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Importance-performance analysis as a tool to guide employer branding strategies in the IT-BPM industry

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Abstract

Purpose – Based on attribute research in marketing, importance-performance analysis (IPA) provides a useful analogy to examine employer branding concepts. The purpose of this paper is to use IPA to evaluate employees' perceptions of important employer value proposition (EVP) attributes and their corresponding psychological contract fulfillment scores. IPA is applied to 40 EVP attributes and their corresponding EVP dimensions – "Economic Value", "Development Value", "Social Value", "Work Value" and "Employer Reputation." Further, the paper examines the difference between highly engaged and less engaged employees in their relationship to importance and fulfillment of the five EVP dimensions.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were drawn from information technology-business process management employees ($n = 520$) in India through a questionnaire survey. The IPA matrix was used to plot the importance and fulfillment scores. Independent samples *t*-test was used to assess the difference between high and low engagement scores.

Findings – The results indicate that several EVP attributes fall within the "Concentrate Here" quadrant that requires more focus. With respect to EVP dimensions, social value needs focus; economic value received "Low Priority"; and work value and employer reputation are identified as "Potential Overkill." The findings also suggest that, organizations should engage employees across all dimensions, by both prioritizing and fulfilling their obligations promptly.

Practical implications – The study highlights the need for HR practitioners and academicians to draw insights from attribute research in marketing to effectively devise the employer branding strategy of individual organizations.

Originality/value – This paper is the first of its kind to apply IPA to EVP attributes, which contributes to the growing literature on employer branding.

Keywords Employer branding, Employer value proposition (EVP), Importance-performance analysis (IPA)

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Attribute research in marketing is not new to the methods of identifying important attributes and their features and more importantly where they stand in the mind space of customers. Recent research in employer branding has reinforced attribute research in terms of promoting the unique "tangible and intangible" offerings termed as employer value proposition or EVP attributes (Theurer *et al.*, 2018). By developing and marketing their EVPs that are unique and difficult to imitate (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004), organizations consider employer branding as an effective strategy to seek quality talent and differentiate themselves from their competitors.

Employer branding as a concept originated from the marketing discipline in the 1990s when Ambler and Barrow (1996) traced its roots to the concept of relationship marketing. The objective of relationship marketing is essential for maintaining long-term relations with customers rather than aiming for short-term economic gains. The relationship between the

organization and customers is effective when the value proposition is aligned with the needs of customers (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, employer branding is about the organization's efforts in maintaining a long-term relationship with its employees (Alshathry *et al.*, 2017). Ambler and Barrow (1996) suggested that when replacing customers with employees, the functional, economic and psychological benefits of a product brand are also applicable to the employer brand. Therefore, the employer brand can also be positioned in the same way as a product brand, and all techniques of marketing relevant to a product brand and customer may be applicable (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). EVP is a package of functional, economic and psychological benefits, which is both tangible and intangible in nature, provided by the employer (Ambler and Barrow, 1996) and differentiated from competitors (Edwards, 2009). Pay, job security, challenging work, career prospects, training and development opportunities, empowerment are some of the examples of EVP attributes (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016).

At a conceptual level, employer branding combines the concepts of human resource management, brand management and marketing. Thus, employer branding has multiple manifestations which can take diverse inter-disciplinary perspectives. Despite the wealth of research contributions in employer branding, the inter-disciplinary nature of the construct has not been fully explored. Thus, there is a need to bridge this gap and draw insights from attribute research in brand marketing to understand the performance of organizations. Attribute research is especially relevant for HR practitioners and academics when the possible alignment of marketed versus experienced EVP attributes result in fulfillment or breach of the psychological contract (Theurer *et al.*, 2018). Theurer *et al.* (2018), in their recent literature, suggest that the scope of EVP research should not only be about identifying relevant attributes but should also consider the relative positioning of the attributes with regard to diverse talent segments. In marketing, the importance-performance analysis (IPA) is used especially in studies related to product/service attributes. Here, the mean rating of importance and performance concerning service-related attributes are plotted on four quadrants, mainly for management to understand the practical significance of research findings (Martilla and James, 1977). The advantage of using IPA is that the results can be displayed on an easy-to-interpret four-quadrant grid. The same applies to EVP attributes in our study, where importance and fulfillment scores were used for analysis and subsequently plotted in the IPA matrix.

From the Indian industry perspective, the information technology-business process management organizations consider their employer brand as a reflection of the company's values, which is a combination of their policies, practices and what the external market perceives. The industry also serves as a benchmark for best employer brand practices which is evident from its consistent ranking in the best places to work and best employer brand surveys (Randstad, 2015). The IT-BPM industry has recorded tremendous growth and is regarded by other developing countries as a model of how they can leapfrog stages of industrial development (Saraswathy and Thamaraiselvan, 2010). By definition, "IT services" refers to the application of business and technical expertise to enable organizations in the creation, management and optimization of, or access to, information and business processes. BPM is a discipline that uses various methods to discover, model, analyze, measure, improve and optimize business processes. A business process coordinates the behavior of people, systems, information and things to produce business outcomes in support of a business strategy (Gartner, 2017). Although the IT-BPM industry has been in the threshold of major challenges, like a volatile global economy, inflation, immigration issues and continued unemployment, the industry manages to boast of a 3.7m talent pool and the largest private sector employer (NASSCOM, 2016). IT-BPM organizations often face the challenge of attracting and retaining quality talent. This is because of the gap in supply and demand of talent, which increases firm costs affecting the competitive

advantage of the firm (Doh *et al.*, 2011). Thus, employer branding as a concept seems relevant from a practitioner's perspectives, with a need to implement an effective employer brand strategy for effective talent management (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2017).

