as one of the most important components to attract talent, both by researchers and Human Resources professionals, and are an excellent platform to display all the necessary information and also communicate new opportunities. Thus, the new website should still be aligned with the identity of Académica, but should be straightforward, visually attractive, both for fans or potential candidates and user friendly. A new career page, that currently does not exist, should additionally be developed, providing data about Académica as an employer, make known the employee value proposition and display any job opportunities.

(i) Logistics

For numerous reasons, but mainly for lacking skilled human resources in this field, it is already planned to develop a new website, outsourcing it to an external specialist company. Despite, it still requires a continuously follow up from the Operations Director and Marketing Vice-President during the entire development process.

(ii) Investment and ROI

It's a project that will require an investment of approximately 4.000€, which may be divided into several instalments, due to financial restrictions, and has an expected duration time of 6 weeks, to be implemented in September 2021. This initiative will, without any doubt, come up with the achievement of both short-term goals of renewing the digital image of the club and conveying a more informative and interactive communication. Additionally, it will provide more exposure to the existing partners and can attract more sponsors.

(1.2) Develop the club LinkedIn page as an employer

Another important step to take, in order to achieve the goal of becoming a more attractive organization, with a refreshed image and communication, is to approach social media in a different way from the one used so far. And the most significant professional social media at today's date is LinkedIn, recognized by every company and professional, as a must in every External Employer Branding strategy. The proposal is simple: to start using the already existing page of Académica in this platform to reach the audience it wants to come to - young talent. To do so, the club must create relevant content for its target audience, provide informative and interactive content, that reflects its identity as an employer.

(i) Logistics

For this action, it is proposed that LinkedIn starts to be included in the monthly communication plans of the Marketing Department, in order to have scheduled content, supervised by the Operation's Director and HR Vice-President, guaranteeing its alignment with the pre-set goals. There is no investment required and, although it's considered to be smoothly feasible, it will only make sense to implement from November 2021 on, after the internal structural changes being accomplished, as well as the launch of the website and, therefore, of the new digital image of Académica. It's also relevant to mention the importance of being aligned with the beginning of the following academic year

(ii) Investment and ROI

This initiative does not require any investment besides the time of the human resources allocated, which is ideal for the club reality. Despite the impact and exposure being minor compared to the website, the benefits are still wide and relevant, from the strengthening of the company image as an employer to potentially recruit young talent through this professional platform. In essence, the major return could be indirectly seen on the increasing ability to attract and recruit talent.

(1.3) Create a careers account on Instagram

In accordance and in a complementary perspective to the previous initiative, it is suggested to make the most of the potential of social media and reach young talent through different touch points, in the digital channel. Aligned with some strategies already in practice by Portuguese companies and with the current pandemic situation, it is fundamental to find creative and innovative ways to interact with graduates. Instagram is a more informal platform than LinkedIn and besides communicating the transversal information about careers, it could be used to give a glimpse of what is like to work for Académica, highlighting its employee value proposition. This action, combined with LinkedIn and the website will provide a complete digital presence for any interested student or graduate that looks for more information about the club as an employer, contributing largely for the long-term goal.

(i) Logistics

Again, due to existent resources of Académica, it is suggested that the development of contents be entrusted to the Marketing team, achieving a linear and uniform approach in all the communication channels and, for the same reasons stated above, it is recommended its implementation for November 2021.

(ii) Investment and ROI

As the previous initiative, there are no financial costs associated. Again, it's not expected an impressive short-term return, but the combination of the initiatives and their consistency on long-term period brings an expectation for large contributes on the club's digital presence, on their image as an employer and the way it reaches its target. Hence, it will improve the process, resources, and effort the organization needs to use to hire the best talent on the market.

