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Lappeenranta **University of Technology**

School of Business and Management

**Master's Degree in Programme in International Marketing Management
(MIMM)**

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**Internal Employer Brand: The factors affecting the formation of internal
employer image**

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to identify the factors affecting the formation of employer image and attractiveness in the minds of an organization's employees. Six employees from different backgrounds and business units within a larger organization are interviewed, and the results are compared in order to better understand the effect divergent variables have on the resulting factors.

The theoretical background of the research is based on the study of the concept of employer branding, an organization's effort in affecting the employer image it projects and attractiveness perceived by the employees and applicants.

The results of the study reveal how immaterial factors, primarily related to self-actualization and social relationships, often took precedence over material ones, so long as the material factors, such as salary and work equipment, were at least on a minimum level acceptable to the employee. As such, focusing on these immaterial factors when forming an employer brand strategy is expected to yield larger benefits in form of employer attractiveness.

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Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tunnistaa, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat työnantajakuvaan ja houkuttelevuuden muodostumiseen organisaation työntekijöiden mielissä. Tutkimuksessa haastatellaan kuutta eritaustaista työntekijää yhden suuryrityksen eri osastoilta. Haastattelujen tuloksia vertaillaan, jotta paremmin ymmärretään haastateltavien eri ominaisuuksien vaikutusta tunnistettuihin tekijöihin.

Tutkielman teoreettinen tausta pohjautuu tutkimukseen työnantajabrändäyksen konseptista, jolla tarkoitetaan organisaation pyrkimyksiä vaikuttaa heijastamaansa työnantajakuvaan sekä työntekijöiden ja -hakijoiden mieltämään houkuttelevuuteen.

Tutkimuksen tulokset paljastavat, pää-asiassa itsensä toteuttamiseen ja sosiaaliseen kanssakäymiseen liittyvien, aineettomien tekijöiden olevan etusijalla aineellisiin tekijöihin, kuten palkka ja työvälitteet, verrattuna, olettaen että nämä tekijät ylittivät työntekijän hyväksymän alarajan. Näin ollen, näihin aineettomiin tekijöihin keskittyminen työnantajabrändistrategiaa luodessa tarjoaa odotettavasti suuremman hyödyn työnantajan houkuttelevuutena.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are plenty of reasons for organizations to focus on employer branding and the benefits it brings. This research paper sets out to study the concept of employer brand from an intra organizational standpoint, aiming to uncover factors affecting the employees' views of their employer, and compare the differences between employees of differing organizational roles, in order to uncover the factors and facets which form an organization's internal employer brand. The introduction chapter will be going through the background of the research, taking a look at the earlier research on the field relating to employer branding, as well as introducing the research questions and the adopted methodology to propose answers for them.

1.1 Background

The study sets out to uncover the makings of an internal employer brand, focusing on the factors company's employees favor when assessing the employer image of their organization. Due to the high benefits presented by successful management of employer brand, it is important to understand both internal and external side of employer branding, in order to prevent a superficial communication.

Strong employer brand is a rare source of employee loyalty, which consequently drives productivity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This is to be expected due to the interlinked nature of a strong internal employer brand and job satisfaction (Davies, 2007). Well managed internal employer brand is also one of the few ways to communicate positive word-of-mouth about the employer (Ahlstrom, et. al, 2013), which has a potential of being a strong enticement, as psychologically, people want to work for firms that are popular with their peers (Mossevelde, 2010).

Employer branding is a great way for a firm to differentiate themselves from other employers competing for same human resources, placing them in a better position

in the talent market. This becomes especially important in industries with limited pools or high demand for skilled personnel.

On a personal level, I have chosen to tackle the topic of employer branding in order to bring together two fields of academic interest, that of marketing and human resource management, as the practical conduction of employer branding, and underlying drivers are deeply rooted in the management of human resources, whereas part of the proposed benefit and the strongest effect are very interesting from a marketing perspective.

1.2 Literature review

Since the inception of the concept of employer branding in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow, the research has come a long way. For a long time, the research of employer branding revolved around its practical application, and the academic side suffered from the lack of theoretical base (Edwards, 2010) and later the lack of empirical application of the proposed models (Iyamabo et al. 2013). The research gap in employer branding research exists in this lack of empirical application. In this segment we will take a look into some of the existing research and theoretical models done on empirical branding.

In 2004 researchers Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo set out to conceptualize employer branding and came up with an initial employer branding framework linking employer brand associations and image into employers' potential attractiveness under the umbrella of employer branding. Under employer branding, they also included organizational identity and culture which in turn affect the employer brand loyalty, which consequently affects employee productivity. This is one of the early theoretical models of employer branding and can be seen affecting the later model

proposed by Wilden et. al. in 2010. The main findings of Backhaus and Tikoo propose that potential employees develop brand image from associations tied to a firm's employer brand.

The theory of employer branding was fleshed out in Gary Davies' 2007 research article "Employer branding and its influence on managers", where he observed the effects employer brand has on current employees, and identified a link to employee satisfaction and loyalty from successful management of employer branding. Davies emphasized employer branding's growing importance to recruitment of capable personnel, but noted the complexity present in employer management. According to Davies, successful employer management requires the manager to take into consideration multiple aspects affecting the employer branding.

In 2010, researchers Ralf Wilden, Sigfried Gudergan and Ian Lings published their article on strategic implications employer branding can have on staff recruitment. In this article they proposed a revised conceptual framework for employee-based brand equity. This model links various aspects, such as traditional product brand and brand investments, to the employer brand signal, and how this affects employer attractiveness after the signal is perceived by the potential recruit. The model takes in to consideration new aspects, such a those of clarity and credibility of the brand signal as well as the experience of the job seekers. The researchers noted that factors such as age and work experience have potential to affect employer branding's effectiveness, and further emphasized that there are differences between demographics in what they see as attractive qualities in an employer. Therefore, they proposed that communicating different aspects to the potential employees depending on the sought demographic becomes important. The research also brought risks associated with employment scenarios under the looking glass, noting that the recruits consider risks, but focus solely on their own performance instead of companies' ability to see through their promises. Interesting point noted in the article was also that many recruits have a strong pull towards certain industries, but are indifferent on the specific companies. This was tied to the increased use of employment agencies, which has the potential to circumvent

employer branding efforts. The article concluded by noting the relationship between consumer based branding and employer branding, but mentioned that modifications are required to translate the benefits to employee recruitment and retention.

In his 2010 article “An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory” Martin Edwards brings up the unique nature of employer branding and the way it is positioned in the junction between marketing and human resource management research, linking these subjects together. He describes employer branding by describing how marketing is applied to human resource management. According to Edwards, employer branding campaigns aim to clarify employment offering tied to the image and identity of an organization. The article also brings up the ties psychology research has with employer branding, bringing up facets such as employer attractiveness and noting that rational factors such as profitability are rarely the main reason for choosing an employer.

In their article “Workplace Branding: Leveraging Human Resources Management Practices for Competitive Advantage Through “Best Employer” Surveys” researchers Linda Love and Parbudyal Singh take the existing research in employer branding and apply it by examining employer surveys as a tool for employer branding. The article emphasizes employer branding as a source of potential competitive advantage, but notes that the researched “best employer” practices have a strong chance of devaluing in future, due to their overuse and associated hyperbole. In their article the researchers echo a notion that was present in most of the pre 2011 studies that employer branding has received most of its attention from practitioners instead of academics, which hints at the fact that the theoretical foundation has not fully developed at the time of the publication. (2011)

Michelle Wallace, Ian Lings and Roslyn Cameron take the concepts of employer branding and stretch it to encompass whole industries, introducing the concept of industry branding. The researchers noticed that the existing branding theory can be applied to whole industries, much like it can be used in employer branding. The researchers emphasize the fact that both in industry and employer branding,

understanding the needs and wants of the target labour segments and markets is paramount to the success of the recruitment, noting that successful employer brand management requires the that the employer offering is aligned with the potential employees'. As mentioned in Wildens' article, many job seekers feel a strong pull towards certain industries instead of employers, making industry branding an interesting alternative to employer branding. (2012)

In their 2012 article "Employer brand trust and affect: linking brand personality to employer brand attractiveness" researchers Linn Rampl and Peter Kenning discuss the relationship between the general brand and the employer brand's attractiveness. The article starts by bringing attention the raising importance of employer branding in human resource management and recruitment, noting that in the current highly competitive business landscape any source of competitive advantage should be taken into consideration. The findings of the research reveal that brand personality traits can be used to explain the variance in employer brands attractiveness. According to the article the assumed sincerity of brand personality will influence the trust and affect of the brand. The researchers observed that different brand personality traits have different effects, bringing up the most important examples of excitement and sophistication, which has an effect on brand affect, and ruggedness, which has a negative brand affect. The researchers claim that brand affect and trust explain 71% of the variance in employer attractiveness.

Researchers Jin Feng Uen, David Ahlstrom, Shuyuan Chen and Julie Liu take a look into a specific employer brand communication channel in their 2013 article "Employer brand management, organizational prestige and employees' word-of-mouth referrals in Taiwan". Employer branding communication has many different channels, some of which are more effective or easy to use than others. According to the article word of mouth referrals are a highly effective source of recruitment info, with a downside of being very difficult to control. The study proposes that the link between employer brand management and company prestige, might be the key to affecting employees word of mouth referrals. The results of the research display a significant relationship between employer branding efforts and the amount of word

of mouth referrals, pointing towards the effectiveness of internal employer branding as a recruitment tool.

The final study covered in the literature review segment is the 2014 article by Sara Rosengren focusing on the relationship between consumer advertising and employer attractiveness. Rosengren proposes that creative advertising has the potential to improve the perceptions of development and reputation value of the organization's employees, which in turn can potentially translate to attractiveness of the employer brand. The article emphasizes that advertising contributes to a firm's performance in more ways, than just traditional influencing of consumers. Rosenberg notes that advertising does not directly translate into job attractiveness, but instead affects the perceived innovativeness of a company and the development opportunities it offers to potential employees.

1.3 Research questions

The research questions are chosen to assist in opening the research problem, and to help provide relevant research results. The research revolves around the concepts of employer branding, the internal employer image and employer attractiveness that the organization's members have of their employer. The aim of the study is to identify the factors affecting existing employees' view of their employer, assess the factors' importance towards the formation of an employer image and consequently internal employer brand, and finally compare the views of employees from differing organizational roles. As such, to tackle the main problem of employer brand as a concept, the main research question is posed as follows:

What constitutes the internal employer brand?

To further assess more comprehensive information, sub-questions are posed to help emphasize the required information and understanding, in order to reliably

answer the main research question. The first sub-question seeks to reveal the different factors affecting the formation of employer image.

Which factors affect the employees' opinion on their company's employer image and its attractiveness?

The second sub-question attempts to determine the importance and weight the individual factors carry.

How important are the chosen factors in the formation of internal employer brand?

The third sub-question seeks to create contrast between the sources of information, which will be further analyzed in the empirical portion of the thesis.

How does the employee's role in the organization affect their view of the employer?

The earlier research shows that there are notable benefits in employing an employer branding initiative and managing a positive internal employer image. This research sets out to uncover the factors affecting the opinion formation within organizations in order to identify what constitutes the internal employer brand. This information can later be used to focus organizations employer branding efforts towards effective objectives.

1.4 Theoretical framework

Figure 1. represents the visualization of the thesis' theoretical framework. The project is encompassed in within the theme of employer branding envisioned in the figure by the outer frame. The aim of the research is to identify the factors affecting employees' view of their employer, analyze identified factors, their importance and effect making comparisons between interviewees based on their differing characteristics and finally aim to infer what constitutes the internal employer brand.

This is visualized in the figure as the process within the employer branding theory's outer frame.