Researchers are of the view that it is difficult to measure firm performance directly through employer branding practices, but its impact on firm's resources and resultant employee behavior could be plausible outcomes (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2010). Employer brand attributes or EVP help in creating positive perceptions in not only sourcing the best of talent, but also in enhancing employee commitment, engagement and retention (Gilani and Cunningham, 2017). As learning organizations, IT-BPM organizations constantly face the challenge of a dynamic environment which has to foster a continuous knowledge-sharing and supportive learning environment. However, this, in turn, helps to establish a strong employer brand by emotionally engaging employees, attracting and retaining them (Lenka and Chawla, 2015). Employee engagement has been a topic of discussion in managing talent, where disengaged employees are a potential threat to absenteeism, negative word-of-mouth and attrition in organizations (Saks, 2006). Employee engagement is also considered as one of the important outcomes of psychological contract literature (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008), resulting in improved organizational effectiveness and people performance. However, psychological contract literature has been mainly instrumental in considering only the fulfillment scores for analyzing the impact on employee engagement (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008; Parzefall and Hakanen, 2010). In this paper, we considered the influence of both the importance and fulfillment scores to understand its relationship to employee engagement. One of the important research questions of Prajogo and McDermott (2011) in using the IPA matrix was to understand "if there was any difference between high and low performing firms regarding their competitive priorities" (p. 469). A similar approach was followed in this study, where the IPA analysis was followed up with understanding the difference between highly engaged and less engaged employees regarding their EVP attribute priorities.

With IT-BPM industry being the scope of this study, we discuss how the importance-fulfillment scores are analyzed using the IPA matrix. Further, the differences between high and low engagement scores of employees in their relationship to EVP priorities are discussed. The results of the analysis and their applications to organizations are also discussed in detail.

Literature review
Theoretical background
From a theoretical stand point, psychological contract literature (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) forms the basis of EVP attributes. The employer brand presents attribute-based information that aids in the formation of the psychological contract between the employer and the employee (Edwards, 2009). Inducements are offered by employers with the expectation that employees will contribute to the organization (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2008). Three aspects of social exchange form the building blocks of psychological contract literature namely, exchange, relationship and reciprocity. In an organizational set-up, a relationship is built when inducements offered by the employer are valued by employees, in exchange for which employees reciprocate in return for what they have received, which creates a mutual obligation between the parties (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2008). However, this exchange relationship is possible only when employees perceive that the organization has fulfilled its obligations (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008). Psychological contract research emphasizes that employee perceptions of inconsistencies in brand promise and reality can lead to a psychological contract violation, in turn, leading to turnover and intention to quit (Backhaus, 2016). Employees evaluate the offerings from their employers and this evaluation results in the fulfillment or breach of psychological contract (Vos and Meganck, 2009).

Employees, who are satisfied with their current employment relationships or perceive that their psychological contract with their employer is fulfilled, exhibit higher organizational support and commitment (Kochanski and Elliott, 2011). Thus, it is important to assess the perceived importance (value of inducements offered) and perceived fulfillment of the psychological contract regarding EVP attributes (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008; Edwards, 2009).

EVP attributes

EVP is the "employee's perception of the value or benefit he/she gets through association with the firm" (Heger, 2007, p. 122). From academic literature, Ambler and Barrow (1996) describe employer brand as a package of functional, economic and psychological benefits. EVP attributes are also categorized as transactional (tangible) and relational contracts (tangible and intangible) as per the psychological contract literature. Several attributes or the job and organizational factors have been listed in literature as potential drivers of managing talent. Literature has generally targeted business/engineering/graduate students to understand the drivers of employer attractiveness or engagement (e.g. Baum and Kabst, 2013; Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Lievens *et al.*, 2007; Montgomery and Ramus, 2011). Some studies are specific to the Indian context (Aggarwal and Bhargava, 2009; Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2010), and a few studies also pertain to the knowledge industry or the IT and BPM industry (Bhatnagar, 2007; Saraswathy and Thamaraiselvan, 2010; Vaijayanthi and Shreenivasan, 2011). Apart from the job and organizational attributes, employer reputation is an important dimension initially identified by Ambler and Barrow (1996) and followed by others (e.g. Cable and Turban, 2003; Collins and Han, 2004; Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016).

The EVP attributes were chosen for the study and categorized as economic value, development value, social value, work value and employer reputation. Economic value is about compensation, employee benefits and perks. Development value is about learning, professional development and career-enhancing experience. Social value is the employees' assessment of his social needs concerning family, friends and colleagues that provide a sense of belonging both within and outside the organization. Work value is about employees' need for an exciting work environment and novel work practices. Employer reputation is the employees' perceptions of employer's honesty, credibility and ability to satisfy employee demands (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Jiang and Iles, 2011). Based on the explanation of EVP dimensions, the attributes were listed under each of the dimensions. For example, compensation and retirement benefits were categorized as economic value and career growth opportunities and challenging assignments were categorized as development value. Further details regarding the attributes and dimensions under which they were listed, along with the literature sources, are given in Table I.