(1.4) Launch quarterly newsletter

The last action proposed to contribute for a new image and reach a more informative and dynamic communication, the launch of a quarterly newsletter, specifically designed for students is suggested. Email marketing has been mentioned as one of the digital channels with potential to be explored and could be a good addition to the previous items. The goal is to have a unique piece of communication, that summarizes all the actions developed during the quarter and provide a sneak peek of the next initiatives. It is also a perfect tool to forward young talent to specific events or actions, through links and call to actions. It is encouraged a regularity of one newsletter every three months to avoid overloading students with information. In an analytical perspective, this could be a great initiative as with hardly any efforts there is the potential to reach thousands of students and graduates in Coimbra. However, it is important to state that the subsequent data analysis is highly relevant to evaluate the open rate and click ratio to understand its effectivity.

(i) Logistics

The launch of a quarterly newsletter would be led by the Operation's Director and the HR Vice-President along the Marketing team, that will be responsible for the aesthetic part. The collection of data has to be carefully done, due to privacy matters, guaranteeing the compliance with General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR. For this reason, it is suggested for the process to be followed by the legal Vice-President. The launch of the first newsletter should occur on March 2022, by the end of the first quarter of the year, already with several relevant initiatives already in progress or completed.

(ii) Investment and ROI

Depending on the size of the audience and frequency of the usage of the platform, Académica will need to invest between 30€ to 80€ every month to have access to an email marketing platform, like mailchimp or e-goi, which are two of the most used nowadays. This initiative will represent a different approach to reach its target audience and contribute for the employer image, as the previous actions. However, the return on investment can be broader as this email marketing platform can be used by other teams and to achieve different purposes, as to

communicate with fans, advertise merchandise or reach to new sponsors. Overall, it is a small investment for the club which can bring several and meaningful benefits.

Long Term Goal 2 - Have a qualified, agile and innovative workforce, with young talent

(2.1) Create a curricular internship program

One of the foremost ways to get to know better young talent for future hiring in the club, where existx high change resistance and tight financial restrictions, is to provide space, time and opportunities to get involved in the organization. Because of its current situation, the development of a curricular internship program value is a suitable approach for Académica, that will allow students to complete their cycle of studies, gain professional experience and demonstrate their value. It will allow a closer contact with students or graduates and enable an evaluation with higher precision and criteria for the possibility of giving continuity to their presence in the organization as effective employees in the future, which should always be the end goal of the program. The internships should have a minimum of three and a maximum of six months, to give the necessary space to adapt, learn and grow with the internship. As common practice, every intern should be followed by a supervisor within the organization, which should lead regular feedback sessions. The aim of this initiative should always be to mutually add value between the interns and the club, and it can become one of the most important talent pools for Académica. In the future, with better financial conditions, the program could evolve to professional paid internships or trainee programs, that offer superior conditions for the students.

(i) Logistics

The development of this internship program assumes a previous internal diagnosis of the organization and their respective needs, in order to build up the right opportunities for internships. Besides that, the maturing of the whole process, value proposition and monitoring procedures must be carried out by the HR Vice-President and the responsible for the respective areas, where the internships will take place. The first edition of the curricular internship program should start in the first two months of 2022, be communicated through the communication channels of the club and with the support of the career services of higher education institutions in Coimbra.

(ii) Investment and ROI

A curricular internship program does not assume direct costs associated with it, but will require some time of the employees involved in the process to build previously a complete program, to train and follow up the interns during the whole period. However, this investment

in time from the employees will bring the possibility to increase the resources of the organization and the output. Additionally, depending on how successful the experience is, it can become a more effective and better approach to attract and recruit talent. Despite taking more time and resources than a simple recruitment process, it will be considerably more accurate and rigorous, guaranteeing fully aligned individuals with the company strategy and with a deeper knowledge of the organization's reality. The investment required is clearly worth it for the short and medium-term benefits.