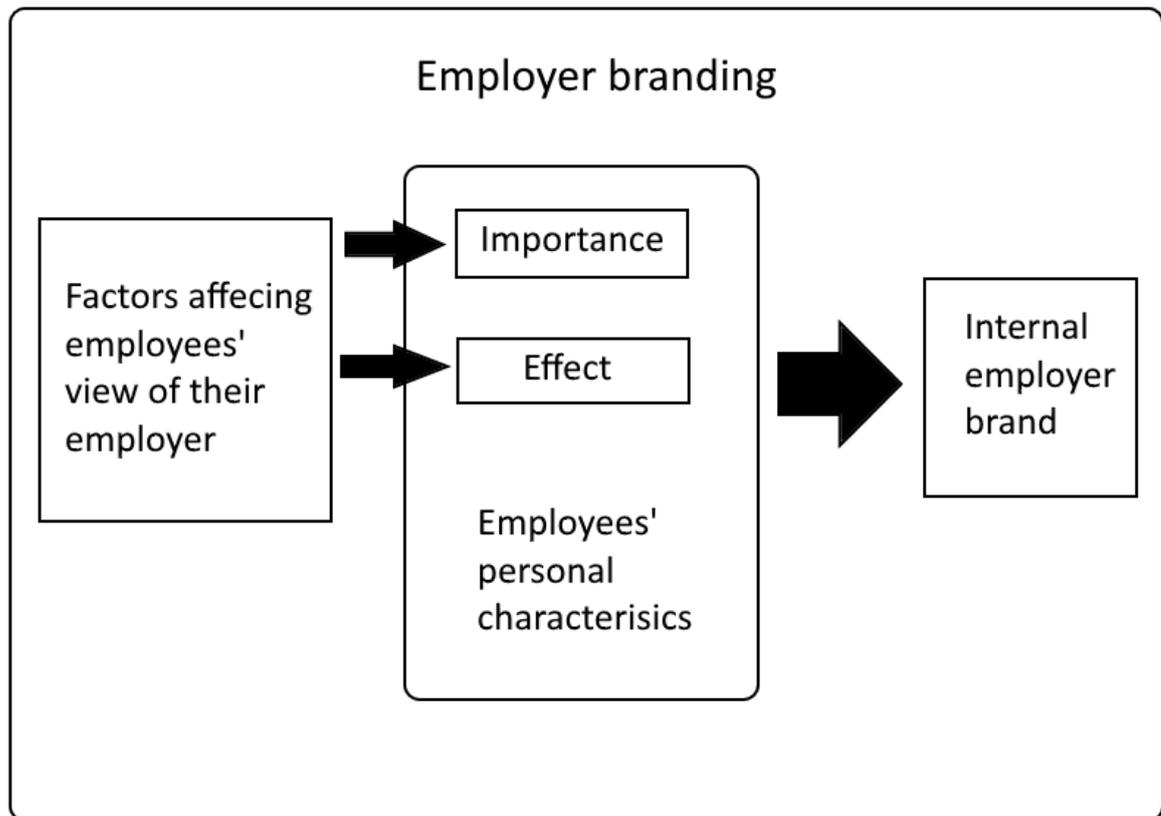


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the research

1.5 Definition of concepts

Employer brand

“A set of distinctive images of a prospective employer, which are manifest in the minds of the target groups – potential employees” (Wilden, et. al, 2010). This definition will be used interchangeably with ‘employer brand image’.

Employer brand equity:

“the effect of brand knowledge on potential and existing employees of the firm” (Wilden et al., 2010).

Employer branding:

The actions and operations an organization takes in order to positively influence its image as an employer to potential and existing employees.

Employer attractiveness

“Envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization” (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005)

Employer image

An image employees and applicants form of an employer based on the information and assumptions available to them.

Internal employer brand image

How organization’s existing employees view the organization as an employer

External employer brand image

How individuals unaffiliated with the organization view it as an employer

Organizational identity

“insiders’ (employee or member) perception of what the organization stands for” (Lievens(2) et al., 2007)

Internal branding

Internal branding, according to Bergstrom *et al.* (2002), refers to three things: communicating the brand effectively to the employees; convincing them of its relevance and worth; and successfully linking every job in the organisation to delivery of the ‘brand essence’. (Berthon et al. 2005)

1.6 Delimitations

While the overarching theme of the research deals with the concept of employer branding as a whole, the empirical portion only studies organizations internal employer brand. Moreover the empirical research is conducted in business units under one organization, and as such is subject to the unique characteristics of the case company, making it possible that received results are not applicable to other organizations of similar stature. Thus, further research is required in order to verify the wider effect of the results of this research. That said, while the circumstances differ between organizations, it can be expected that similar research conducted in other equally sized organizations are likely to bring up results reflecting those of this research, partly due to the themes of the empirical research being universal to most companies.

Due to the wideness of the theme of employer branding, a more narrow focus of internal employer branding was chosen for this research, in order to gather more precise information.

1.7 Methodology

The research will be conducted as a qualitative study, with an empirical research conducted with theme interviews. The research is carried out by conduct multiple theme interviews within a large organization, and will encompass interviews from different levels and positions of employees within the company, in order to conduct comparison between answers from employees with differing individual attributes. The study will not aim to change existing structures therefore it will not fall under the scope of a normative study, but instead lean towards descriptive research. The key concepts will be tightly related to the overarching theme of employer branding. Considering the intangible nature of the research concepts, they will likely be left un-operationalized. The study will be valid within the researched company, but due to the smaller scope cannot reliably applied as such. Further research will be needed to make the results truly valid, but the study is expected to provide understanding of the direction the later results are likely to provide

1.8 Structure of the thesis

The research paper is divided into four main parts, beginning with introduction, which outlines the practicalities of the research, its aim, the research gap filled as well as proposes the research problem to be tackled in the later chapters. During the introduction, the thesis' theoretical framework and the methodology employed in the empirical portion are also presented. Finally, the chapter outlines the limitations of the research and gives a brief look into the earlier research done on the subject.

Following the introduction comes the theoretical research portion of the thesis, further opening the past research into the subject matter, its effects and relevance to the conducted research. The literature review initially presents the overarching theme of employer branding, moving on to more specific subjects mainly focusing

of the internal employer brand and internal employer image, which are under scrutiny in the empirical portion of the paper.

The empirical portion of the thesis begins with an outlook into the methods in which the research was conducted, followed by an introduction of the chosen interviewees and finally presenting the results of the data collection. Due to an agreement with the researched case company, no specific information is given of the organization or its members, which might allow a third party to infer the name of the organization.

In the last portion of the research I present my conclusions based on the analysis of the results gathered in the previous segment. In this segment I propose the implications my research has and finally summarize the whole research and its results.

2. EMPLOYER BRANDING

Employer branding is a wide concept that includes and is related to a multitude of research directions including corporate branding, internal branding, organizational identity and even brand equity (Foster, Punjaisiri & Cheng, 2010). Consequently, employer branding research also dabbles in various fields, bringing together many areas of research, largely from marketing, human resource management and social psychology. The theoretical portion of this research paper will identify the most important concepts related to employer branding, its theoretical and practical implications as well as the interlinked connections it has in research as well as within organizations.

There are plenty of reasons for a company to focus on employer branding. Many of the potential benefits revolve around the enabling of effective human resource management, as identified by Van Mossevelde in his article “Employer branding: five reasons why it matters & five steps to action”. According to Mossevelde, the globally growing shortage of skilled labor is in itself a relevant reason for employers to start seeking ways to differentiate themselves from the competition, in order to generate competitive advantage both from human resources, as well as in the field of recruitment (2010).

Mossevelde’s findings link well to a later research article by Neeti Leekha Chhabra and Sanjeev Sharma, which noted the correlation between strong brand image and the likelihood to apply (2014). Here we can again identify the interlinked nature of employer branding, as this strong brand image may stem from a multitude of sources, whether it is strong corporate image, well liked product brand or an organization that is known as a good employer. Any of these factors may be the catalyst to spark the applying decision. Sharma and Chhabra identified the importance of meeting the scarcity of skilled labor, by increasing the attractiveness of an employer in order to fill the vital roles in order to enable an organization’s sustained operation (2014). This becomes increasingly important in industries that originally have difficulties attracting enough skilled workforce, such as in the power industry (Heilmann, Saarenketo, Liikanen, 2013). All of this ties to the psychological

factor that people want to work for companies that are popular, often asking peers and family for opinions and approval for a potential employer. This is one of the key drivers in what makes word-of-mouth communication an important channel for any company that is invested in employer branding (Mossevelde, 2010).

Apart from the apparent benefits employer branding brings to recruitment, there are also the effects it brings towards the human resource management. Naturally successful recruitment provides an organization with productive employees, which decreases the burden to meet the requirements of the company. This can be seen in increasing profitability and it also further enables the growth of an organization taking advantage of this highly skilled workforce. This in addition to the notable increase in bargaining power a popular employer has, gives an organization all the necessary tools to future success. (Mossevelde, 2010) Well managed employer branding initiative can as such be a large factor in an organization's future success.

Researchers Berthow, Ewing and Hah bring up the notion that external marketing communication will become paramount in the future of human resource management. Specifically they emphasize the advertisements role in acquisition and retention of skilled employees. (2005) Having said that, it should be noted that external marketing is hardly the only source of information current and future employees use to make their employment decisions, and focusing on only on advertisement is likely to have somewhat superficial results in a long run.

2.1 Internal employer branding

A successful implementation of employer branding initiatives requires considerable attention towards internal side of the organization. Thus, internal employer branding becomes important tool for reaching the existing employees to communicate the brand message or promise in a companywide manner. Having said that, internal

branding is not quite as simple as informing your employees of your organization's values and vision. This communication led approach is more closely related to internal marketing than it is to internal branding. This is also the dimension focused on the empirical portion of this research, with the aims of bringing clarity to the practical level workings of internal employer brand.

The concept of internal marketing was nicely defined by researchers Berthon, Ewing and Hah as a concept that puts organization's employees as the first market to be addressed (2005). When you connect this internal marketing concept to employer branding, we get the basic premise of internal employer branding and its relation to employer branding as a whole. We can see internal employer branding as a sub segment of internal marketing or internal branding, which concentrates on the organization's specific role as an employer.

While both internal marketing and internal branding often end up using fairly similar means in practice, there is a conceptual difference between the two. Internal marketing essentially aims to ensure employees understand the brand promise of the organization and their role in delivering this brand promise. In marketing literature, the definition of internal marketing usually boils down to: "Creating motivated and customer-oriented employees". The internal marketing is often left as a fairly superficial proposition, with focus often on a sub segment of an organization's business process, usually the act of selling. This is something that internal branding tries to change, by bringing a more comprehensive approach towards the role of the internal brand and the role and importance of employees. (Mosley, 2007)

Compared to internal marketing, internal branding aims to affect the culture of an organization instead of just a portion of employees' performance. The reasoning behind internal branding implementation lies in the claim that if brand values are not experienced by employees in their interactions with the organization, the desired results will end up being superficial at best. For employees to fully acknowledge the brand proposition, and implement it into their own behavior, the organization needs to display in their interactions with the employees that they too follow the brand

promise. As such, an organizations internal brand values need to be the same as the ones they project towards the external audiences. (Mosley, 2007)

In the past both internal marketing and internal branding have been heavily reliant on traditional communication based approach to transfer brand knowledge to existing employees. According to Richard Mosley, this sort of superficial approach is unable to generate a sustainable and lasting effect on the employees and the organization as a whole (2007). This is why the need to make the transition from internal marketing's outside-in value based approach towards the internal branding's inside-out based approach. Operating on an assumption that the complete branding process starts from the employees within the organization, and from there travels to the external audience provides a good basis to forming a believable brand proposition, whether it is a corporate, product or even employer brand.

While employer brand shares notable similarities with corporate and product brands, they retain some distinctive features differentiating themselves. Researchers Backhaus and Tikoo identify two key factors that sets employer branding apart from corporate and product brands. Firstly the employer brand focuses solely on the employment specific aspects of an organization, highlighting a company mainly as an employer. The second key characteristic of employer branding is that it focuses both on the internal and external audiences, while the corporate and product branding forgo internal dimension in favor of the external one. (2004) This is notable for this research, as the focus of the empirical research is placed on the organization's internal environment instead of the external one.

Oftentimes the responsibility for shouldering the responsibility of seeing through successful internal branding initiatives is left for the human resource management team. While the employer branding as a whole involves both internal and external sides, the practical application of each dimension is left to different organizational divisions. Researchers Aurand, Gorchels and Bishop have observed this disconnect between the internal and external marketing in their 2005 article "Human resource management's role in internal branding: an opportunity for cross functional brand message synergy". According to the research, most organizations fail to see through

their external brand promises due to a lacking attention paid to the organization's internal situation. In the case of employer branding, this would mean for example that a company is very vocal about their social responsibility, but fail to extend this towards the existing employees and their work.

In the initial research, employer branding research concentrated mostly on the external marketing side of employer branding. Considering the external employer branding process differs notably compared to the internal branding process, this could be seen as a lacking view of the employer brand management. In 2006, researchers Simon Knox and Cheryl Freeman proposed an employer branding model that adds this internal employer brand side to the equation, taking a look at the effect of internal brand images formation and its effects on the recruitment of new employees, making a clear distinction between internal and external branding, as well as their effects on each other. This leads to a situation where we have to consider both internal and external branding's importance and implications towards the whole of the employer branding process.

Researchers Foster, Punjasiri and Cheng propose internal and employer branding as an alternative for the more disconnected corporate branding, emphasizing that they allow corporate to better align its values with those of its employees' (2010). This ties well to the inside-out value based approach, in which an organization first tries to synchronize its internal value proposition before radiating it out. Conducting internal in this manner requires the organization to know what the employees value, and in the case of employer branding, what do they view as a good employer. This question will be tackled in the empirical portion in the research, where query is conducted within an organization, in order to uncover the factors, the employees value.

