

Employer Branding in the Military Sector

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The developments in the national security environment have changed for the European continent, and the year 2022 marks a paradigm shift in people's minds and in national and international policies (European Parliament, 2022). In Germany, both public military employers and private defense companies must staff according to increased requirements and production volume. This incentivized a master's thesis project about employer branding in the military sector in the Spring 2026.

Skilled labor is a necessity

There is a competition for skilled labor and qualified newcomers, not only for active military duty but also for personnel that can fill civilian roles (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, 2025). Foreign Forces, predominantly from the United States, are also recruiting civilian "Host Nation personnel" (Headquarters United States Army Europe and Africa, 2025). Qualified applicants are scarce, and the German military employers must find a way to appeal to their target audiences.

The question becomes then: how can military organizations use employer branding to bolster their recruitment efforts? How can they get started with employer branding as an employer in the German military context, and how can existing strategies be improved? This article reviews employer branding in the German military and defense sector from a theoretical perspective that was used in the thesis project.

Particularities of Military Employment

Employers in the military sector are facing unique obstacles when it comes to employer branding and recruiting. The security requirements for applicants are elevated (Europe Online Publishing House GmbH, 2025). This reduces the pool of potential applicants and makes hiring procedures lengthier.

Once hired into military-adjacent roles, civilian employees are facing a world of structure and hierarchies. The processes are complex and highly regulated. As another factor in branding, the public image of the German military remains complex due to the complicated historical context and critical voices are consistent (Berliner Verlag GmbH, 2025).

Creating an Employer Brand

Employer branding is an identity-based positioning of the organization's own identity with the goal of presenting oneself as an attractive and credible employer (Kriegler, 2022, pp. 38–39). As Kriegler (ibid., p. 42) describes, the aim is to compose a clear-cut idea in people's minds about an organization as a workplace. These ideas of the organization are the basis for mental associations with certain tangible and intangible traits.

An employer brand is created when target groups connect an organization with concrete perceptions (Walter & Kremmel, 2016, p. 42). To achieve full effect, employer branding hinges on a precisely defined Employer Value Proposition (EVP) which can be understood as an offer to potential employees. The EVP entails an individual composition of existing values and visions for the future that are promised as binding to people associated with the company (Kriegler, 2022, p. 101).

Credibility is key

An authentic employer brand positioning is based on the company's true values and identity (Pommerening, 2024, p. 39). Many employer branding attempts lead to disappointment when the initial planning was inadequate. An example of this might be lack of involvement by company leadership, different expectations about the outcomes, or different strategies followed by multiple instances, which are misaligned or perhaps even conflict with each other (Kriegler, 2022, p. 53). Whether factual or symbolic, the communicated attributes must be based on reality. To be credible, the created image must be authentic. This is a core principle of successful employer branding.

For employers in the military and defense sector, credibility also means communicating the specific conditions and requirements of civilian employment in a realistic manner. This includes speaking about the organizational structures, security environments and the different occupational profiles. As Kriegler (2022, p. 22) notes, an authentically constructed employer brand is the centerpiece of the identification offer of a company. As an ideal outcome, company values turn into a human experience (Gutmann & Lorenz, 2024, p. 102). This creates a coherent image of the employer, and the company culture becomes believable.

Employer Branding as Long-Term Investment

Especially now that companies are facing the ongoing shortage of skilled labor and demographic developments, employers should design their brands to be clear, honest and authentic (Kriegler, 2022, p. 21). To reach this goal, a company should be very precise when building and managing its brand. As Pommerening (2024, pp. 39–40) writes, employer brand emerges from a clear strategy, consistent communication and involvement of the C-Suite.

It is advisable for organizations to consider their ideal candidates. Once the target groups have been identified, they can be targeted with a tailored approach. This is done by defining the ideal “culture fit” or “brand fit” or “future fit” of applicants and creating specific messaging towards those groups (Kriegler, 2022, p. 22).

Trends and Future Challenges

A widely discussed development affecting the German job market is the demographic shift. To meet the new demands, the German defense industry has changed gears to reach industrial mass production. The new output trajectory calls for sufficient staffing. A shortage of skilled labor acts as a functional brake, like a bottleneck for output (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, 2025). Public military employers must invest strong efforts to retain their workforce. Their employees are highly attractive to the defense sector, where applicants often find more attractive offers and conditions (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2026).

The growing security relevance increases public attention and shapes external perception of military and military-affiliated organizations. Increased exposure also increases public scrutiny. The military employers in Germany are in the spotlight, and potential applicants are forming their opinions based on employers’ external communication and their media coverage (Walter & Kremmel, 2016, pp. 63–64). Once the intensive vetting is completed successfully and the candidate was hired into a job in the sector, applicants will face a job with a high level of complexity, which leads to long training periods, and a multi-step onboarding process (Europe Online Publishing House GmbH, 2025).

Conclusion

Employer Branding can help employers in the military sector in Germany with their recruiting. Although the different military employers all operate in their individual fields, their institutional structure and employment conditions differ. There are some commonalities, however each of the employer groups must find their own approach that reflects the unique characteristics and circumstances.

For an effective employer branding strategy, the employers need a clear employer identity, a credible Employer Value Proposition, and a target-focused communication strategy. This helps to find a differentiated position on the German labor market and establish and maintain visibility to relevant target audiences. Another key factor is credibility. The messaging must capture the reality of the work life of an employee.

The military and defense sector in Germany is not a homogenous group. With different tasks, the requirements of applicants also differ. It would be interesting for future research to review the different requirements that the German military and military-related employers have toward their applicants.

Theseus Link: https://www.theseus.fi/handle/11111/406062**Authors:Luzie Wohlfart** is Double Degree graduate from the Master in International Business Management -program at SEAMK. She authored the thesis as part of her Degree programme and the thesis was published in November 2026.

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