(2.2) Establish connections with higher education institution's career services

This is a complementary move to the initiative presented above and could also support numerous other actions in the future. Despite having their own channels of communication, Académica can benefit from career services offices that exist in the different universities and schools, which have far more ease and data to reach their students, in a direct way. Furthermore, career services offices have a deeper understanding of the context of their students, their plan of studies and needs, which can help to segment any communication or adapt a specific approach. Thus, the goal is to establish contact with these offices, looking for the settlement of an agreement or even a protocol, that allows a partnership between parties, whenever it is possible, as different institutions have different ways of operating it. It ends to be a win-win situation for both entities, as universities also look actively for new opportunities and events that add value to their students. This particular initiative doesn't have a direct impact on the long-term goal, but it is considered as necessary to provide important support to other actions.

(i) Logistics

The contact with the different career services offices should be established by the Operation's Director or the HR Vice-President, as representatives of the organization and supervisors of the majority of the initiatives included in the action plan. It is feasible to start the contacts in the beginning of the academic year, in October 2021.

(ii) Investment and ROI

There are no direct costs associated with this initiative and it is expected helping to reach further students and graduates, increasing the effectiveness of the communication and initiatives carried out throughout the year.

(2.3) Developing two Business Case Challenges

Organizations need to continuously find ways to interact with students, add value to their experience and, simultaneously, keep a close eye on the best individuals, scouting the finest

talent for future hires. However, it's not always easy to achieve the three objectives all together, particularly if we are not talking about a recruitment process. One of the top practices suggested by some companies and academic organizations involves the development of an event – in person or remote – where an organization presents a real challenge that is experiencing and gives opportunity to students, individually or in group, to find and present a possible solution in a final pitch, at which point a jury evaluates and give feedback. As an example, Académica could organize an event in Universidade de Coimbra with the challenge “*How Académica can bring more students to the football matches*”, looking to solve a real problem, directly with the students. Usually, these Business Case Challenges are done together with an academic organization and often offer a prize to the winners, from money, products, experiences or opportunities in the company. Depending on the success and participation of the students, there could be room for more events in the future.

(i) Logistics

These two events will require an anticipatory preparation, from the challenges it might be presented to students to the extent and rules of the event. The Operation's Director is responsible for the management and control of this initiative, with the support of the Marketing team, also being recommended to have additional assistance from an academic organization. Due to covid-19 restrictions, the events should occur virtually through platforms like Zoom or Microsoft teams, one in each semester of the academic year. However, if conditions are met for physical attendance, the event can take place in the club facilities or in university campus.

(ii) Investment and ROI

In theory, there are no costs associated, apart from the human resources working on this project and apart from the prize that can be bypassed by means of a sponsor or with a costless prize for the club, like match tickets. Given the context of Académica, brimming with challenges, and the desirable goals to attain, these events seem a perfect opportunity to get closer to the students, find innovative solutions for real problems and, above all, considering young talent for potential job opportunities in the club's structure. The potential return of these simple events fully justifies the almost null investment required to organize them.

Long Term Goal 3 - To be one of the most active organizations in the academic community and participative in its development

(3.1) Establish five partnerships with academic organizations

Another important step, mentioned both by Human Resources professionals and students, was the importance of the connections established between academic organizations and

companies allowing a closer presence of employers in the campus, being beneficial for both parties. There are more than 20 academic organizations in Coimbra, from junior enterprises to student unions or clubs that represent a certain group of students, either by their field of study, interests, sports or projects in which they are involved. For instance, there is ESN Coimbra that represents all international students and coordinates events and activities for them; NEG which groups the management students from Universidade de Coimbra; or JEEFEUC, a junior enterprise, that performs actual projects for real companies with students from the school of economics. These organizations present themselves as an interesting touch point with young talent, once they group an already segmented audience, have a very direct approach and engaged contact with the students. In this regard, Académica could establish partnerships with some of these organizations, attaining several benefits, ranging from logistical support in initiatives at the university facilities, to joint organization of projects or events, which would be defined upon agreement.

(i) Logistics

To accomplish these partnerships, which involve external relationships, the Operation's Director together with the HR Vice-President would be, once more, the responsible for it. Furthermore, all the items defined in each partnership protocol could involve other teams and employees, depending on their scope of action. The meetings to find mutual interests and sign a cooperation protocol should start at the beginning of the academic year.