Importance-performance analysis (IPA)

When attribute research is conducted in marketing, firms face the problem of converting results into action. This is because of the inability of the management to interpret the results in understandable terms. Again, customer satisfaction is based on the judgment of customers regarding the importance and performance of service-related attributes. When one of it is ignored, the results cannot be interpreted in satisfactory terms. Thus, the mean values of the importance and performance scores of the attributes are plotted on four quadrants. The median values are used as a measure of central tendency to divide the x- and y-axis into four quadrants on a scatter plot. To analyze the observations, attention should be given to extreme observations that "show greater disparity between importance and performance as they are key indicators of customer dissatisfaction" (Martilla and James, 1977, p. 79).

Dimension	Item code	Item	Source
Economic value	EVP1	Salary and compensation based on competency	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009)
	EVP2	Competitive compensation as per industry standards	Maxwell and Knox (2009), Sengupta *et al.* (2015), Vaijayanthi and Shreenivasan (2011)
	EVP4	Rewards and recognition for exceptional performance exceeding expectations	Hiltrop (1999)
	EVP3	Access to benefits and perks for all employees	
	EVP8	Employee stock options (ESOP)	Tumasjan *et al.* (2011)
	EVP5	Healthcare benefits	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009)
	EVP7	Retirement benefits	
Development value	EVP10	Career growth opportunities	Hughes and Rog (2008), Lievens (2007), Lievens *et al.* (2007)
	EVP9	Opportunity to work across multiple technologies and verticals	Saraswathy and Thamaraiselvan (2010)
	EVP11	Challenging assignments	Baum and Kabst (2013), Chugh and Bhatnagar (2006), Maxwell and Knox (2009)
	EVP12	Opportunities for teamwork	Baum and Kabst (2013), Hiltrop (1999), Lievens (2007), Lievens *et al.* (2007)
	EVP13	Empowerment to take decisions	Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2008), Tumasjan *et al.* (2011)
	EVP14	Opportunities to develop new skills through training	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009), Cable and Turban (2003), Collins and Stevens (2002), Christiaans (2012)
	EVP15	Exposure to global business and work practices	Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010)
	EVP17	Opportunity to apply what was learnt	Berthon *et al.* (2005)
	EVP18	Fast-track promotion for star performers	Chugh and Bhatnagar (2006), Lievens and Highhouse (2003)
Social value	EVP19	Organizational support during personal exigencies	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009)
	EVP20	Culture of supportive and encouraging colleagues	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009), Berthon *et al.* (2005), Maxwell and Knox (2009).
	EVP21	Treating people with respect and trust	Hughes and Rog (2008)
	EVP22	Culture of supportive leadership	Montgomery and Ramus (2011)
	EVP16	Interaction with experts within and outside the organization	Munsamy and Venter (2009)
	EVP29	Work-life balance	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009), Baum and Kabst (2013)
	EVP6	Childcare facilities	Munsamy and Venter (2009)
Work value	EVP23	Periodic feedback on performance	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009)
	EVP24	Flexible work schedule	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009), Vaijayanthi and Shreenivasan (2011)
	EVP25	Adequate resources to perform on the job	Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009), Bhatnagar (2007)
	EVP26	Role clarity	Bhatnagar (2007)
	EVP27	Stress-free work environment	Knox and Freeman (2010), Munsamy and Venter (2009)
	EVP28	Job Security	Collins and Stevens (2002), Christiaans (2012), Hughes and Rog (2008), Jiang and Iles (2011), Lievens (2007)

Table I.
List of EVP attributes and their literature source

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Table I.

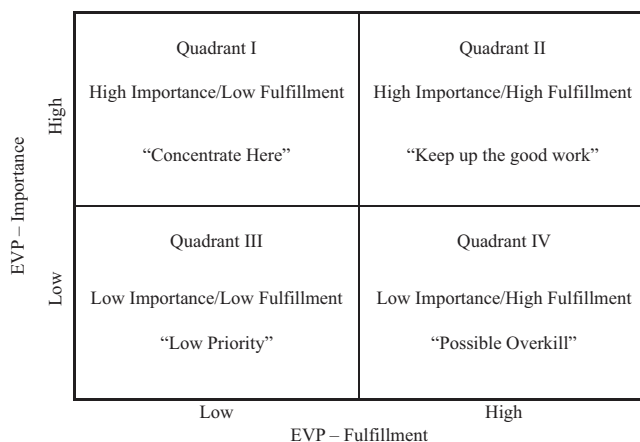| Dimension	Item code	Item	Source
	EVP30	Informal work culture	Knox and Freeman (2010), Maxwell and Knox (2009)
	EVP31	Encourage creativity at work	Aggerholm *et al.* (2011), Berthon *et al.* (2005)
	EVP32	Work relevant to one's strength, competency, interests	Expert opinion
	EVP33	Transparent work culture	Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2008)
	EVP34	Technology support	Hughes and Rog (2008), Kennedy and Daim (2010)
Employer reputation	EVP36	Organization's focus on environmental and CSR activities	Montgomery and Ramus (2011)
	EVP37	Organization's focus on high quality products and/or services	Berthon *et al.* (2005)
	EVP38	Organization's reputation of being ethical	Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010), Montgomery and Ramus (2011)
	EVP35	Customer-oriented organization	Berthon *et al.* (2005)
	EVP39	Competent and fair leadership	Kennedy and Daim (2010)
	EVP40	Organization's focus on innovative products and/or services	Berthon *et al.* (2005)

The four quadrants of the scatter plot are named as "Concentrate Here," "Keep up the good work," "Low Priority" and "Possible Overkill." "Concentrate Here" pertains to the high importance given to the attribute but relatively rated low on performance. All the attributes in this quadrant need focus from the management as the main quadrant for improvement. In other words, they need to receive higher priority and more resources. "Keep up the good work" is a pat on the back for the management where important attributes are also well managed with good performance scores. "Low Priority" suggests low scores on importance and performance. Being less important, these identified attributes do not need priority. "Possible overkill" happens when attributes rated low on importance are rated high on performance and, hence, are inconsequential for customers. Organizations can look to deprioritize and re-allocate their resources for attributes in this quadrant.