A method of internal branding is proposed by researchers Devasagayam, Buff, Aurand and Judson, who claim that building a strong brand community within an organization can increase stronger emotional attachment or "buy-in" within the employees (2010). This could perhaps be a component in improving the internal employer image, with a loyalty and commitment towards a "charismatic" organization being a factor in employer evaluation. Considering the special

characteristics of the case company observed in the empirical portion, it will be interesting to see whether this sort of brand community pops up in our interviews.

Relating to the previous sentiment on organizations possessed brand value and its effect on the employees view of their employer, researchers Helm, Renk and Misra identify the organizations brands relationship with the employees' self-assessment. The research brings up a relationship between organizations brand and the employees self, noting that if organizations proposed brand image is in line with an employees' self-evaluation it results in consistent brand identification. Having said that, the research found that brand pride, which in turn is likely to affect the employees' outwards communication, is achieved only in a situation in which the employer's brand is in line with employees view of their ideal values (2016). This promotes an idea that the employer is expected to go above the expected, when conducting internal employer branding. The expected rewards of such internal branding efforts can later be harvested in the potential contact points with clients, and possibly other associations, in form of better communication of the brand values, which contributes towards the longer term brand success (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015)

2.2 External employer branding

External marketing of employer brand is the more traditional approach towards communicating the employer's value proposition towards new and potential recruits. Compared to the internal marketing side, the external employer branding usually forgoes the organization and focuses mainly on advertising towards the outside of the company. A distinction that differentiates external and internal employer brand, is who is viewing it. In the case of internal employer brand, the people perceiving it are the ones within the brand organization. On the other hand, in the case of external employer brand, the observed viewers are those who are looking at the organization

from outside. Naturally this affects the existing employees as well in the form of reputation, and outsider assessment.

The main goal of external employer branding is to establish the chosen organization as the most desirable employer on the market (Heilmann et al. 2013). With the marketing tools available to the company, it should aim to distinguish itself from the competing employers, and position itself as the employer of choice for as many potential recruits as feasible. The organization should aim to signal a distinctive image that differentiates itself in the market in order to acquire notable human capital (Heilmann et al. 2013).

There is a clear connection between external employer branding and the recruitment process, which can be nicely seen in Knox and Freeman's employer brand recruitment process model linking potential recruits' perception of the firm to the external employer brand image (2006). At an optimal situation, this employer brand image has been constructed from the combination of internal and external views of the brand, which according to Knox and Freeman, should modify each other in addition to the construed brand image (2006).

Before proper external marketing communication can be established, the organization needs to identify what they are offering to the potential recruits. To do this, a company needs to create an employer value proposition. Employer value proposition signals what is unique, about the employer compared to its competitors in the employer market. This unique employer offer is what the potential recruits are drawn in towards, and it is the source of competitive advantage in the field of recruitment. (Mossevelde, 2013)

External employer branding's main goal is to create and improve the company's brand image. Considering the employees applying decision is not solely based on company's reputation as an employer, this will naturally include aspects from the fields of product and corporate brand. As such, researchers Sara Rosengren and Niklas Bondesson propose that even actions such as consumer advertising have a relationship with external employer branding (2014). The claim that creative advertising can potentially improve the outside perceptions of employees'

development within the organization, and the reputation value they gain from being involved with the company. All of this translates into increased attractiveness of the employer and improves the external employer brand. As such, we can note that advertising can have more impact than just by influencing consumer decisions, and while it does not directly translate into employer attractiveness, it does affect peoples' perceptions of the company, especially in the case of firms that thrive from innovations and technology (Rosengren, Bondesson, 2014).

2.3 Theoretical models of employer branding

The theoretical foundation for employer branding has been gradually developing for the past two decades, and saw its first theoretical models in 2004 when researchers Backhaus and Tikoo published their conceptual framework of employer branding (Figure 1). Even in the first conceptualization of employer branding research we can see the fields division to the internal and external dimensions, which is integral to the delimitations of this study. The model proposed by Tikoo and Backhaus displays how the practice of employer branding generates benefits from both the internal and external actions.

In 2004 researchers Kristin Backhaus and Srinder Tikoo set out to conceptualize employer branding and came up with an initial employer branding framework linking employer brand associations and image into the employers potential attractiveness under the umbrella of employer branding. Under employer branding, they also included organizational identity and culture which in turn affect the employer brand loyalty, which consequently affects employee productivity. (Figure 2) This is one of the early theoretical models of employer branding and can be seen affecting the later model proposed by Wilden et al. in 2010. The main findings of Backhaus and Tikoo propose that potential employees develop brand image from associations tied to a firm's employer brand. When compared to the later research conducted in Taiwan, the employees' heightened view of company employer brand image also

has a big effect on potential recruits appraisal of the employer (Ahlstrom, Uen, Chen, Liu, 2013, 8-12), we can deduce that an overarching organizational employer branding initiatives are likely to have a notable effect on a company's overall employer brand.

The employer branding framework (Figure 2) divides the concept into roughly two sides, with organizational identity and culture leading towards the internal branding, with the constructed brand being responsible for the external employer brand associations. According to the model, the internal side leads to employer brand loyalty which in turn is transformed into benefits in form of employer productivity. On the external side, the framework presents how associations form into an employer image, which in turn is responsible for employer attraction. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004)

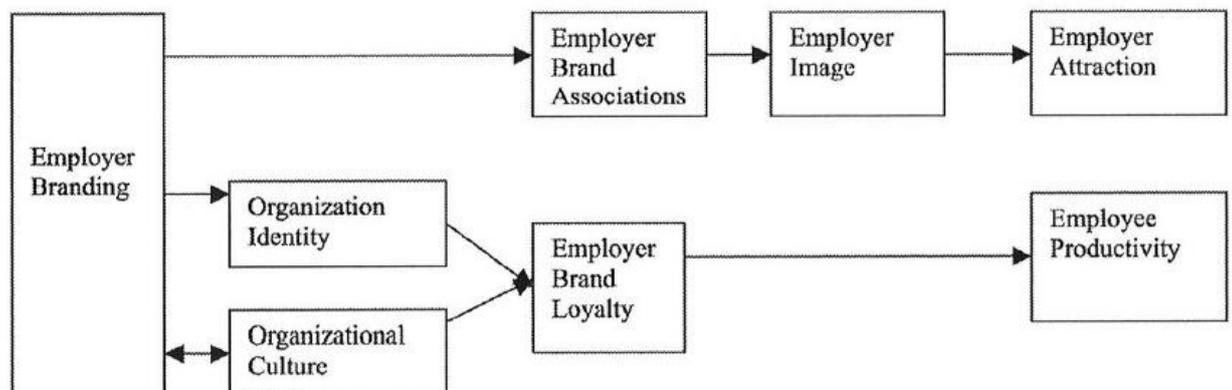


Figure 2. Employer branding framework (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004)

This division though, could be seen as slightly artificial, as the source of benefits gained cannot be limited to the actions of one dimension only, as shown by the article by Uen et al. which linked the job satisfaction and positive organizational culture to positive word-of-mouth referrals, which were responsible for notable rise in employer attractiveness (2013). As such, in the light of later research we can see that the initial conceptualization of employer branding, while accurate, is severely

limited and gives only a cursory glance at the real life effects and benefits employer branding can potentially have.

Researchers Knox and Freeman took the conceptualization of employer branding further by focusing on the employer branding and its effects on the recruitment process (figure 3). Instead of building on the previous model, Knox and Freeman take the concept of employer branding and apply its effects on a smaller sub segment of human resource management, namely recruitment.

Compared to this earlier model, researchers Simon Knox and Cheryl Freeman applied similar concept to the recruitment process, which gives an interesting take on the current employees' idea of the employer image and its effect on the potential recruits' (figure 3). The model differentiates employer brand image into internal and external, as well as a so called "construed" image, which is the company's perception of potential recruits' view on employer's brand. (Knox, Freeman, 2006) Knox & Freeman's research focus on the importance of recruiter in strengthening the employer brand in the potential recruits, but earlier research by Aurand, Bishop and Gorchels suggests that human resource department's involvement can have a large effect even on existing employees. The employer brand recruitment process model (figure 3) served well to fix the issue of overly focusing on external branding, even though internal employer identity is required for sustained employer attractiveness (Oladipo, 2013).

Knox and Freeman's model (figure 3) depict the perceptions of employer brand image in the recruitment process. It sees recruiters as the internal dimension of the organization, which creates the internal employer brand image, and potential recruits as the source of external brand image. An interesting addition to this model is the construed employer brand image, which is the culmination of internal perceptions of the employer brand image external audiences have of the firm. The flow of the model suggests that this construed image is affected by external employer image and it in turn goes on to affect the internal employer image, which the recruiters themselves have. This process begins to loop when recruiters'

communication is assessed by potential recruits, which again affects their employer brand image. (2006)

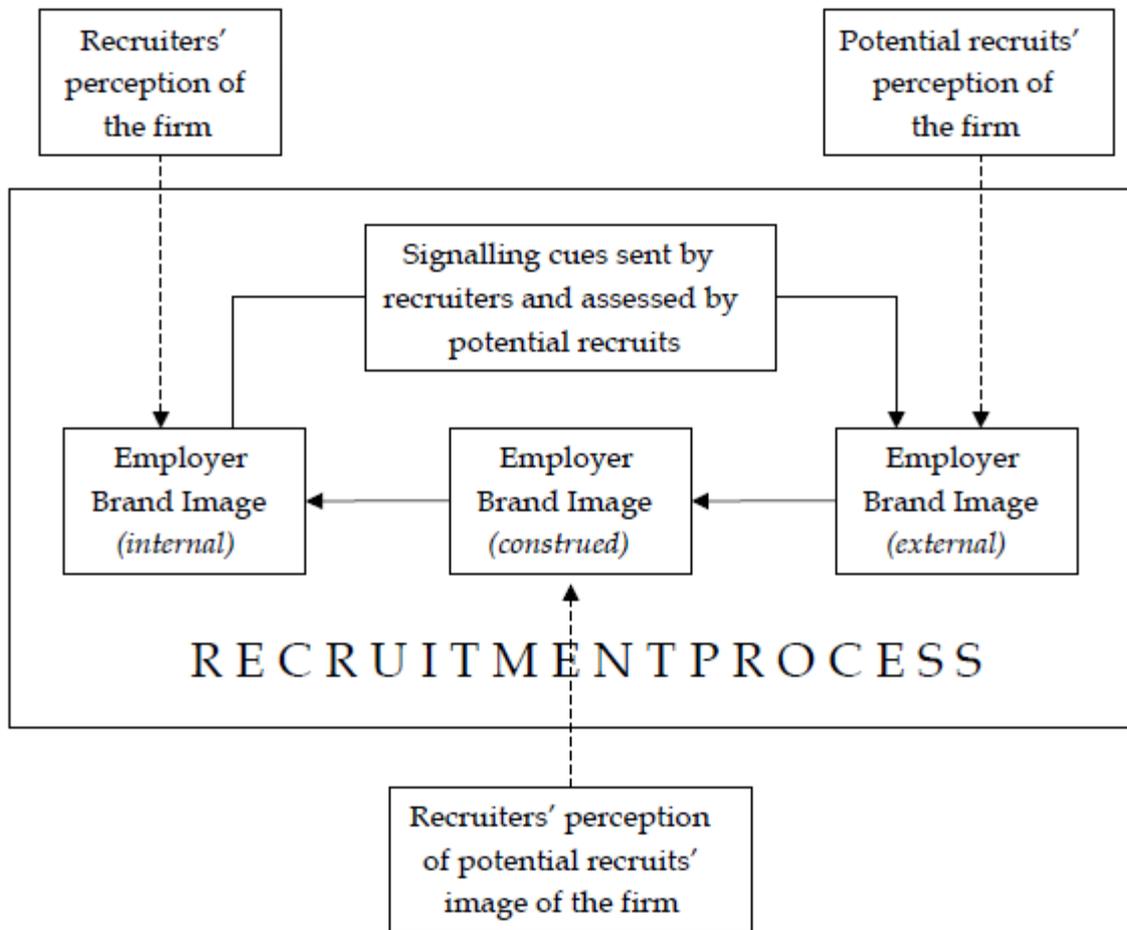


Figure 3. Perceptions of Employer Brand Image in the Recruitment Process. (Knox & Freeman, 2006)

While this viewpoint only takes into consideration the recruiters' view of the employer brand image, it can be seen applying in a wider range if we assume that recruiters are not the only ones providing these signaling cues assessed by potential recruits. As we discussed earlier in the study, potential employees gather information about the employers from a wide variety of sources, some of which are more influential than others. Not all of these sources are linked to the human

resource department. For example, the opinions of former and current employees of the organization may be seen as a more reliable source of information than constructed communication of the firm's recruitment division. As such, for the formulation of potential recruits' employer brand image, the existing employees' view of their employer becomes increasingly important, and as such a relevant point of further research.