(ii) Investment and ROI

Once again, this action has no investment required besides the time allocated from the responsible employees. It has clear impact on the long-term goal defined, contributing significantly for its achievement, as it guarantees a closer presence near the students, which can lead to future gains on the attraction and recruitment process, both on their efficiency and efficacy. Furthermore, these partnerships can also provide occasional logistical support on projects or events and reduce the club resources involved in it.

(3.2) Be present at five main events in the academic community

One of the best practices to be involved in the academic environment and, at the same time, interact with young talent and collect insightful information is through the presence in events, as all the companies and students interviewed in the process agreed on. Even though nowadays there seems to exist endless events on campus, it can also drive to additional difficulties for the organizations who aspire to be a regular presence on it, once it raises resources management issues. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to understand the purpose behind each event and

select carefully where, when and how Académica wishes to signal its presence at the University campus, participating either in relevant events for the club strategy, and also significant for the students. For this reason, it is relevant to disclose the club presence through the two academic semesters, not focusing on only a single type of event and pool all the efforts at once.

There are three main moments and events that have been recognized as the most important in Universidade de Coimbra, where Académica needs to assure its participation, in order to have the regular and closer presence near the young talent as an end goal. The academic year starts with the Onboarding week, where students from all over the country start to get involved in the city and there is no better moment to engage with new students, presenting Académica as an organization and identity of the city, being helpful in any way. On the other hand, towards the end of the year, the biggest academic event in the country occurs in Coimbra, known as Queima das Fitas, being also a good moment to be present at, even though the way and purpose of attending is rather different than the first. Finally, the most important events for the attraction of talent are the Career Fairs that occurs during the year in the different schools of the University, which the club should attend, offering the chance students get to know more about Académica as an organization and communicate opportunities, such as the curricular internships.

(i) Logistics

The selection and participation in these events will be coordinated by the Human Resources Vice-President and the Operation's Director, in collaboration with the Marketing Department, which will also encourage the use of any materials or visuals that might need to be developed. There's the need for an anticipatory work of preparation of items, positioning and activities, as well as the necessary human resources to implement it in each event.

(ii) Investment and ROI

While there will be no personnel or transportation additional investment, it is expected the need for merchandising production and goods that guarantees the visibility of the organization in each initiative, even though there is the chance to use existing resources of the club. However, it is estimated a required budget of 1000€ for the year and the presence in, at least, five main academic events, if allowed physical attendance. This investment is necessary to assure the presence in the major events and, thus the top opportunities to be in touch with young talent. It will strengthen the club image as an employer, allow a more precise collection of data from interested candidates and convey information more effectively, besides the brand awareness gains and other marketing benefits associated. It is expected a positive return on the investment

made on the image and talent attraction, that should be monitored along the year, with the aim to be enhanced.

(3.3) Organize an Open Day at the club facilities

At the end of the academic year, it is proposed an Open Day at the two infrastructures where the club operates – the stadium and the academy. It has become a common practice for companies who want to be more active and get closer to the young talent, as it represents a perfect opportunity to gather interested students and give a realistic glimpse of the day to day in the organization. For Académica it is also relevant to break a common misconception of being a football club, where only students from sportive areas of study can get opportunities of employment. The goal of the Open Day is to be conducted by two or three different employees of Académica, along its duration, looking to explore different domains and perspectives of working at the club. After an introduction to its history and identity, this event should cover a presentation of the facilities, the strategy and vision of Académica, how is to work at the club and all the duties and advantages associated, additionally to presenting the current open opportunities. It should give the opportunity for students to interact with other employees and end with a session of questions and debate, to fully cover and answer all the existing concerns.

(i) Logistics

There will be a responsible employee for this event, which will follow and monitor the visit and interaction with employees, being previously briefed to promise a quality experience to the students. The responsibility of the organization of the event should rely on the Operation's Director. The final session of questions can occur in the press room of each building, allowing a seat for every student. The event will only take place if there are conditions to do it on site and will always have a limit of registrations, to assure the feasibility of the Open Day.