On a similar note, Figure 1 represents the importance-fulfillment analysis framework for EVP attribute research in employer branding. EVP importance score is depicted in the *y*-axis and the fulfillment score is depicted in the *x*-axis. The nomenclature of the four quadrants remains the same as adapted from the IPA matrix.

Employee engagement
Engagement measures employees' work-related state of mind, which has direct talent management implications like retention and reduced employee turnover. According to Özçelik (2015), engagement creates an emotional response of pride and inspiration among employees that enhances employee retention. Highly engaged employees, in turn, contribute to developing the employer brand. Employee engagement is also subsequently linked to higher levels of customer satisfaction, higher revenues, profit margin and overall return on investment (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). Heger (2007) describes employee engagement as being intellectually stimulated and emotionally inspired toward work and organization. EVP attributes motivate employees to be positively engaged with the organization and employees who perceive that their EVP is not adequately fulfilled are likely to disengage themselves from work or leave the organization (Heger, 2007). Engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006, p. 702). The study used the importance and fulfillment

	Quadrant I High Importance/Low Fulfillment "Concentrate Here"	Quadrant II High Importance/High Fulfillment "Keep up the good work"
	Quadrant III Low Importance/Low Fulfillment "Low Priority"	Quadrant IV Low Importance/High Fulfillment "Possible Overkill"

EVP – Importance (High / Low)

EVP – Fulfillment (Low / High)

Source: Adapted from Martilla and James (1977)

Figure 1.
Importance-fulfillment
analysis framework

scores of the EVP attributes to analyze its relationship to employee engagement. For this, the abridged version of the "Work Engagement" scale by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) was used. The dimensions of the scale included "vigour, dedication and absorption" as the key constructs. "Vigor is characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication is characterised by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterised by being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006, p. 702).

Research design
The purpose of this study was to understand the IT-BPM employees' perspective of the important EVP attributes. Similarly, it was important to understand employee perception of psychological contract fulfillment regarding EVP attributes, since employees would feel satisfied (similar to customer satisfaction) and contribute to the organization only based on their perception that the organization has fulfilled their expectation (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008). The primary research objective was to compare the level of EVP attributes' importance against fulfillment based on the IPA framework adapted from marketing literature.

The attributes that were chosen from the literature were subject to content and face validation by a panel of academic and industry experts. The dimensions and their operational definitions were enclosed in the questionnaire for expert reference. The experts were asked to rate on relevance, representativeness and clarity of each attribute corresponding to their dimensions. A total of 40 attributes and their dimensions were finalized based on expert opinion.

Survey research was conducted to understand employees' perception of important EVP attributes and their corresponding level of fulfillment by the employers. The respondents were asked to rate the EVP attributes on the level of importance (1 – not important; 2 – less important; 3 – important; 4 – very important) and the extent of fulfillment by the employer (0 – no promise was made; 1 – not at all fulfilled; 2 – fulfilled to some extent; 3 – fulfilled to a large extent; 4 – completely fulfilled). The four-point Likert scale was primarily used as a "forced-choice" method, to avoid the choice of neutral opinion and minimize social-desirability bias (Allen and Seaman, 2007; Garland, 1991; Matell and Jacoby, 1971).

To assess individual preference or attitude, a forced-choice response is recommended (Garland, 1991). The IPA was conducted with the 40 attributes and also based on their dimensions, namely, economic value, social value, work value, development value and employer reputation.

The second research objective was about understanding the difference between highly engaged and less engaged employees regarding their EVP attribute priorities. The survey research also captured employee engagement through the same questionnaire. Employee engagement was measured on a six-point frequency scale (0 – never; 1 – almost never (a few times a year or less); 2 – rarely (once a month or less); 3 – sometimes (a few times a month); 4 – often (once a week); 5 – very often (a few times a week); 6 – always (everyday)).

Sample
A pilot study was conducted with the objective of examining the scale reliabilities. The reliability results showed that the Cronbach's α for all the items of the EVP attributes and employee engagement scale were above 0.9. Thus, the scales were found to be reliable (George and Mallery, 2003).

For both the pilot and the main study, the respondents were IT-BPM employees. The organizations to which the employees belong are National Association of Software Service Companies (NASSCOM)-listed and constantly rated in best places to work or best employer brand surveys. Some of the coveted awards the organizations have received are: India's Best Companies to work for – A Great Place to Work and Economic Times study; "NASSCOM – Aon Hewitt Best Employer" ranking; Asia's Best Employer Brand award – For India, given by the Employer Branding Institute; and Universum Global Most Attractive Employers. This is a reflection that these organizations are active in employer branding-related practices and believe in promoting the brand values of the organization to both external and internal stakeholders. A total of 38 such organizations were contacted for the survey. Most of the organizations were large organizations (> 5,000 employees), and seven organizations were medium-sized with less than 5,000 employees.