Compared to the earlier models proposed by Backhaus & Tikoo as well as Knox & Freeman, the model proposed by Richard Mosley proposes a more general framework of employer brand experience, outlining the various factors affecting employer brand image. The earlier models were fairly simplistic in their depiction of what constitutes employer brand image, thus the model proposed by Mosley brings much needed scope to the inspection of employer brand and its facets. Mosley's framework is roughly divided into two levels, the inner level tying to the leadership and management competencies and values and the outer level dealing with the more practical aspects of company's operations (figure 4). The framework displays well how employer branding does not magically transform into employer attraction and productivity, but instead requires a large scale attitude changes in the whole organization. (2007) Support for this line of thought can be found from the 2007 study by Lievens, Hoye and Anseel which established a link between two previously separate lines of research. They noticed that there exists a relationship between organizational identity and employer brand, which ties well to Mosley's research promoting larger scale intra-organizational actions. The research also brought up that while employees' view of the employer brand affects the potential recruits, the employees also attach an importance towards outsiders' assessment of the employer, proposing a loose two-way relationship between the recruiters and the recruits.

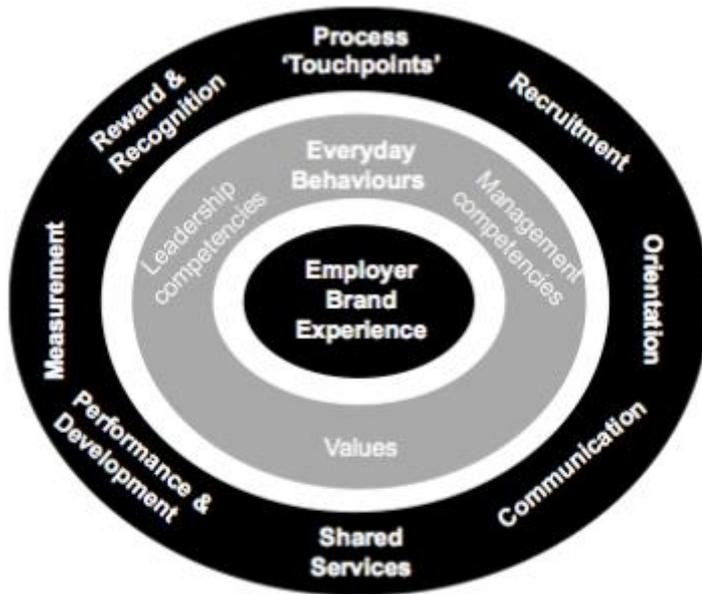


Figure 4. Employer brand experience framework (Mosley, 2007)

Researchers Wilden, Gudergan and Lings developed a model, which well depicts employer branding initiatives' effect on the final employer attractiveness, bringing up factors affecting employees' formulation of opinion. The model called "Employee-based Brand Equity Model" depicted in figure 5. presents a process flow starting from the organization and its proposed vacancy, leading through company's employer branding initiatives and the factors affecting the targets' decision making, finally ending in the resulting employer attractiveness.

In the model, the initial starting point illustrates the organization seeking qualified employees. From here branching towards three directions. Firstly, the employers practical brand strategy, which in essence is the plan an organization has on influencing its image in the minds of current and potential employees, and additionally the required employment market research required for the planning and conducting the employer branding initiative. In practice, the market research seeks to uncover the specific factors potential employees consider attractive employer as possessing (Erlenkaemper, Hinzdorf, Priemuth and Thaden, 2006). Second in the process flow is the perceived risk towards the targeted employee inherent in

accepting the position, which denote the possibility of negative outcomes towards the candidate from accepting the position. Finally, the information costs, which can be seen as the potential exchange costs incurred to the employee from switching employment.

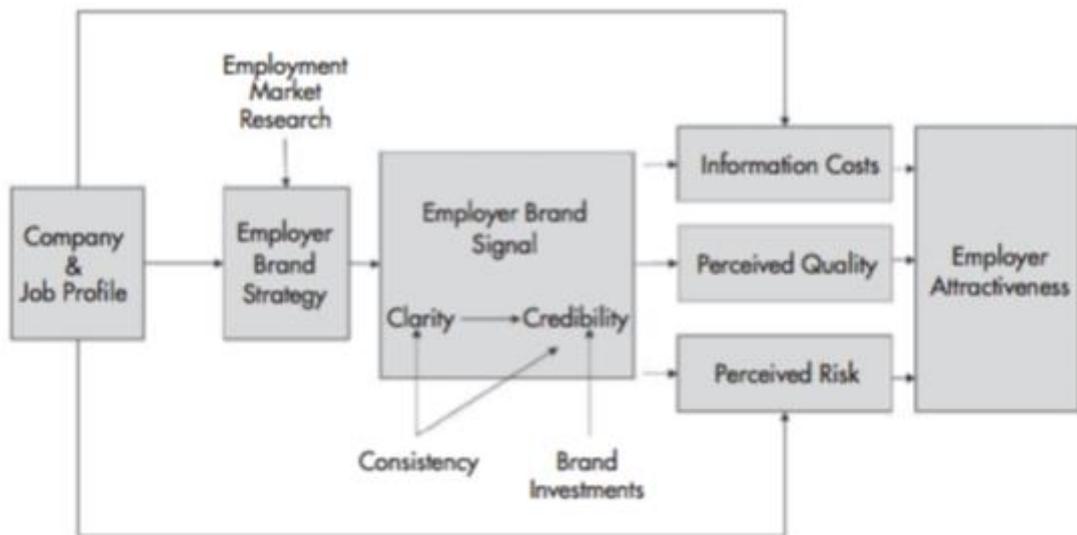


Figure 5. Employee-based Brand Equity Model (Wilden et al. 2010)

The crux of the model comes following the formation of employer branding strategy, in the generation of projected employer brand signal. Here the group proposes three factors affecting how the employees view the communicated employer brand, two of which are under direct control of the communicating party. The employer has full control over the clarity as well as the credibility of the proposed employer brand signal, with clarity relating to how the message is communicated, and the credibility pointing at how the organizations external actions and internal operation reflect their projected message. The third factor of consistency describes the employees' view of how well the employer is able to uphold the proposed employer brand during an extended period of time. An interesting example of a failure to manage a consistent employer brand management was proposed by researchers Marting and Tony

Edwards in their study about a recently acquired company, in which they identified a strong negative effects due to the company being unable to fulfill its brand proposition (2013). From this communicated information and the employees initial view of the company, the prospective employees form their appraisal of, the earlier mentioned, information costs and perceived risk, as well as the perceived overall quality of the employer, forming the final assessment of the employer's attractiveness.

Wilden's group's research proposes employer branding as a solution to the information asymmetry between an uninformed employees and the employing organization. Their model well clarifies the formulation of the employer attractiveness in the minds of current and potential employees, and can be seen as a good reference on the key factors affecting the formulation of employer image. (2010) It can be expected that while the model is unlikely to be clearly reflected in the results gained from the interviews of the empirical portion of this thesis, it is likely that at least the factors identified by the group can be identified in the meaning behind the gathered interviews.

2.4 Employer image and employer attractiveness

Employer attractiveness is a trait which, as the name suggests, denotes the desirability of the organizations job offering. Employer attractiveness is defined as denoting "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation" by research group consisting of Pierre Berthon, Michael Ewing and Li Lian Hah. In their 2005 research article "Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding" the group relates total employer attractiveness across all employees to an organization's employer brand equity. The more attractive the general population sees a company as, the higher its employer brand equity. The researchers highlight the necessity to understand the factors

contributing to an organizations employer attractiveness, should an organization seek to attract new employees or retain existing ones.

Researchers Rosengren and Bondesson bring additional insight into the discussion about employer attractiveness by claiming that consumer advertising may influence the attractiveness of an employer brand. In their article “Consumer advertising as a signal of employer attractiveness” they found that creative advertising is linked to an overall increase in the attractiveness of company’s employer brand. The implications of this is that there is a clear danger if there is a disconnect between company’s marketing communication and the direction of human resource management, (2014) which ties to Wilden’s group’s findings that when formulating an employer image, the big constituent to it is how consistent the employees view employer’s communication (2010). This emphasizes the importance of employer branding and its role in managing the image the employer projects both externally and internally.

2.5 Potential factors affecting employer brand

In the previous segment the necessity to identifying the factors affecting the formulation of employer image was emphasized. The basis for the factors affecting the employees’ view of an employer image was already laid out by Wilden’s group, in their assessment of the importance of clarity, credibility and consistency when communicating employer brands unique value. Having said that, these are only attributes of a larger message, to better understand the ground level factors that employees value a more in-depth research is conducted in the empirical portion of this thesis.

In their study “Employer branding: employer attractiveness and the use of social media” researchers Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen have identified a myriad of potential factors affecting employer’s reputation and employees’ readiness to seek employment, dividing the most potent ones to three distinct categories: Psychological value, application value and innovation value. The researchers

prompt companies to focus on non-monetary factors, noting that an employer does not want to profile compensation to be its main draw. The main categories include a variety of factors, first being the opportunities for personal innovation, which could be assumed as relating to how challenging the tasks provided are, or more specifically how repetitive one's job is. Secondly, they describe the feeling of confidence and self-worth, something that could be described as feeling of being needed and useful. Thirdly they mention factors relating to personal growth, such as opportunity to learn, use one's skills and knowledge in their job. This could potentially manifest in form of employee training initiatives, and consequently tasks reflecting learned abilities. (2013)

2.6 Benefits of an employer brand

There are many benefits to be had from a well-managed employer brand, both relating to marketing as well as human resource management, external and internal. On the most basic level, strong employer brand helps employees internalize company's core values, as noted in the study by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004).

Researchers Jain and Pal bring up a plethora of positive benefits of employer branding in their 2012 study "Importance of Employer Branding in Business Up-Gradation". According to the paper, on an internal level strong employer brand has an effect of increasing productivity within the organization's employees, which consequently increases the overall profitability of a unit. As revealed on previous chapters communicating a consistent employer brand increases an employer's attractiveness in the eyes of applicants and employees alike. Relating to this attractiveness, naturally employee retention is also increased within the organization. Positive recognition in the talent market is also a proponent in decreasing recruitment costs of high skilled employees. Two less evident perks of strong employer brand come from the increased commitment employees are likely to show towards common organizational goals, and improvement in the personal relations between employees and work atmosphere.

On a conceptual level, employer branding has brought many stakeholder centric organizations notable benefits. Good example of this are the many non-profit organization, such as charities, and their introduction of employer branding initiatives. A good example of practical application of this concept comes from researchers Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen's study, where they set out to conceptualize employer branding initiatives for sustainable organizations, in order to bridge marketing, human resource management and corporate social responsibility and create a cohesive plan to conduct the organizations' operations. They found out that integrating employer branding initiatives with organizations' corporate social responsibility efforts brings about a manner of employee-employer dialogue and co-creation of benefits. (2011)

2 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The empirical portion of this research paper is conducted as a qualitative study. The data was collected interviewing six people from within one organizations six different business units. All interviewees have differing job descriptions, and there is an equal mix of both men and women of varying ages. In this further chapter I will describe the methods used, introduce the participant and give the outline of the organization within which the empirical research was conducted.

3.1 Research methods

The research is conducted as a qualitative study conducted within one organization. Qualitative approach is chosen due to the its suitability due to the sought results requiring more descriptive analysis. The informants are semi-randomly individuals selected from different business units within the organization. The interviewees were chosen randomly from a pool of employees while ensuring that the selection provides a wide range of demographic differences between the employees. The data is collected in six face-to-face interviews, with their approximated length being between 45 to 90 minutes. The content of the interviews were recorded on two devices, and later transliterated and spread out on an excel table for easier comparison between answers. A theory based content analysis method was used in analyzing the data (Metsämuuronen, 2006).

The context of the research is the identification of factors affecting employees' view of their employer. Due to the more subliminal nature of the formation of employer image and opinion on employer attractiveness, the interviews are approached from the perspective of job satisfaction and personal opinion of the organization as an employer. This is to prevent misunderstandings and ease the informants into the subject, without straying too far from the main subject.

3.1.1 Description of case company and participants

Due to a mutual agreement between the researcher and the case company, no characteristics, which could be used to identify the organization or its participants will be revealed in this thesis.

The organization chosen for the empirical portion of this study is a large Financing company, with multiple business units within its country of origin. The organization has one larger main office, and multiple smaller business units, in which most of the client interaction is performed in.

The informants chosen in for the research are employees of this organization from different roles and business units, and they were randomly chosen for the interviews by the organizations human resource department. The chosen interviewees were as follows:

- Interviewee 1:** A 35 years old female Lawyer, with 13 years of experience in her field, of which 6 years within the organization.
- Interviewee 2:** A 36 years old male regional manager, with 8 years of working experience, of which 3 years within the organization.
- Interviewee 3:** A 57 years old female financial specialist, with 40 years of experience her field, of which 15 years within the organization.
- Interviewee 4:** A 51 years old female treasury assistant, with 30 years of experience in her field, of which 7 years within the organization.
- Interviewee 5:** A 42 years old male account manager, with 16 years of experience within the organization.
- Interviewee 6:** A 43 years old male financial manager, with 18 years of experience in the field and less than a year within the organization.