(ii) Investment and ROI

There is no necessary investment to be made with this event, which represents a highly relevant initiative for the current situation of Académica, despite having the need of personnel allocated to it. This low investment initiative will not bring impactful direct returns but, together with the previous action, will come up to a fully and dynamic communication and approach young talent, reaching a group of already interested group of students, which will have higher probability of being potential candidates.

4.6 Measurement

As Kaplan and Norton stated previously in 2007, if companies are not measuring their progress, they are not able to manage and improve their performance. And companies and professionals in Human Resources are in agreement regarding the importance of measuring and monitoring the results, even though sometimes it can get challenging. With the theoretical knowledge gathered and the insightful feedback collected during the research, it is proposed to start measuring the External Employer Branding approach, that seeks to have a complete look on the performance obtained, seeking to understand the results attained and providing an ability, adapting the strategy along the way.

The first step goes through the definition of, at least one KPI - to each initiative described above in the action plan, which will allow the measurement and tracking results onwards, which can be found in figure 4.11. This is what the main interviewed companies are currently doing in their Employer Branding strategies, and it also allows future definition of goals, taking into account the results achieved. Each KPI may also improve the quality of meetings regarding Employer Branding, as it provides important data to support future decisions. However, it is relevant to find a balance in the amount of KPI's defined, as too much information, which may often not be entirely useful, will lead to more time consumption analysing data.

LONG TERM GOAL	INITIATIVE	KPIs	# - number of
<p>I</p> <p>To be one of the 10 most attractive organizations to work for in Coimbra</p>	Website with career page	# visits // # applications	
	LinkedIn Page	# followers	
	Instagram Career Account	# followers	
	Quarterly Newsletter	open rate // # subscribers	
<p>II</p> <p>Have a qualified, agile and innovative workforce, with young talent</p>	Internship program	# applications // retention rate	
	Connection w/career services	# partnerships	
	Business Case Challenges	# events // # participants	
<p>III</p> <p>To be one of the most active organizations in the academic community and participative in its development</p>	Establish five partnerships	# partnerships // # initiatives	
	Present at five main events	# events // # participants	
	Open Day	# participants // # applications	

Figure 4.11 | KPIs for the action plan initiatives. Source: author

As an extra to the definition of measurement indicators, Académica should seek for direct feedback from its target audience, getting information on a different and unbiased perspective, which is highly relevant for eventual changes in strategy. Thus, a brief satisfaction survey, with few qualitative and quantitative evaluation should be provided to students after every action or event where Académica is involved. The structure should remain the same along the year, in order to have the ability to compare results across the different initiatives.

Finally, it is recommended to carry two annual meetings, one per semester, to evaluate all the results as a whole and adapt the strategy, if necessary. The first meeting of the year is strongly recommended to occur before the beginning of the academic year and should always be more complete, allowing the evaluation of all the data, the definition of the strategy and the goals for the next year. The second meeting must be held in the middle of the academic year and play a different role, as it will not contribute to structural changes. Instead, it is designed for small adjustments or changes in the plan, based on the first results of the year, new necessities of the club or unexpected events that affect the natural course of the academic year. The responsibility of all the measurement process is to be conducted by the Operations Director, which will be in charge for the Employer Branding Strategy, supervised by the Human Resources Vice-President.

4.7 Validation

The final step of this project is the validation stage, where all the strategic framework and its application should be evaluated, in order to check its real feasibility and effectiveness. One year after its implementation, there are two possible outcomes: (1) the model is validated, and strategic framework can continue to be used by the club in the future; (2) it does not achieve the desired results, so it should be re-assessed.

The expected outcomes for this External Employer Branding strategy are focused, as seen before, on the club's image as an employer, its attractiveness, and on its ability to recruit new talent and renew its workforce. Based on that, there are four main indicators, built upon specific data of Académica, that will allow the validation of the outcomes of this strategy. They are: (1) Double the club's growth rate on social media, from 4% to, at least, 8% a year; (2) Maintain or increase the current turnover, which stood around 4% last year, in order to guarantee a necessary structure renewal; (3) Organize at least 5 events with students and young talent; (4) Receive more than 100 applications to the internship program or other junior positions.