As per the rules of membership, employees were required to have a minimum of two years of experience, to be acquainted with the organizational policies and practices. A minimum required response of 15 employees per organization was taken into consideration since the study pertained to individual employees (Bontis, 2001). The target audience was project managers, team leads and team members who were urged to participate in the survey. Geographically, data were collected from cities which were home to major IT-BPM companies like Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad, Delhi-NCR and Chennai. The assurance was given that the identity of the respondents would be confidential, and the analysis would be an aggregation of all responses.

Incomplete responses and outliers were removed from the data set. The data were also screened for unengaged respondents who might have answered in a pattern of 1,111 or 2,222 for all the responses. In total, there were 520 responses that were valid and considered for this study. The sample size was above the minimum required sample size, based on the accepted item to respondent ratio of 1:5 (Worthington and Whittaker, 2006).

Profile of respondents
Out of 520 respondents, 66.9 percent were male and 33.1 percent were female. Age profile of the respondents: up to 25 years, there were 63 employees (12.1 percent); between the age group of 26 and 30 years, there were 137 employees (26.3 percent); between the age group of 31 and 35, there were 180 employees (34.6 percent); and between the age group of 36 and 40 years, there were 113 employees (21.7 percent). Above 40 years, there were a total of 27 employees (5.2 percent). This is also in line with the industry perspective that Millennials

(below 35 years) are the dominant group in the IT-BPM industry (People Matters and Monster.com, 2016).

Regarding marital status, 65.2 percent of the employees reported that they were married and 34.8 percent of employees reported that they were not married.

A majority held a UG-technical qualification like BE/BTech/BS (51.9 percent), and 10.8 percent had a UG-Non-technical qualification like bachelors from arts and science. A PG-technical qualification like ME/MTech/MS made up 13.5 percent of the sample, followed by PG-Non-technical qualification (23.5 percent).

About organizational tenure (work experience with the current organization), a majority of the respondents were between two and five years (63.7 percent) with their present organization. Similarly, the career tenure (total work experience) of respondents was mainly between six and ten years (36.3 percent). Organizational tenure between two and five years, termed as the mid-tenure group, is also the recent focus of the IT-BPM industry (Great Place to Work, 2015).

The nature of business in the IT-BPM industry was mainly classified as IT services, pure-play BPM, Product, Engineering/Embedded/R&D, Internet & E-commerce by NASSCOM. Organizations practiced more than one kind of business. The organizations which operated only one of the businesses (IT services or pure-play BPM) were coded as 1, two businesses were coded as 2, three businesses were coded as 3 and more than three businesses were coded as 4. Majority of the respondents belonged to organizations that handled at least two businesses (32.7 percent).

Importance-fulfillment analysis of all the EVP attributes

Initially, all the 40 EVP attributes were considered for analysis. Table II provides the "Importance" and corresponding "Fulfillment" scores in the descending order of "Importance" score for the EVP attributes.

Based on the importance and fulfillment scores, a two-dimensional matrix was constructed, with EVP importance depicted on the y-axis and fulfillment in the x-axis. A scatter plot was drawn with the mean scores, and the median divided the plot into four quadrants. Median is considered as a better measure of central tendency especially when the interval scales are four-point scales (Martilla and James, 1977). The scatter plot given in Figure 2 gives the results of the analysis.

From the figure, it is evident that there are many attributes in the "Keep up with the good work" category, which is good news for the IT-BPM industry in general. The EVP attributes under this category are mentioned in Table III.

From the individual attributes in the "Keep up the good work" category, it is evident that the attributes cut across all the five dimensions of the EVP attributes. The category indicates that the organizations are on the right track and effective in fulfilling the important EVP attributes of employees. There are also many attributes closer to the axis and employers must work toward taking it to the quadrant "Keep up the good work."

A few other EVP attributes as given in Table IV need more focus, as they fall within the "Concentrate Here" category.

These attributes are crucial in an IT-BPM industry set-up, where employees work for clients in multiple time-zones and thus look for a work environment free of stress, organizational support and work-life balance. They also look for development opportunities to work across multiple technologies and verticals. Provision or assistance regarding childcare facilities will certainly help the IT-BPM industry to retain the female talent and help them have the crucial work-family balance, given the increase in dual-earner families.

The two categories "Low Priority" and "Possible Overkill" indicate lower organizational effectiveness regarding prioritizing important EVP attributes and, accordingly, fulfilling employee obligations. Similarly, attributes under these categories do not need much focus,