3.1.4 Validity of results

Due to the nature of the qualitative research, the results of this study can not be valid in a technical sense (Metsämuuronen, 2006). Due to the descriptive nature of the research, the study is aimed at increasing understanding on the subject of the formation of employer image and the drivers which affect the perceived employer attractiveness, instead of proposing infallible truths about the matter. The reliability of the research is supported by using the principles of good research, with the research being conducted with the permission of the case organization, retention of confidentiality in the usage of collected data as well as upholding the required anonymity of the case organization and informants (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007).

3.2 Findings

During the data collection, a wide variety of factors affecting the employer's attractiveness emerged. There were some common themes in all interviews, but especially the division between the answers of manager and subordinate level employees became evident. In this segment we will go through the results, bringing up the commonalities and differences between the interviewees' answers, aiming to analyze the pattern between the results and attempt to deduce reasons behind emerged factors.

While many of the interviews shared common themes, the answers and situations of different interviewees varied slightly. As such, to best present the acquired results, I have divided the answers into different blocks, each of which has a general theme, around which the answers will be analyzed and compared.

salary

One factor that was discussed in all but one interview was the salary of the interviewee. This was often used as a counterpoint when I was attempting to gauge the factors' importance to the person, and as such came up in most interviews. A common theme in all interviews was that the salary, or rather it's size, was never the most important factor relating to employer image to most of the interviewees. For example, the second interviewee, a 36 years old regional manager made a good point in saying that: The salary is important, up to a certain point, a sentiment which was shared by both the managerial and the subordinate level. During the interview he also noted that a small raise in salary was unlikely to persuade him to switch employers. Most interviewees felt the salary was not the most important reason when thinking about what makes the company a good place to work at, further emphasizing that so long as the salary was at a level where you get by, a level which surely is different depending on the employee, its importance drops in comparison to other factors affecting the employee satisfaction.

When discussing the salary, while the general consensus was that the salary is not a priority when assessing the employer, in general most interviewees felt that the level of salaries was low when comparing it to assumed average pay in employees of similar position in different companies. For example, interviewee 5, a 42 year old account manager mused that his current pay and salary development would surely be better, had he not been working for the case company for 16 years, noting that mid-level specialists are likely to have a salary that is slightly higher than the median, whereas higher specialist and manager level employees have a salary under the median. Interviewee 4, a 51 year old treasury assistant, reflected these thoughts mentioning that she felt her pay was on a lower side of the salary median on similar positions. While the salary was all around considered to be fairly low, compared to the work required, all interviewees considered this to be par for the course, emphasizing the other factors and special characteristics of the company as the reason for working for the employer. As such, these factors , which have the potential for being more important than the base monetary compensation, are highly

likely to positively affect a company's employer image should it come up in discussion or marketing communication.

That said, the earlier mentioned treasury assistant brought up her frustration at being unable to engage in a negotiation about a salary raise, stating that she had been, not outright denied, but rather dodged when attempting to organize a meeting with her superior about the case. This comes as an interestingly strong grievance in an otherwise quite tranquil discussion about salary, hinting towards the fact that rather than the level of salary, this sort of social disconnect becomes a stronger factor in a scope of overall job satisfaction.

Working hours

The work hours, schedule and the amount of work related tasks required was discussed in two interviews. The general consensus was that compared to similar organizations without the special characteristics of our case company, the work times were at a lower, more tolerable level. As an example, interviewee 1, a 35 year old lawyer, brought up work times as a factor strongly affecting her job satisfaction, emphasizing that flexible working hours were invaluable for her, as she had young children waiting at home. The interviewee 4 on the other hand brought up work hours during our discussion about the importance of salary, mentioning that at her age one begins to appreciate free time over money.

Considering the special characteristics of the case company, it is quite surprising that the theme of work hours did not crop up more often during the interviews. That said, it is possible that many of the employees feel the working hours are par for the course with the chosen company. Another possibility is that I am underestimating the hours done by the employees, which is possible especially in the case of managerial level employees.

Changes in the workplace

When I was conducting the interviews, one thing that came up in multiple discussions was that the work location was going through some sort of change. In most cases this involved a relocation of offices or a change in the workplace. To many of the respondents, these changes were fresh on their mind, and most reported that the upcoming changes had a notable effect on their current work satisfaction.

A great example of the significance of the transferals comes from interviewee 4 (Treasury assistant), who was facing a practically mandatory transfer to a new more centered working unit along with other assistant level employees from the area. During the discussion about the personal significance of the case, she noted that “this is the first time in seven and a half years that I’ve considered changing my job”. I feel that this well highlights the impact these sorts of environmental changes and the associated uncertainty have on the employees.

Interviewee 3, a financial specialist, had a less passionate response towards an upcoming relocation to an open plan office, describing the move as a ‘sensible’ change. Having said that, she brought up that the relocation may well cause tensions to raise in other departments, while noting that this was unlikely to affect herself, and if it would it would be mostly indirectly. After further discussion into the matter, she revealed that the increasing commute as well as the form of an open plan office might indeed negatively affect her work satisfaction, and if the relocation was a negative change it might at the worst case affect her desire to change jobs.

Some, mostly managerial level employees, voiced an alternative view on the changes their units were facing. For example, interviewee 6, a 43-year-old financial director, mentioned the upcoming move to an open plan office as one of the changes he would also make as a way to improve the case company as a whole. He felt that this sort of change took the organization towards the direction he felt improved his work satisfaction and internal employer image, which is understandable considering the interviewee emphasized the importance of the interaction and mobility between organizations departments as a factor towards his personal job satisfaction.

Change in the workplace often has a high impact on the employees' satisfaction and their view of their employer (Anderson, Anderson. 2001). While change and its effects should be taken into consideration when assessing the internal employer image, this sort of temporary source of unease will often appease with time, as employees settle in their new environment and the new roles become routine. While organizational reforms initially have a strong negative impact on the employer image, unless there is a failure of change management, this can be left with less attention when weighting its effects on the long term internal employer brand.

Task rotation

During the interviews, one of the main things that profiled the case company was the fact that employees had the ability for lateral movement inside the organization. Employees were encouraged to seek out new tasks and positions within the organization, in order to increase their skillset and competence. Many reported this as a strong factor influencing their view of the employer in relation to other jobs. That said, the implementation of this sort of task circulation did not come without issues, and especially the more experienced employees felt the effects to be cumbersome at times.

Interviewee 3 (financial specialist) offered quite balanced view of the task rotation used in the company. While she listed this rotation as a positive factor in her employment, she noted that this sort of rotational system carries with it some negative sides. When inquired further about the matter, she noted that the task rotation is good system up to a certain point. She felt that this kind of practice was apt at designating the right people to the right tasks, but on the other hand felt the system and its rotational tempo was taken too far in that people do not have time to learn their new tasks before being assigned to new ones. On the positive side, she brought up that switching tasks brings with it newfound interest in work and improves enthusiasm. Having said that she emphasized that this is brought by the switch, and does not necessarily require a full blown job rotation.

The negative effects of this sort of job rotation were also brought up by interviewee 6 (Financial manager) who reflected the previous sentiment by noting that many of the experienced employees were displeased by the fact that they have to retrain people to the tasks too frequently due to the system. That said, it was also noted that this sort of system benefits those who rotate often, as the varied skill set and knowledge pool is seen as a source of respect among their colleagues. Interviewee 6's opinion was well in line with the rest of the managerial level employees, as he felt that this sort of internal mobility should after all be increased in an effort to improve the internal communication between different business units, both official as well as spontaneous. As mentioned in the previous block about the changes in the workplace, interviewee 6 also predicted that the move to an open plan office might improve this sort of communication and mobility.

During our discussion about training and employee development Interviewee 5 (Account manager) emphasized that while the educational side had seen improvements, the system is still lacking in direction and foresight. He felt that while the lateral movement in the organization is functioning adequately, there is an absence of discussion about individuals' career paths. According to the interviewee, the company needs a longer term approach towards the job rotation, noting that while there is some amount of lateral movement, the commitment towards a more systematic rotation and development is lacking, noting that due to this, many of the long term employees have become somewhat cemented in their roles. He felt that more communication about the rotation and career development is needed to improve the existing system.

Interviewee 2 (regional manager) was among the few who did not consider the lateral movement as a factor affecting his personal job satisfaction. On the other hand, he did bring up a similar topic during our discussion about the ways in which he could see the case company improved. He felt that the custom of changing tasks within the organization could be expanded further, with the focus of improving the understanding of the organization between different business units. Interviewee 2 felt that there is a need to better understand what their colleagues in the different units are doing and how it relates to one's own task. Switching employees between

units, would then increase the complete understanding the employees have of the organization, knowledge of the company's range of offerings, as well as the work of their peers.

Tools

The tools and equipment were brought up a few times as a factor affecting the employees job satisfaction. As expected, the employee and specialist roles seemed to put more emphasis on having up to date equipment, in order to better complete their assigned tasks, when compared to the managerial level interviewees. The first interviewee noted that the tools needed to perform her job had improved during the six years she had been working for the company, and while she mentioned the lacking features in document management, overall the tools were considered satisfactory, and they were one of the positive factors discussed later in the interview.

During our discussion, interviewee 4 (treasury assistant) whom had had a longer seven-year career at the case company noted that the equipment had stayed up to date and relevant all throughout her stay, noting that having the right equipment for the job increased her job satisfaction greatly. Another comment regarding the importance of effective tools came from interviewee 1 (Lawyer), who felt that functional equipment was the basic requirement for work and if they are found lacking, it has tremendous effect on both job satisfaction and further interest in switching employers. This opinion is well in line with the 2015 Best industry ranking report, which revealed lacking tools and resources to be one of the key causes of employee frustrations (Smith, 2015). While she reflected interviewee 4's opinions in that the tools were up to date, she felt the tools had improved considerably during her 6 year stay at the company, which points at a deficiency at an earlier point of time. She also mentioned that there were individual shortcomings in the current software and listed the current state of tools as both positive and negative factor in her job satisfaction.

Work premises

The work premises were brought up in two occasions as a source of job satisfaction. It seems that the location and the spaces of the office had a notable positive effect on employees view of the company.

Both interviewee 2 (regional manager) and 4 (treasury assistant) felt the work premises to be a factor in their job satisfaction. That said both had a slightly different outlook into the importance of office spaces. Interviewee 2 felt that functional premises were part of the requisite that one has to be able to focus on their job, and as such have minimum requirements to set before they start affecting the employee. Interviewee 4 on the other hand felt that premises were a direct source of job satisfaction, and that their importance keeps rising as the employee grows older.

An interesting example of the significance of the premises towards internal employer image came from interviewee 4 (treasury assistant), who mentioned the office space as a source of subtle pride. According to her, she was pleased to host guests, such as clients, in a nice office coupled with up to date equipment, an act which had direct relation to her work.

The work environment, namely the workspace was brought up as a positive factor in the interview 2, where the 36-year-old regional manager mentioned the functional premises as important for being able to focus on the work. During the discussion he did note that they were moving to new workspace in the near future. Which, while small concern to interviewee 2, was a source of ire for some other employees. The interviewee 4, mentioned both workspaces and tools as important factors towards her job satisfaction, considering them to be as important as the company's internal training and development offers, which in turn she rated as one of the key components in affecting her job satisfaction. That said, while her workplace is simultaneously going through a different change compared to interviewee 2, she felt similar negative feelings to her colleagues, going as far as saying this was the first time in here seven-year career she had considered changing employers.

The strong feelings raised by changing environment highlight the importance of small factors when it comes to overall job satisfaction, which in turn has wider effects in the grand scheme of things.

Health benefits

The case company offers significant health benefits to its employees, a factor which many considered key when viewing the positives of the employer. This was especially prominent in the subordinate level employees working at the company's main office.

Interviewee 2 (regional manager) gave an interesting comment regarding the health benefits, noting that the leadership within the company has a great understanding about the the management of occupational well-being. While this was the case, when discussing the matter further he personally felt the health benefits to be more of a nice addition, when considering the other factors affecting his view of the employer. When we reflect this to interviewee 1's (lawyer) opinion, in which she states the health benefits to have a great impact on her job satisfaction and desire to switch employers, we can notice a difference between the managerial and specialist level employees' emphasis on different factors in their view of an employer.

Again, interviewee 3 (financial specialist) gave a fairly balanced outlook into the factor at hand, saying that the provided health benefits are important and that she highly values the fact that the employer provides them. That said, if she was in the market for a new employer, the provided health benefits would likely take a back seat for other aspects, such as the manner of work and proposed tasks.