Aligned with the implementation of the whole project, the validation process will be carried out by the Operations Director and the Vice-President of Human Resources and should provide clear conclusions on the level of success of the strategy, regarding the main expected outcomes for it.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

5.1 Main Conclusions

There are fast-paced changes occurring every day in industries that are forcing companies to constantly adapt. One of the most recognized elements playing a key role on this ability to adjust and innovate lies on how companies deal with talent, specifically on attracting and retaining it (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Brown & Tannock, 2009). This new context of change brought a “war of talent”, requiring a thoughtful and strategic planning from organizations, that must invest on the development of an Employer Branding Strategy.

Associação Académica de Coimbra – Organismo Autónomo de Futebol is the oldest professional club in the Iberian Peninsula, with over 130 years of existence. Its identity and values are deeply rooted on the history of the city and university, being recognized nationwide. Nevertheless, the last decades brought a delicate and poor financial situation which, in combination with a very aged workforce, places the organization in an unstable position towards the future. This project emerged from this need of improvement and innovation, complementing some of the internal changes that are being planned and implemented, seeking to explore the already existing potential of Académica. It looked for the development of an External Employer Branding strategy, from the starting points with the construction of the framework to its implementation.

In order to get a realistic and updated strategy, a wide variety of sources were used, incorporating inputs collected through attendance in relevant events and hearing different Human Resources and Employer Branding professionals in Portugal. Furthermore, the suitability of the strategy to the organization’s reality was also a priority, being achieved through hundreds of hours working at the club, meetings with employees and Board members. The lack of any strategy on this regard was evident and the development of this project with the integration of these different sources of information has revealed to be crucial for a complete and tailor-made strategy.

The expected results have been aligned with all the intervenients, reaching a consensus on renewing the image of Académica as an employer, persuing to become more attractive to young talent as the main ending goal. This strategy will be able to lead to a more dynamic and closer interaction with students and potential candidates and also illustrate the value proposition for

the outside world. In the future, it could represent one of the main competitive advantages of the club, playing a major role on renewing its workforce and ability to innovate and grow.

The belief in the success of this strategy and all the work done around it to become feasible to the club reality, as well as the need to act quickly has already led to a partial application of this project, with several initiatives being already planned and carried out, in alignment with the club objectives. The full implementation of the presented strategy could represent a new chapter for Académica and a new image as an employer, expecting it to provide multiple benefits in the future.

5.2 Critical Analysis

The strategy defined has been set entirely with the focus on the external dimension of Employer Branding, as there are internal changes already taking pace. This internal context of change would constantly interfere with the development of a project that included both dimensions. Thus, it was chosen to only address the external dimension of Employer Branding. However, the level of effectiveness and success of any Employer Branding Strategy depends on the full balance and integration of both internal and external dimensions (Tikoo, 2004; Vatsa, 2006). Despite this project not considering the full internal changes that have been and are still being made, the methodology used allowed the most suitable and rigorous approach to the club's reality. Nevertheless, it is recommended a future development of this Employer Branding Strategy focused on the internal dimension, as soon as there exists that possibility.

Additionally, this strategy was defined with a measurement system of KPI's, recognizing the importance of tracking results and its effectiveness. However, there were no comparative data regarding the Employer Branding field, that provided more rigorous and accurate information to monitor progress. The internal diagnosis carried through interviews and meetings with employees and with the Board of Vice-Presidents was vital to get the best picture of the previous and current situation of the club. Still, there was lack of data for a deeper analysis.

The full implementation of this strategy relies now on the ability of the current structure of Académica and on the approval of the different stages and initiatives by the board of Vice-Presidents of the club. It is recommended a continuous review to this strategy at least twice a year and a complete evaluation to the KPI's results, to adjust and guarantee the right alignment to achieve the goals set.