S. No.	EVP attribute labels	EVP attributes	EVP importance	EVP fulfillment
1	EVP5	Healthcare benefits	3.48	2.77
2	EVP6	Childcare facilities	3.38	2.32
3	EVP7	Retirement benefits	3.34	2.54
4	EVP10	Career growth opportunities	3.29	2.37
5	EVP21	Treating people with respect and trust	3.27	2.46
6	EVP34	Technology support	3.26	2.55
7	EVP11	Challenging assignments	3.26	2.44
8	EVP28	Job security	3.20	2.46
9	EVP26	Role clarity	3.16	2.40
10	EVP18	Fast-track promotion for star performers	3.16	2.33
11	EVP40	Organization's focus on innovative products and services	3.14	2.43
12	EVP1	Salary and compensation based on competency	3.13	2.33
13	EVP14	Opportunities to develop new skills through training	3.12	2.35
14	EVP27	Stress-free work environment	3.12	2.27
15	EVP35	Customer-oriented organization	3.12	2.41
16	EVP19	Organizational support during personal exigencies	3.10	2.32
17	EVP2	Competitive compensation as per industry standards	3.10	2.34
18	EVP29	Work-life balance	3.09	2.28
19	EVP4	Performance rewards and recognition for exceptional performance exceeding expectations	3.07	2.40
20	EVP33	Transparent work culture	3.06	2.30
21	EVP23	Periodic feedback on performance	3.06	2.32
22	EVP9	Opportunity to work across multiple technologies and verticals	3.06	2.33
23	EVP22	Culture of supportive leadership	3.06	2.34
24	EVP8	Employee stock options (ESOP)	3.05	2.21
25	EVP17	Opportunity to apply what was learnt	3.05	2.29
26	EVP12	Opportunities for teamwork	3.04	2.43
27	EVP32	Work relevant to one's strength, competency, interests	3.04	2.30
28	EVP15	Exposure to the global business and work practices	3.04	2.28
29	EVP37	Organization's focus on high quality products and/or services	3.04	2.37
30	EVP39	Competent and fair leadership	3.03	2.34
31	EVP24	Flexible work schedule	3.03	2.22
32	EVP20	Culture of supportive and encouraging colleagues	3.02	2.28
33	EVP25	Adequate resources to perform on the job	3.02	2.38
34	EVP31	Encourage creativity at work	3.01	2.29
35	EVP36	Organization's focus on environmental and CSR activities	3.00	2.24
36	EVP38	Organization's reputation of being ethical	3.00	2.28
37	EVP16	Interaction with experts within and outside the organization	2.98	2.20
38	EVP13	Empowerment to take decisions	2.95	2.32
39	EVP30	Informal work culture	2.86	2.24
40	EVP3	Access to benefits and perks for all employees	2.79	2.13

Table II.
Mean score of EVP attributes based on importance and fulfillment scales

and hence organizations should look to redistribute their resources to other categories. This will help organizations to fulfill the psychological contract of employees concerning "Concentrate Here" quadrant and maintain the psychological contract concerning "Keep up the good work" quadrant.

Importance-fulfillment analysis of the EVP dimensions
After analyzing the attributes individually, the five EVP dimensions based on the mean scores of individual EVP attributes which come under each dimension were assessed using the IPA matrix. The importance–fulfillment relationship was analyzed to ascertain their
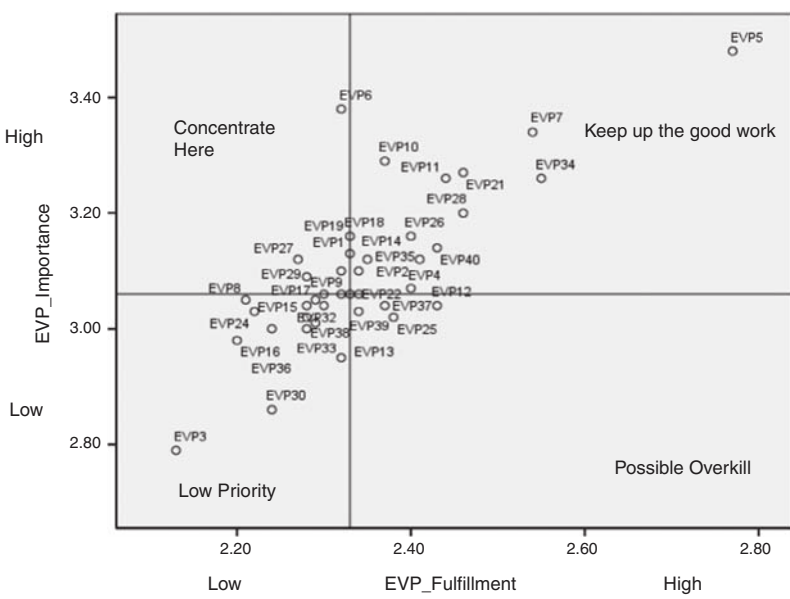
Figure 2.
Importance-fulfillment
analysis (all 40
attributes)

IPA quadrant	Item code	Item
Keep up the good work	EVP2	Competitive compensation as per industry standards
	EVP4	Rewards and recognition for exceptional performance exceeding expectations
	EVP5	Healthcare benefits
	EVP7	Retirement benefits
	EVP10	Career growth opportunities
	EVP11	Challenging assignments
	EVP12	Opportunities for teamwork
	EVP14	Opportunities to develop new skills through training
	EVP18	Fast-track promotion for star performers
	EVP21	Treating people with respect and trust
	EVP26	Role clarity
	EVP28	Job security
	EVP34	Technology support
	EVP35	Customer-oriented organization
	EVP40	Organization's focus on innovative products and services

Table III.
List of EVP attributes
in the quadrant "Keep
up the good work"

IPA quadrant	Item code	Item
Concentrate here	EVP1	Salary and compensation based on competency
	EVP6	Childcare facilities
	EVP9	Opportunity to work across multiple technologies and verticals
	EVP17	Opportunity to apply what was learned
	EVP19	Organizational support during personal exigencies
	EVP27	Stress-free work environment
	EVP29	Work-life balance

Table IV.
List of EVP attributes
in the quadrant
"concentrate here"

distinctiveness, to map them into four quadrants in the IPA matrix. A paired sample t-test was carried out to assess the significant difference between the overall values of importance ($M = 3.1$, SD $= 0.34$) and fulfillment scores ($M = 2.35$, SD $= 0.46$) of all the dimensions put together. The null hypothesis was rejected at $t(519) = 30.9$, $p < 0.001$, thus indicating that the means of both the values were statistically significantly different.