Coworkers and atmosphere

Good coworkers and good work atmosphere have been known to be a big factor in generating job satisfaction. This has been further highlighted by the recent Best

industry ranking report, which brought up people and work environment as two of the three most important aspects regarding job satisfaction. (Smith, 2015) As such, it is not surprising that coworkers and work atmosphere were brought up on few occasion during the interviews.

Interviewee 1 (Lawyer) brought up friendly coworkers as one of the factors positively affecting her job satisfaction. Though, while she noted that good relations with colleagues and good work atmosphere are important, it is secondary to the fundamental reasons to work, such as adequate salary. This opinion though is quite different when compared to interviewee 2's (regional manager) notion that the mere thought of coming to a workplace without a comfortable community is impossible to him. This provides us with an interesting comparison between the opinions of a specialist employee with a mainly individual tasks and a more self-reliant management, and a manager level employee with a handful of subordinates, and tasks which involve a slew of daily human encounters. As such, it is not excessively difficult to deduce where the differences in opinion stem from in this instance, with more involved party emphasizing the importance of human relations and less involved favoring other factors.

An interesting addition to the role of coworkers comes from interviewee 4 (treasury assistant) who brought up the eroding work culture at her unit, bringing up that during her stay the tradition of cooperation and mutual assistance had decreased considerably. According to the interviewee at the start of her employment, the case company had had an external employer image as a stiffer and more bureaucratic workplace, which turned out to be opposite to what she experienced at the time. At the start of her run at the company, interviewee 4 felt that the company was modern and flexible, with a good atmosphere of camaraderie and mutual assistance. As such, it is unfortunate that her comments about the current situation have become closer to the initial, more negative, employer image.

Compared to interviewee 4's sentiments about the atmosphere in her business unit, interviewee 6 (Financial manager) provides a more positive overview about his unit. He emphasized that during the the past half a year he has been in the organization he has identified that the unit is a close-knit team of employees, noting that people

are well familiar with each other through the large unit he's positioned in. He speculated that this is likely due to the fact that all employees are located within the same country, with a large portion situated in the same building even. Interviewee 5 noted that during his stay his unit has displayed good cooperation, with employees thinking things through together, which according to him helps reach better conclusions and subsequently, better decisions. He concluded by noting that in the organization there exist a robust culture of cooperation.

Employee segmenting and cliques

While social grouping is a very common occurrence in any situation in which people come to contact with each other, it can also have a negative effect on an organization as a whole (Smith, 2013). This can also be identified in the points made by the interviewees, as many brought the matter of employee segmenting and work cliques as a negative factor about their employment. Partly relating to the social segmenting, some employees felt that there is a presence of employees entrenching to certain tasks within the organization, a grievance which I feel is partly unique to the case company, with its strong culture of lateral movement within the organization.

Interviewee 1 (lawyer) brought up the matter of coworker segmenting as a negative point about her work, musing that the employee entrenching is a problem stemming from long employment contracts common to the case company. According to her, people seem to pigeonhole into their own tasks, failing to exit their comfort zone. I feel that this sort of segmenting can cause the formation of long time cliques as well as both social and organizational problems. The interviewee emphasized the necessity for an organizational reform, forcing the employees to leave their comfort zone, with an aim to remove the presence of sinecures and move the company towards a more business oriented direction. Having said that, she did emphasize that while this may be a source of ire, it has no impact on her personally, which would suggest that the impact of the phenomenon is less significant than assumed when considering the formulation of internal employer image.

Additional insight towards the segmented nature of the workplace relations were provided by interviewee 3 (Financial specialist). She brought up that a past organizational fusion's effects can still be partly seen in the company, claiming that a slight divide between two factions can be observed, namely the original employees and those introduced by said fusion. According to the interviewee, while this affects her only indirectly, she has noted a presence of discontent in her colleagues due to current state of affairs. During our interview she emphasized the necessity to begin dismantling the preserving 'us versus them' mentality. I concur in her assessment that the present situation is affecting the current work atmosphere, especially in the units and segments where associated employees gather.

Earlier we have discussed interviewee 4's (Treasury assistant) changed perception of the organizational culture and how the spirit of cooperation she observed when starting at the company had deteriorated during her seven year stay. This ties well to this segment of cliques, as part of her grievances came from an emerged 'us versus them' mentality. According to the interviewee, especially in matters relating to clients the unit needs a stronger sense of unity. The segmenting in this case seems to follow the separation of tasks within the business unit, and as such can be seen as artificial in a sense. When we discussed the effect of the current state to interviewee 4, she noted that it has while the divided nature of the work place has only minor impact on her day-to-day work, the feeling of lacking cooperation and mutual assistance can cause quite a bit of frustration, feeling of isolation as well as uncertainty, all strong negative sentiments. That said, when the social segmenting leads to such deterioration in cooperation and unity, it is likely to have a strong negative effect towards the internal employer image as well as hindering the business process.

Regarding to the problems caused by the segmenting, Interviewee 2 (regional manager) weighs in on the discussion by bringing up the manner in which paradigms and procedures stagnate and employees tend to entrench into their personal comfort zones within the unit and social clique. The interviewee laments that this sort of situation obstructs critical thinking and causes a lack of "outside view" of the organization, its problems and varying tasks at hand. He also presents a rhetorical

question in the form of “could things be done differently?”, perhaps pointing at the problematic nature of the current situation alluding that there may well exist a solution, which could help the organization overcome the problems of social segmentation.

Considering how this phenomenon of cliques is present in multiple units, it can be considered an organization wide problem, one which has an effect on many employees’ view of the organizational image. As such, I feel this is a factor that definitely should be taken into consideration when seeking to improve upon the prevailing employer image.

Leadership

Leadership came into discussion on few occasions, which is unsurprising as one’s immediate superior is the main connection between an employer and the organization. Adding to that, in a recent study it was found that one of the key reasons for employee frustration stems from unsupportive managers (Smith, 2015), as such it can be assumed that leadership has significance towards employees view of their employer. For the employees who felt the leadership to be a notable factor when thinking about their employment, the cases were often that either they felt that their superior was good at their job and the employee was happy to work with them or that the overall management had faults, which the interviewees felt affected their job satisfaction. Interestingly, comments about leadership came equally from two managers and two employee or specialist level interviewees.

Interviewee 1 (Lawyer) has a job that requires a high level of autonomy when in completing her tasks. As such, it is not surprising that many of her grievances about the employer were connected to matters which hinder this autonomy, both in completing tasks as well as overall controlling her overall employment. The first negative factor interviewee 1 brought up was the fact that she felt that the leadership and management was overly controlling. Considering her specialist role as a lawyer in charge of financing law consulting, a highly autonomous responsibility role, she felt that it was silly that her coming and going was controlled by a timecard. She felt

that her job was missing the freedom which was in line with the required responsibility, calling for trust from the employer's side in the fact that the tasks will be completed as expected. She brought up that a more flexible working time would be an effective way to manage the stress caused by the high responsibility tasks she was associated with.

Interviewee 4 (treasury assistant) had both positive and negative feelings in regards to the organization's management. When prompted about factors that make the case company a good employer she brought up both her current and previous superior, emphasizing how she felt that most things could be discussed through and anything could be brought to the table. Having said that, she brought up that there was one discussion topic which was incredibly difficult to get proper feedback on: Salary. In an earlier segment it was brought up how interviewee 1 had had notable difficulties gaining an audience to discuss her salary and a potential raise. This was a problem with both the new and the old manager and as such had been an issue for a long time. Unsurprisingly this ended up being a strong negative factor in her view of the employer, and begs the question whether this is a companywide phenomenon or one isolated to this one unit or employee. In either case, it can be seen as a strong negative factor in formation of an internal employer image, and should be a case of concern should it be a recurring thing within the company. This doubly so as the interviewee brought a good immediate superior as a deal breaker when comparing potential employers.

On the managerial side, interviewee 5 (account manager) provided interesting insight into the higher leadership of the organization when asked to compare his view of an ideal employer and current case organization. He started by noting that when looking into the organization's past, the leadership had historically been fairly suboptimal with big portion of the leadership being provided their position after a long active career in other organizations and tasks as a manner of trophy post, from which they are able to comfortably transfer to pension. Nowadays the company is a modern, professionally led, efficient organization, which is a stark contrast to the earlier days of the company. The interviewee brought up his feelings that when he started in the organization 16 some years earlier, he remembers thinking that "this

company sure could be ran in a lot smarter way". Having said that, both interviewee 5 and interviewee 2 (regional manager) noted that current leadership is in a good place, with interviewee 2 bringing up an example of leaderships' strong focus on employee wellbeing.

Job security

The case company's special characteristics allow it to provide employees' job security that is unprecedented in their respective field of business. This was reflected in the interviewees' answers when determining the positive factors relating to the employer, with half the employees bringing this up as a factor that affected their job satisfaction either highly or moderately.

Interviewee 2 (regional manager) was one of the employees which brought up job security as a factor that makes the case company a good employer. He described the employment as belonging to the more secure end of the spectrum while grounding the discussion by reminding that nothing is ever certain when it comes to job security. The interviewee felt that job security is very important to him, and emphasized that it is what enables the employee to plan ahead in their life, finally admitting that it is a factor which affects his desire to switch or choose an employer.

Job security was also a factor of importance to interviewee 3 (financial specialist) who had a broader view of the topic, bringing up factors such as personal security, timely payment of salary and stability. Partly relating to the theme of job security, interviewee 3 also brought up the possibility of taking up office in one of the organization's various business units around the country should the employee face a need to move house. When discussing further, the interviewee emphasized the importance stability of the employment had on her personal wellbeing and job satisfaction. Having said that when we tried to weigh the significance of the absence of danger of layoff she was two minds about it, balancing between whether it or not it is highly important. She felt that due to her advanced age, the matter of layoff would not have as strong of an impact on her. In the end she concluded the job

security as being an important factor in her employment, in the end trumping most of the other discussed aspects of the job.

Interviewee 5 (account manager) provides a look into what how the job security culminates in practice by bringing up past co-operation negotiations, in any of which employees have not been laid off due to economic reasons. The interviewee appreciated how the company is not acting as a “hard” employer in this sense. While this is the case, he notes that this sort of conduct may also bring about adverse effects, as the employees lulled to the sense of security may end up exhibiting negative characteristics such as sloth. This also partly ties to the entrenching and formation of sinecures discussed in the social segmenting portion of the analysis. Interviewee 5 proposed that introducing a bit of competitiveness into the business environment might bring about a spark which could alleviate the current side effects of the high job security. When asked about the personal significance job security has, the interviewee brought up the importance job security has towards employees with long careers within the organization, such as himself. He emphasized his position saying that in a sense he is “hanging by a thread” having put all his eggs in one basket, when comparing to people who constantly switch jobs he felt that the job security ends up being more important to himself. At the end he brought up an interesting side effect the good job security may have on the prevalent work atmosphere, musing that in a workplace with low job security, there might surface scowling between the employees while pondering whether one is better than the other and who is getting the boot next.

In conclusion, while high job security is a strong positive factor in the formulation of positive internal employer image, it may well have negative side effects which affect the efficiency of the business process of a company. This becomes increasingly evident considering the special characteristics of the observed company.

Bureaucracy

Relatively high bureaucracy and rigid rules within the business process have a strong place in the case company due to its unique characteristics, as such it came

up in quite a few interviews. While the inflexible nature of the organization's operation affects many employees, compared to many other factors it was not considered to be playing a major role in the employees' job satisfaction or their view of the organization. That said, considering the frequency the topic came up in discussion, it should not be outright dismissed as inconsequential.

Interviewee 2 (regional manager) provided a balanced outlook towards the bureaucracy related to his job. Bureaucracy was one of the few negative factors he brought up when discussing the case company as an employer, noting that while it is a negative side of his job, he considered it a necessary evil. The interviewee felt that in the case company, bureaucracy had a distinct purpose, which it served amicably in enabling the organization to function and fulfill its purpose. When discussing the effects of bureaucracy, he noted that while its overall purpose is good it can be a source of frustration, as it slowed down the business process, caused ire in to both the clients and the employees, and in the end had a considerable negative effect on overall job satisfaction. That said, interviewee 2 felt that bureaucracy was something the employees just have to live with concluding by saying that "it is what it is", while advising that while it may be a cause of frustration in individual cases, with a sense of humor one should be able to pull through. It seems that while the bureaucracy may well have a strong negative effect on formation of internal employer image, considering interviewee later conceded that bureaucracy's presence in the in the job would not end up being a deal breaker, it can be speculated that the factor's overall negative effect was small in the grand scheme of things.