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Annexes

Annex A – List of interviewed Human Resources professionals and representatives of academic organizations in Coimbra

NAME	ROLE	ORGANIZATION
Andreia Reis	Employer Branding Specialist	Nmbrs BV
Catarina Fonseca	Employer Branding Manager	Jerónimo Martins
Carolina Garccia	Employer Branding Specialist	Jerónimo Martins
Felipe Vieira	CEO	Networkme
Pedro Prior	Community Manager	Relive
Patrícia Villas Boas	People and Communication Manager	Schmidt Light Metal Group
Sofia Passos	Young Talent & Employer Brand	SONAE
Mário Castro	Head of Community	Forall Phones
Tomás Pinho	President	JEEFEUC
Bárbara Vieira	Career Coordinator	Núcleo de Estudantes de Informática da Universidade de Coimbra
Pedro Valente	Project Manager	ESN Coimbra
Miguel do Carmo	Student Ambassador	Académica Start UC

Annex B – Interview script for Human Resources professionals

Semi-structured interview

- 1. What company do you work for and what's your position?*
- 2. What is the dimension of your company? How do you characterize its structure?*
- 3. What the concept Employer Branding means to your company?*
- 4. Where Employer Branding positions within the company structure?*
- 5. What are the goals behind the Employer Branding activity of the company?*
- 6. What is the process to define a strategy and implement an Employer Branding action plan?*
- 7. With which frequency do you set and evaluate your Employer Branding strategy?*
- 8. Which are the practices your company uses the most to attract and develop young talent? How do you relate with universities?*
- 9. What role social media plays in your Employer Branding strategy? In broad terms, what is your approach?*
- 10. How are you adapting your Employer Branding external initiatives to the current context, with covid-19 pandemic.*
- 11. How do you measure and validate the results?*
- 12. If so, which KPIs do you usually define?*

Annex C – Interview script for representatives from academic organizations in Coimbra

Semi-structured interview

- 1. When you think about Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. what is the first image you have in mind?*
- 2. What words do you associate with Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F.?*
- 3. Have you ever thought in Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. as an employer in which you could work? Why?*
- 4. Do you feel that students attending higher education institutions in Coimbra look at Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. as an employer in which they could work? Why do you think so?*
- 5. Have you ever been aware of any initiative of the Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. with the students? If yes, which?*
- 6. Do you think that there is potential for Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. to get closer to students? Why do you think so?*
- 7. What initiatives do you think that Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. could carry out to get closer to university students?*
- 8. What academic events usually take place during the year in which it would be beneficial for Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. to participate?*
- 9. Do you think it would be beneficial for Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. to establish partnerships with student unions, junior enterprises or other university organizations? If yes, why? And what value could Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F. add to these organizations?*
- 10. Do you follow the social media accounts of Associação Académica de Coimbra – O.A.F.? If yes, how do you evaluate the content developed?*

Annex D – List of events attended

Event	Speaker	Date
World Employer Branding Day		5/11/2020
<i>How Microsoft localizes their employer brand in regional markets</i>	Jasmin Pillay, Microsoft, David Plink, Top Employers Institute	
<i>World Employer Branding Expert Panel - Adapting for a post COVID-19 world-of-work</i>	Brett Michington, Employer Branding College	
<i>How to bring your employer brand to life through user-generated video (UGV)</i>	Emily Forbes, Seenit Megan Gubler, Seenit	
<i>The Give and Get of employer brand</i>	Bryan Adams, Ph.Creative	
<i>Your brand your promise</i>	Bianca Rehmer, Indeed	
<i>Managing your employer brand through a global pandemic</i>	Sophie Hopley, JobHoller	
<i>Building true culture at SLMG through employee empowerment</i>	Patrícia Villas-Boas, Schmidt Light Metal Group	
<i>Facts based employer branding strategy</i>	Dragos Gheban, Catalyst Solutions	
Aula Aberta ISCAC: Employer Branding	Joana Pais Afonso, Delloite	16/11/2020
Porto RH Meeting		26/11 - 27/11/2020
<i>Humanização e digitalização. O que exigem as profissões do futuro?</i>	Teresa Coelho, KPMG	
<i>Recrutamento: resiliência e disponibilidade para aprender</i>	Marta Soeiro, Grupo Cães de Pedra	
<i>Onboarding: experiência real</i>	Susana Zorrinho, HIT	
Fireside Talk Programas de Trainees	Catarina Neves, Fidelidade Inês Pedro, NOVO BANCO Tiago Gonçalves, Jerónimo Martins	30/11/2020
Fireside Talk Programas de Trainees	Inês Pinto, Glintt Marisa Garrido, CTT Sandra Pereira, Montepio	18/03/2021