Similarly, the paired sample t-test between each of the pairs of importance and fulfillment scores of the five dimensions ($^{10}C_2 = 45$) was conducted to find that they were statistically significantly different at $p < 0.001$. The importance and fulfillment mean scores of the dimensions are given in Table V.

A further distinction between the importance and fulfillment scores was achieved, by plotting them on a two-dimensional matrix, based on IPA. The scatter plot given in Figure 3 presents the results of the analysis.

From the results, it is evident that IT-BPM organizations have been fulfilling promises related to development value, work value and employer reputation in both "Keep up the good work" category and "Possible Overkill." Two main outcomes that need focus are the "Concentrate Here" category and "Low Priority." Social value and economic value fall

EVP dimensions	Mean	SD	Sample size
Importance			
Economic value	3.14	0.36	520
Developmental value	3.11	0.38	520
Social value	3.13	0.40	520
Work value	3.07	0.39	520
Employer reputation	3.05	0.46	520
Fulfillment			
Economic value	2.39	0.56	520
Developmental value	2.35	0.51	520
Social value	2.36	0.54	520
Work value	2.34	0.50	520
Employer reputation	2.35	0.54	520

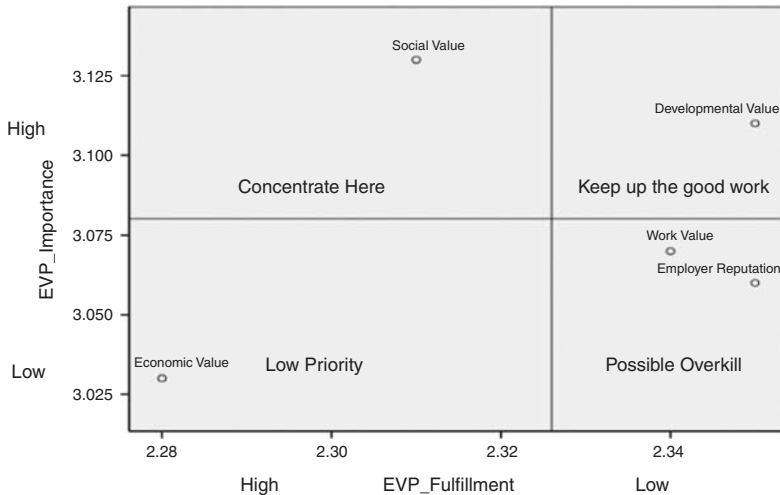**Table V.**
Mean scores of EVP dimensions

Figure 3.
Importance-fulfillment analysis (EVP dimensions)

under these categories. Social value is regarding employer and peer support. IT-BPM organizations in India veer knowledge workers toward pay, which is the prime motivator to join an organization. Employees who have been with the organization for some time seem to give low priority to economic value since pay and benefits are more of a hygiene factor than a motivator in the long run. However, for their psychological contract to be maintained and fulfilled, employees seem to value social value and development value, as per our results. Though organizations provide sufficient training and development opportunities, they should focus on fulfilling social value such as a work-life balance that involves flexible work schedules, peer and supervisor support and support during personal exigencies.

EVP attribute scores and employee engagement

To understand the role of engagement in its relationship to EVP attribute importance and fulfillment, the sample was split as highly engaged and less engaged employees based on the median of engagement score which was 4.38. Respondents above the median score were considered as highly engaged ($n = 267$) and those below the median score were considered less engaged ($n = 253$), respectively. An independent sample t-test was carried out to examine the difference between the two groups concerning five dimensions of the importance and fulfillment scores. The results are given in Table VI.

Concerning the importance scores, the mean values were statistically, significantly different between highly engaged and less engaged employees regarding economic value, work value and employer reputation. Both highly engaged and less engaged employees emphasize almost an equal level of priority on economic value, whereas work value and employer reputation have higher priority among less engaged employees. So, organizations should focus on these dimensions so that importance translates into fulfillment for employees, to be better engaged with their organization. For fulfillment scores, the mean of all the five dimensions were significantly different and higher for highly engaged employees than less engaged employees. Regarding fulfillment, employees who feel that their employers have sufficiently fulfilled their obligation are highly engaged with the organization which can result in improved organizational effectiveness and individual performance. Thus, it is imperative for organizations to sufficiently engage employees across all the dimensions by not only prioritizing, but also fulfilling their obligations promptly, as less engaged or disengaged employees may also be high-potentials who may

EVP dimensions	Highly engaged employees		Less engaged employees		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	ΔMean
Importance					
Economic value	3.18	0.34	3.1	0.38	0.08**
Developmental value	3.08	0.39	3.13	0.37	−0.05
Social value	3.14	0.39	3.12	0.42	0.02
Work value	3.03	0.41	3.12	0.37	−0.09**
Employer reputation	2.97	0.47	3.14	0.43	−0.17**
Fulfillment					
Economic value	2.66	0.47	2.1	0.51	0.56**
Developmental value	2.54	0.44	2.14	0.51	0.4**
Social value	2.6	0.43	2.09	0.52	0.51**
Work value	2.51	0.43	2.16	0.51	0.35**
Employer reputation	2.43	0.51	2.25	0.56	0.18**
Note: ** $p < 0.01$					

Table VI.
Comparing highly engaged and less engaged employees in terms of "importance" and "fulfillment" scores of the EVP dimensions

threaten to leave the organization. The organizations should work toward reprioritizing the attributes and move them into appropriate quadrants, which is also a call for repositioning their brand value accordingly.