Reflecting the previous interviewees sentiments, interviewee 3 (financing specialist) also had a quite somber outlook towards the prevailing bureaucracy within the organization. Bringing up a good point, the interviewee emphasized that when dealing with money in the volumes that the case company does, a certain amount of bureaucracy is vital. She also brought up the case company's special characteristics, laws, regulations as well as the hierarchical structure of the organization as reasons for the current situation and the need for bureaucracy in the business process. As a counterpoint, she also brought up some problems caused

by the prevailing arrangement, noting that bureaucracy is a great hindrance when the company tries to introduce change within the organization, and on an individual level it complicates the execution of employees' individual tasks. As for her own practical experience with dealing with bureaucracy, the interviewee described how the regulation at times works as intended and at times it obstructs work, bringing up the difficulty of arranging substitutes. In conclusion, she noted that bureaucracy is present in her work and it also negatively affects her job satisfaction to some degree. Having said that, individually bureaucracy is not a factor that might make her consider switching employers, hinting at a smaller impact of said factor towards formulation of internal employer image.

Interviewee 5 (account manager) brings up an interesting effect the prevailing regulation and bureaucracy has on him and his colleagues. According to him, the regulation to which the case company is subject to has an effect of limiting potential career opportunities to a portion of the employees. In turn the company has robust system of task circulation and lateral movement within the organization, which was discussed in an earlier segment. This ties to Interviewee 5's previous grievance of lacking career planning and advancement opportunities. Though, apart from the effect on career paths, he felt that the regulation has limited effect on him personally, noting that while it is present in the execution of his tasks, it is insignificant and can be described merely as a light burden. When further probed about the effects of the regulation the answers followed similar pattern with bureaucracy having no effect on his personal job satisfaction or desire to change jobs. Though, he did note that the amount of regulation has decreased during his long stay with the case company, bringing up that earlier when there was larger amount of complicated, at times irrational, directives and internal bureaucracy it had a visible effect on prevailing work atmosphere. That said, he felt that those days are already behind, making the current state of regulation a mere annoyance.

While the case company has a stark culture of bureaucracy, there were also a couple of dissenting voices describing the phenomenon. For example, interviewee 4 felt that when she started at the case company it was largely seen as bureaucratic, cumbersome and inflexible organization, something that the interviewee felt

contrary about when witnessing it first-hand. According to her, at the time she saw the case company as having fairly low hierarchical structure, feeling that things moved quite flexibly with modern systems accommodating the business processes. This partly ties to her initial impression of strong culture of cooperation within her business unit, which we later found out had faced a period of stagnation coming to this day. Despite this, she insists on still not considering the organization as inflexible or particularly bureaucratic, noting that as far as she is considered she has always seen the company as being relatively flexible in its decisions. When it comes to achieving the business goals set for the company, interviewee 5 also reflected the previous statement, noting that the company is relatively agile in executing tasks set by the owners of the company.

Challenging & interesting tasks

Challenging and interesting tasks is a factor I expected to come across when conducting my interviews and I was not surprised to find that four out of five interviewees brought it up as a positive factor when analyzing their employment. In this segment we can observe a demographic difference, as there was a clear divide between younger interviewees who placed more emphasis on the manner of the tasks they were presented with, while interviewees who were approaching a more advanced age opted for other factors.

An interesting outlook towards the personal importance of challenging tasks came from interviewee 2 (regional manager), who noted that the feeling of being needed is a great source of motivation. Overall he felt that interesting task description was important towards his personal job satisfaction, going as far as saying that job description that feels meaningless or one that does not fit his persona was a valid reason to start considering a change of employer. This manner of strong feelings towards a factor emphasize its significance in the formation of employees view of their employer. Interestingly the interesting job description was one of the few factors, which the employee felt was significant when considering the external peer opinion of him. Following that, when prompted about various factors' relationship

with pride, the having challenging tasks was the only one interviewee 2 felt warranted being proud about.

Adding to the discussion, interviewee 5 gives an interesting perspective towards his tasks, noting that in his job he has a great vantage point to view interesting ventures of new firms, the so called enterprise tales. Following that, he notes that his own tasks are also very interesting, even though as a manager level employee he has a more limited contact with interesting startups. Concerning his role as a manager, interviewee notes that it's interesting to work with people, giving an example of how to motivate people to pull together to achieve goals as a cohesive unit. When discussing the personal importance of interesting and challenging tasks, interviewee 5 emphasized that it is a very important matter to him, a pivotal factor by his words. He feels that the provided tasks' content has to be both interesting and challenging, or if this is not the case it is sure to lower the level of his job satisfaction and overall "feeling". When asked about potential effect towards the work atmosphere, he felt that employees that are not content with the content of their tasks are sure to have a negative impact on overall atmosphere. To conclude, interviewee 5 noted that if he felt unsatisfied about his current tasks, it would without a doubt increase his desire to look around for alternative employment.

Rather than interesting or challenging tasks, interviewee 6 (Financial manager) brought up the variance of provided tasks as a positive factor. That said when probed further about the matter, he conceded that the wide variance of different tasks was not a top contender when considering different factors' importance. In the end, the interviewee summed that the variance in provided tasks was a factor which played a bigger role the longer employee stayed within the organization. Given enough time, the variance in provided tasks has to increase in order to avoid frustration caused by monotonous work.

Education and training

The possibility to receive further education and training cropped up in two interviewees answers. This partly relates to the segment of task rotation, as

employees are trained by their colleagues in the new unit in order to enable them to complete their newly assigned jobs. In this segment we focus more on the additional training offering provided to some employees and weigh their impact on their view of the employer.

Interviewee 4 (treasury assistant) felt that she was provided with ample opportunities of training both in-house and in external facilities. According to her, the employees were offered varying and interesting courses of education and even warmly encouraged to participate in the offered training opportunities. During the discussion it did come to light though that the training offering had been largely stagnating in the past few years, which the interviewee lamented as being a shame. All in all, the interviewee felt that educational opportunities provided by the employer are a big factor when evaluating an employer, with it being a big proponent of her personal job satisfaction.

During our discussion about the employees' lateral movement within the organization, interviewee 5 (account manager) went on to bring up his thoughts on the training and personal improvement of the workforce, noting that the theme of education had been discussed extensively in recent times. According to him, investments had been made towards training, but the venture still lacked strong direction, which ties to his personal grievances about the current state of career paths within the organization, which has caused some employees to become stuck in their positions for excessively extended periods. On a personal level interviewee 5 felt that training and education is a factor that allows him to improve on a professional level, bringing about new expertise, making it a fairly strong factor when appraising his current employer.

Incentives

In addition to the base salary, the case company has in place incentive programs, which reward exceptional performance of the employers. Having said that some interviewees had problems with the conduction of said programs, with complaints

ranging from lack of transparency to the notable difference between leaderships incentives compared to those of other employees.

Relating to the discussion of salary, some interviewees brought up monetary incentives as a factor affecting their view of an employer. Most in depth discussion was had with interviewee 4 (treasury assistant), whom had grievances on the manner in which incentives were offered to the employees, as well as their disparity to leaderships corresponding rewards. She brought up the issue that while the leadership received their incentives based on the performance of the company, an employee would get a carrot only in a situation where he/she had done something exceptional, and even then the criterion of receiving such prize were shrouded in mystery. Even then, she concluded that while it is a source of ire for her it is hardly important when looking at a whole, mentioning in passing though that the incentives of the top brass did have an effect on her view of the employer as a whole.

Interviewee 6 (financial manager) reflected the previous sentiments in noting that it is problematic that the basis for receiving incentives lacks transparency, noting that if no concrete factors to strive towards it is hard to adjust one's actions towards a better direction. He called for concrete performance indicators to be put in place, in order to make the incentive system more transparent. When asked about the how the incentives affect his outlook on the employer, the interviewee described that concrete rewards for well executed tasks was a great source of job satisfaction for him. He did note that concrete rewards could be other than monetary incentives, such as promotions or tasks requiring a higher level of responsibility. During all this, interviewee 6 emphasized the importance of the feeling of fairness in the distribution of rewards, which ties well with his calls for increased transparency. On a personal level he noted that incentives are fairly important, but not overly so when compared to more fundamental factors, finally noting that the current state of incentive program was not something that had strong effect on his job satisfaction but may well have a negative effect on overall work atmosphere.

Miscellaneous

In this segment we go through factors that were brought up only by one interviewee, or the ones that were mentioned only in passing. Many of these factors were important to the individual interviewee, but considering their low frequency of appearance, can be attributed to being characteristics affecting only a small portion of the workforce in the case company. Nevertheless, considering some of the following factors had a notable effect on employees' view of their employer, I feel their inclusion in the analysis portion of the thesis is well justified.

Interviewee 1 (lawyer) has profiled as a very autonomous specialist, to whom working times and a freedom of operation are of great importance. As such, the work-life balance and sensible working hours present in the case company was a big positive factor. While the controlling leadership was a source of ire for her, she conceded that overall her work and life were in a good balance, bringing up her ability to work remotely and how she currently works four days a week at the office. She concluded by emphasizing that reasonable working hours are a strong contributor towards her overall job satisfaction, and should this factor sag, it is likely to cause an increase in desire to switch jobs.

Interviewee 3 (financial specialist) brought up an interesting topic of personal safety when discussing the differences between her current employer and a previous career in the banking field. According to her, a financial institute feels like a safer place to work in comparison to her example of a bank. She brought up an extreme example of a possible bank robbery as a source of insecurity in her previous occupation. This discussion tied to overall security present in the case company when appraising the good job security in the case company, with the bottom line being that the employer is able to provide comparatively safe and stable working conditions to its employees, which is something the interviewee was able to appreciate, noting the stability had a strong positive effect on her personal well being and job satisfaction. This points at the positive effect a stable workplace can have on an employee's view of company's internal employer image.

Feedback was a factor interviewee 6 (financial manager) felt strongly about, bringing it up as a strong positive factor when discussed his image of a very good employer. During our comparison between Nordea, which was the interviewee's previous employer, and the case company, feedback was the factor that raised most points. He felt that where he had received great feedback in his previous job, the interviewee now wanted to play it forward in his current role as a manager, describing his endeavours of being able to provide plenty of accurate feedback to his subordinates. Following this he also brought up his personal experience as a recipient of feedback during his short stay in the case company, saying that he felt there had been plenty of occasions where he had received good commentary from his superior, praising the good two way communication he had experienced. In his concluding remarks, the interviewee noted that good feedback is also dependant on the recipient, describing it as being a bilateral process. When asked about the personal effect good feedback has on him, the interviewee brought up that positive feedback for job well done the "baseline", noting that it is to be expected from a superior.

Trust was a topic again brought up by interviewee 6 (financial manager), with him considering it as being a key factor of a good employer. He explained that without trust an employee is unable to properly conduct the role assigned to him, noting that as a manager he must be able to place trust in his subordinates, and when a larger team is striving for a common goal, one must be able to trust that things are going according to directions even without immediate supervision. On a personal level, he felt that if he is not trusted by his superiors it could very well have an effect on his desire to change jobs, which points towards a strong effect of the factor, especially in a condition of failure. In addition to interviewee 6, another proponent the importance of trust in a workplace was interviewee 1 (lawyer) who earlier called for increase in trust towards employees in high autonomy positions.

3 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research identified a number of factors in the practical level, many of which could be identified as relevant when comparing to the existing theoretical models relating to the creation of an employer brand as well as employees' formulation of employer attractiveness. In this segment, in addition to the factors, the general emerged themes will be presented, as well as insight into the conduction of the research and its applicability.

During the data gathering portion, it was interesting to note how employees of different demographics approached the questions in differing manners. For example, manager level employees usually took a broader outlook on the matter, often thinking the questions through an organizational perspective. This created some challenges, as often these employees needed to be prodded into taking a more personal stance on the issues. On the other hand, many subordinate level employees were prone to pouring out their grievances in abundance, which often ended up extending the interviews. On the flipside, in many of these cases it was possible to gain deeper insight into the inner workings of the organization, as well as identify factors which had more personal importance to the respondent.

Another aspect affecting the data gathering were the case company's special characteristics. It could be seen that the case company's reputation, aim of business and other factors skewed the answers towards a direction which is unlikely to be a good representation of other similarly sized organizations. This creates a problem of applicability, that needs to be addressed with further research into the factors affecting the formation of employees view of employer attractiveness.

Of the factors identified, salary was the most fundamental one. As described in the research of Sivertzen et. al., monetary factors ended up playing a comparatively small role in the findings. While they were frequently represented, partly due to their fundamental nature as compensation for work done, they never took an overbearing role when discussing factors affecting the organization's employer attractiveness. While it is possible that the importance of salary was downplayed due to the case

company's special characteristics and the inherent selection bias caused by them, the basic form of the results can be expected to remain the same, as proposed by earlier research, with the exception that employees in other organizations might have a higher threshold of contentment. This threshold was something that many employees called for, as the general consensus was that the salary has to be at an acceptable level, but after that its importance as a factor affecting employer attractiveness drops, with employees starting to favor other factors. It has to be noted though, that most employees felt their salary was currently below the median when compared to other workers, which might have a small effect on the employer attractiveness.