Annex E – Action Plan

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	TIMELINE	BUDGET	KPI
L.G. 1 <i>To be one of the 10 most attractive organizations to work for in Coimbra</i>	1.1 Website with career page	<i>Develop a simpler, visually attractive and user-friendly website, with a new career page. It should provide information about Académica as an employer, make known the employee value proposition and display any job opportunities.</i>	15 th of September, 2021	5000€	# visits # applications
	1.2 LinkedIn Page	<i>Use the existing page of Académica on LinkedIn to reach young talent. The club must develop relevant content for its target audience, providing informative and interactive content, reflecting its identity as an employer.</i>	1 st of November, 2021	(no investment required)	# followers
	1.3 Instagram Career Account	<i>Combined with LinkedIn, Instagram can be used to provide a complete digital presence for any interested student or graduate, providing a glimpse of what is like to work for Académica, highlighting its employee value proposition.</i>	1 st of November, 2021	(no investment required)	# followers
	1.4 Quarterly newsletter	<i>Develop a regular newsletter that summarizes all the actions developed during the trimester and provide a sneak peek of the next initiatives. It is also a perfect tool to forward young talent to specific events or actions, through links and call to actions.</i>	31 st of March, 2022	360€ - 960€	open rate # subscribers
L.G. 2 <i>Have a qualified, agile and innovative workforce, with young talent</i>	2.1 Curricular Internship program	<i>Create a regular program for curricular internships that mutually adds value to the club and the students, allowing them to complete their cycle of studies, gain professional experience and demonstrate their value. It can become one of the most important talent pools for Académica.</i>	1 st of Jan – 15 th Feb. 2022 28 th Feb – 31 th July, 2022	(no investment required)	# applications retention rate
	2.2 Connection w/career services	<i>Establish contact with career services, looking for the settlement of partnership between parties, guaranteeing a easier channel to reach students as well as more data and, which can help to segment any communication or adapt a specific approach.</i>	1 st of October, 2021	(no investment required)	# partnerships

	2.3 Business Case Challenges	<i>Present a real challenge to students, providing the opportunity, individually or in group, to find and present a possible solution in a final pitch. The goal is to get closer to the students and find innovative solutions for real problems.</i>	December, 2021 March, 2022	(no investment required)	# events # participants
<i>L.G. 3 To be one of the most active organizations in the academic community and participative in its development</i>	3.1 Establish five partnerships	<i>Establish partnerships with some of the academic organizations in Coimbra, allowing a closer presence in the academic environment and collecting several other benefits ranging from logistical support in initiatives at the university facilities to joint organization of projects or events, which would be defined upon agreement.</i>	1 st of October, 2021	(no investment required)	# partnerships # initiatives
	3.2 Present at five main events	<i>Guarantee presence at the University campus, being involved in relevant events both for Académica and for students. The three main events identified in the city are the onboarding week, Career Fairs and Queima das Fitas.</i>	1 st of October. – 15 th of Dec. 2021 1 st of Feb. – 15 th of May, 2022	1000€	# events # participants
	3.3 Open Day	<i>Organize an event at the infrastructures where the club operates – the stadium and the academy - with the goal to gather interested students and give a realistic glimpse of the day to day in the organization.</i>	May, 2022	(no investment required)	# participants // # applications