Discussion

The primary objective of our study was to explore the inter-disciplinary nature of employer branding by drawing insights from attribute research in marketing. The objective was to understand employee perceptions of EVP attribute importance against fulfillment by the employer that can be mapped into four quadrants for easy interpretation and action by the management. The research objective was sufficiently addressed by using the IPA framework from marketing discipline, where visual representation and interpretation carry more meaning especially to brand strategists who look to define and prioritize EVP attributes for effective employer brand promotions. The second objective of studying the EVP priorities of less engaged and highly engaged employees was also effectively addressed, where fulfillment clearly translated to engagement among highly engaged employees than less engaged employees.

The literature on employee engagement has empirical evidence of employer branding playing a crucial role in engaging employees, which was once again reinforced by the attribute research on employer branding. However, the study goes one step further in analyzing the difference in highly engaged and less engaged employees on both "importance and fulfillment" scores of the attributes, as against only the fulfillment scores addressed by previous literature. Using the IPA framework for attribute research in the employer branding context is definitely an important addition to the growing literature on employer branding, psychological contract, employee engagement and their inter-relationship. The IPA is an interesting approach that can help employer branding experts to either focus or redistribute their resources according to the attributes which fall under each category. When psychological contract is based on employee perceptions, such an analysis from a strategic management perspective can help managers to not only identify important attributes, but also understand where they have been successful in maintaining the psychological contract and where they have fallen short of fulfilling the psychological contract of employees. This can help organizations avoid the possible breach of trust and negative employee behavior. Thus, this study helps to extend the current understanding on employer branding by bringing in the concept of psychological contract and using IPA to analyze the importance and fulfillment scores, which is a first of its kind in both employer branding and psychological contract literature.

Implications and scope for future research

Drawing on attribute research and positioning EVP attributes according to employees' perception of EVP preferences against their psychological contract fulfillment is an essential implication for HR practitioners and academicians. Attribute research through IPA helps to indicate important avenues for organizational performance that can be utilized by HR to effectively devise their employer branding strategy. The analysis based on IPA can serve as a starting point to provide useful insights to devise their employer branding strategy and also convert results into action. This study provides important managerial implications in identifying the EVP attributes which fall under each category of the IPA matrix. If employees experience inconsistencies in what was communicated and what is being implemented, it will lead to disappointment, breach of psychological contract and withdrawal of trust, which may result in employees joining a prospective competitor. Exit interviews and such mechanisms should help organizations understand such inconsistencies to take corrective actions. The practical implication of this study is that, while organizations should strive to maintain their

psychological contract, they should also develop in other areas that need focus concerning EVP attributes and dimensions, to win over the competition. The employee priorities against competition should be set right so that it is a win-win situation for both the organization and its employees. The study is aggregate in nature, representing the views of IT-BPM employees.

Analyzing the difference between highly engaged and less engaged employees indicates that prioritizing EVPs should be followed by its implementation, since engagement is based on actual employee experience in the organization. Another important implication is for organizations to prioritize and fulfill their EVPs based on the outcome they are targeting, like improved employee performance or building brand equity, similar to engagement.

There are also limitations inherent in this study, which must be dealt with caution when interpreting the findings. Though the study is aggregate in nature, it does not entirely represent the population of the IT-BPM industry. A cross-sectional study also does not take into account the changing tastes and preferences of employees. The attribute preferences are based on a pre-determined set of variables, which can vary in different organizational contexts. Cultural differences and workforce diversity among several multi-national and Indian organizations should be considered in defining and understanding attribute preferences among employees. The study can be a guide to understand employee perceptions concerning a single organization, which must be done through a case study approach. This is an important avenue for future research and a practical implication for any individual organization to conduct IPA analysis as part of their employer branding strategy. The impact of certain strategic decisions like revamping the corporate brand, implementing organizational development and change management strategies, mergers and acquisitions or takeovers and involuntary turnover have both positive and negative impact on the employer brand. This also impacts the psychological contract of employees and the organizational culture. This calls for reengineering the organizational processes with possible repositioning of EVP priorities according to the new organization structure and culture. This can be effectively analyzed and interpreted using the IPA matrix.

Conclusion
Primarily, this study was an attempt to provide conceptual clarity to employer branding based on attribute research. Second, the theoretical background and concepts were used as the basis to draw insights from marketing literature to arrive at a framework to study the EVP attribute priorities of employees. This sufficiently bridges the gap in employer branding literature and contributes to the inter-disciplinary nature of the study. The paper discusses an easy-to-comprehend IPA framework that can be used from the employer branding context. This can help organizations to get a head-start to develop their employer branding strategy or re-position themselves as an employer brand if they are already into employer branding practices. Though employer brand attributes and their importance have been widely discussed in the literature, fulfillment regarding EVP attributes has not been the scope of earlier studies. While several studies are available from prospective employees' perspectives, this study is from the present employees' perspective. Work engagement captures the emotional response of employees directly to their work. This has major implications in addressing employees' work-related state of mind in response to employer branding. This affects employees' responses to day-to-day work, as against the long-term perspective of building brand equity. Hence, examining and positioning brand attributes based on both the importance and fulfillment perception of employees through the IPA framework is a novel attempt in the human resources context.

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