While the theoretical literature did not really mention working times, it was one factor that appeared multiple times during the research. This could be partly tied to the fact that the factor has special relevance to the characteristics of case company when compared to its competitors. When considering this it is surprising that it did not appear more frequently than it did. The factor of time had an increased presence in the answers of employees with young children as well as those of advanced age. Comparisons were drawn to salary, which relates to the factor of how high was the pay when compared to the amount, or more specifically, the hours worked, and how it relates to other employers in the same field.

Work environment was something that could be linked to company's prestige and its effects on formation of employer brand signal in the framework proposed by Wilden et. al. (2010) Modern and outwardly prosperous organization could also be a factor improving the employees view of the organizational identity, which according to Backhaus and Tikoo can lead to increased employer brand loyalty, and consequently productivity (2004). In the research, the work premises were described as a small boon to job satisfaction, but overall their importance as such was small, and became more pronounced only when the company was subject to transfer to new premises.

Many of the interviewees were facing a change in the work place. In most cases, this was a transfer to new business unit or their unit was moving to a new location. Changes in the workplace raised strong feelings across the board. The results

reflect the Edwards and Edwards' study about the strong negative effect on employer brand following a great change in workplace, an acquisition in their case, a transfer to new office in ours. (2013) These changes were generally viewed positively by manager level employees and negatively by subordinate level. out of these two employees reported the upcoming transfer as affecting their desire to change jobs. Due to interviews being close to the upcoming changes, the factor may have had inflated presence in the answers. As often in change management (Anderson & Anderson, 2001), the impact of the change can be expected to decrease as time goes on and employees settle in their new environment.

In the organization, there was a strong culture of lateral movement rotating tasks. Interestingly, this is perfectly in line with Sivertzen's group's proposition of providing opportunities for personal innovation, one of the cornerstones they identified in creating a strong employer brand and increasing employer attractiveness (2013). The task rotation also exhibits traits of the application value, which concerns personal growth, opportunity to learn and put skills to practice. Usually, those not taking advantage of the system had negative opinion. Examples being older and more experienced employees, who often ended up having to retrain new employees repeatedly. This could be partly related to a phenomenon brought up in one interview, that the lateral movement lacks direction, allowing some employees cement in their roles. This was a strong positive factor to many and a notable factor differentiating case company from other employers. Positive effects reported included increased motivation, higher competency of employees and increased communication between business units. While lateral movement is abundant within the organization, many complained about the lack of career advancement opportunities, as well as a clear structure. The discontentment was less common in the specialist roles, more common in the managerial level employees.

The tools and equipment, much like the work premises have at most an indirect relationship with employer branding literature, relating to at most the superficial brand signal of modernity and newness. In essence, they could be part of the brand strategy, as a way to convey innovativeness and modernity (Wilden et. al. 2010). The importance of having up to date equipment was more prominent in the

subordinate and specialist level employees, as expected due to the practical requirements of their jobs. Similar to salary, so long as the equipment served its purpose was enough, trailing off after that in importance. Many emphasized though that having relevant tools for the job had a great impact on job satisfaction. Rather than this factor being a great source of increasing employer attractiveness, it is more of a pitfall, with failure condition being increase in employee frustration and worsening view of the company's employer image.

Health benefits are comparatively very good in the case company. Interestingly, this manifested in strong positive feeling towards the employer. Having said that, as a factor relating to occupational well-being this is likely to be one to communicated outwards in word-of-mouth level, as noted in Uen's groups research (2013). It is likely that personal wellbeing is a factor which raises a lot of positive feelings, and as such greatly improves the internal employer image of the organization. Despite strong positive feelings, health benefits were rarely the most important factor to the interviewees, meaning that by itself it is unlikely to be a strong competitive advantage when competing for employees.

The social atmosphere within the organization was not present in theoretical literature as such. Considering it is fairly difficult to outright control employee social relations, this does not come as a huge surprise. That said, employee interaction could be seen as being part of the communication part of Mosley's employer brand experience framework, meaning that in the organization's employer brand is inadvertently conveyed in everyday interactions at the workplace (2007). That said, it consistently ranks high in industry best practice -reports, and as such is an expected addition to the list of factors increasing employer attractiveness. While the social relations were important, it was noted that it can't replace fundamental reasons for working, such as salary. To some, being part of a good community was an integral part of the work experience, partly tying to the psychological value of employment presented in Sivertzen's research (2013). The importance of this factor to an employee seemed to be largely related to the contents of their job. Employees with individual tasks placed less emphasis on community, while those with high human interaction, such as team leaders, placed more. In an example of eroding

social community, a stronger emotional response was observed, coupled with a social backlash, further lowering the workplace atmosphere.

Relating to the social atmosphere, many interviewees reported of a segmented community, with some strong cliques stemming from earlier days of division within the organization. This was a frequently reported negative factor they saw in working for the organization, hinting towards an organization wide problem. The employee entrenching rarely had a direct impact on the employees, but many reported strong indirect influences, such as eroding work atmosphere, lack of cooperation, obstruction to critical thinking and disconnects between different business units.

Leadership tied to the everyday behaviors of Mosley's employer brand experience framework (2007). Mosley described leadership competencies as being part of the everyday behaviors that communicate an organization's employer brand. The factor of leadership has a potential of being a key source of frustration, as evidenced in the best industry practices -reports (Smith, 2015). Fortunately for the case company, there were many positive responses towards one's immediate superiors. Grievances were mainly limited to a specialist level employee, who felt constrained by tight control of her comings and goings, and an employee who had been unable to schedule time for discussion about her salary for an extended period of time. It should be noted though, that both of these cases are very likely to have a strong influence on an employee's view of the employer's attractiveness. Reported positives included good communication between managers and subordinates.

Job security relates directly to the perceived risk the employee has to weigh when forming his view of a company's employer attractiveness, as presented in Wilden's group's process flow on employee-based brand equity model (2010). Due to the case company's special characteristics. Job security is a strong competitive advantage for the organization in the human resource market. The factor's importance was estimated in the range of moderate to high, making it a strong proponent in the formation of employer attractiveness. Negative effects were also brought up, as some employees complained about the employee entrenching and a presence of sinecures in the company. Though, this only has indirect effects on

other employees, and as such can only have a minor effect on the overall employer attractiveness.

Bureaucracy does not tie well into the theoretical research, but it could be seen as an antithesis for innovativeness and flexibility many interviewees called for, and as is a hindrance towards the formation of the employer brand and the message's consistency. It should be noted that this was not of large importance to anyone, with it having a very slight effect on job satisfaction. Bureaucracy in the workplace was generally considered par for the course due to the field of finance and company's special characteristics.

Many reported that the provided tasks were challenging and interesting, noting that this was important factor when assessing the attractiveness of their current employer. Much like the factor of varying work and task rotation, this also ties directly to the research by Sivertzen et. al., as innovation value directly corresponds to how challenging and interesting one's tasks are. (2013) Some of the employees also reported feelings relating to psychological value, namely feelings of being needed and useful. According to Sivertsen's research this is a source of increased confidence and feeling of self-worth. Demographically, this factor was more important to younger employees, as well as the managerial level employees. The factor of challenging and interesting tasks had a consistently high weight in overall assessment of the employer across the board.

The organization's training and education programs were also brought up as a factor affecting employees view of the organization. Much like the task rotation, this too applies to Sivertzen's application value, dealing with personal growth. While this was a source of motivation and positive employer attractiveness, it was reported that many training initiatives had been driven down in the past years, making the offering scarcer.

Monetary incentives are a factor that is found in Mosley's employer brand experience framework as a way to communicate employer brand. Rewards and recognition are an opportunity to connect to the employee, which in turn communicates the company's employer brand. (2007) Having said that these

incentives were often found lacking, either in transparency or frequency. At the same time leaderships incentives were criticized, which leads to lowering of employer attractiveness. In Wilden et. al.'s model this would present itself in contradiction in consistency and credibility of the brand, considering the special characteristics of the company, and their effect on the organization's image and brand. Reflecting both Mosley's and Sivertzen's research, a sentiment raised describing how rewards and recognition of well executed tasks was a notable source of increase of the view an employee had of their employment. The incentives ended up not being overtly important in comparison to other factors.

In addition to these main factors, other factors brought up included working hours, feeling of personal safety, which technically could be linked to the case company's brand in comparison to its competitors, feedback, which is present in the outer rim of Mosley's employer brand experience framework, and trust was also brought up by Mosley (2007). These factors were only brought up by one employee, suggesting that they are likely to be isolated or scarce in nature within the organization.

Some common themes emerged during the analysis of the results. Firstly, it could be seen that employee and unit relations caused a notable amount of discussion, and as such were prominent proponents of employee satisfaction. Relating to this, only a fraction of the factors were materialistic in nature, and less emphasis was placed on them. A common theme of these materialistic factors, such as salary, premises and equipment, reflected how salary was treated, so long as it was at a threshold level, it was of small consequence in the employees' minds. As such, while the materialistic factors have to meet the required limits, in order to avoid failure condition, no further emphasis should be placed in them when aiming to develop employer brand. The organization should instead opt to focus on the more immaterial factors, relating to employees' self-actualization. Factor's such as challenging tasks, training opportunities and the task rotation, which is already well established, were highly regarded by the respondents, and as such form the core of the case company's employer brand. There are also other immaterial factors, which are likely to have a high role in the formation of employer attractiveness. A large factor in employees' job satisfaction were the social contacts as well as the problems

relating to social relationships. While these intangible factors are difficult to change, considering their great role in viewing the employer's attractiveness it is advisable to start uncovering the drivers behind social problems such as the segmenting and old cliques within the various business units, with an effort of aiming to dismantle them.

To conclude, this research identified that an employer's attractiveness is dependent on various factors, both material and immaterial, of which the latter was more likely to have a stronger importance in an employee's mind as long as the former was at a level accepted by the person. These factors form the core of an employer image an employee forms of a company, which the employee expects to be in line with the employer brand the organization projects. As such, an internal employer brand is composed of the working environment and components of employment placed on the employee and the employer brand signal projected by the organization, from which the employer image is formed by the employee depending on the consistency between the communicated message and the actual characteristics of the employment.

4.1 Limitations and further research

Due to the nature of the study and the special characteristics of the case company the results of the research are unlikely to apply to other organizations as such, and further studies which support the findings of this research are needed. That said, the description and the analysis present in this study can serve as a guidepost for further research and application of employer branding initiatives.

Further studies on the subject should focus on the repeatability of the findings of the research. Additional studies about the practical application of employer branding initiatives would be a natural next step now that practical factors governing the formation of employer attractiveness have been identified.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Interview frame in Finnish

LÄMMITTELY

Haastattelun aloitus

- Mikä on roolisi Finnverassa?
 - Asema
 - työtehtävä
- Mihin organisaation osastoon kuulut. (aladivisioona?)
- Minkä ikäinen olet?
- Kuinka pitkä työkokemus sinulla on?
 - Alalta
 - Finnveralla

- Onko joku yritys jota pidät erityisen hyvänä työnantajana? (pl. Finnvera)
 - Miksi koet kyseisen yrityksen hyvänä työnantajana? (Mistä kuva tulee?)
 - (Mitkä tekijät tekevät kyseisestä yrityksestä hyvän työnantajan)

Vertailu Finnveraan

SISÄLTÖ

Tekijät (Mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat yritys-/organisaatiokuvaan)

- Mitkä asiat tekevät Finnverasta mielestäsi hyvän työnantajan?
 - Avusta tekijöiden määrittämisessä

- Avusta tekijöiden erottelussa
- Mitkä asiat tekevät Finnverasta mielestäsi huonon työnantajan?
 - Avusta tekijöiden määrittämisessä (parannusten kautta?)
 - Avusta tekijöiden erottelussa

Ota vastaukset ylös seuraavia osioita varten

Tekijöiden tärkeys (Kuinka tärkeinä valitut tekijät nähdään)

- Kuinka tärkeänä näät valitut tekijät, kun arvioit Finnveraa työnantajana?

Tekijöiden vaikutus

- Kuinka koet tekijöiden vaikuttavan itseesi?
 - Työtyytyväisyys
 - Halu/valmius vaihtaa työpaikkaa
 - Ylpeys, ulkopuolinen mielipide työpaikastasi
 - Työilmapiiri

LOPETTELU

Tulevaisuus

- Millainen olisi unelmiesi Finnvera? *(Voi olla pieniä tai isoja muutoksia)*
 - Työnantajana?
 - Minkälaiset muutokset parantaisivat arviotasi Finnverasta työnantajana
 - Organisaationa?
- Onko kysymyksistä unohtunut jotain oleellista?

Työnantajabrändi

- Pyrkiikö Finnvera mielestäsi parantamaan kuvaansa hyvänä työnantajana?
 - Miten?
- Onko Finnveran roolia hyvänä työnantajana ”mainostettu”?
 - Organisaation sisällä?
 - Ulkopuolella?
 - Onko vaikuttanut mielipiteeseen Finnverasta?
- Onko Finnveran julkinen maine yrityksenä vaikuttanut arvioosi Finnverasta työnantajana?