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**ATTRACTION, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HIGH PERFORMING
SALES PROFESSIONALS
CASE STUDY: LINDSTRÖM**

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ABSTRACT

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The goal of this thesis is to gain more in-depth understanding of employer branding and offer suggestions on how this knowledge could be utilized in the case company. More in detail, the purpose of this research is to provide tools for improving Lindström's organizational attractiveness and boosting the recruitment and retention of the segment of high-performing sales professionals. A strategy for reaching this particular segment has not been previously drawn and HR-managers believe strongly that it would be very beneficial for the company's development and growth. The topic of this research is very current for Lindström, but also contributes on general level as companies are competing against each other in attracting, recruiting and retention of skilled workforce in the times of labor shortage.

The research is conducted with qualitative methods and the data collection includes primary data through interviews as well as secondary data in the form of analysis on previous research, websites, recruitment material and discussions with Lindström's HR department. This research provides a good basis for broader examination on the topic and presents development suggestions for the identified challenges. Based on the key findings Lindström's HR department was advised to increase firm's visibility, broaden recruitment channels, provide more hands-on knowledge about the sales positions and investigate their possibilities of developing sales reward systems.

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Pro gradu-tutkielman tavoitteena on syventää ymmärrystä työnantajabrändäyksestä ja ehdottaa miten tätä tietoa voitaisiin soveltaa tapaustutkimusy yrityksessä. Tarkemmin ilmaistuna tämän tutkielman tarkoitus on tarjota työkaluja Lindströmin houkuttelevuuden parantamiseksi ja rekrytoinnin sekä sitouttamisen tehostamiseksi hyvin menestyneiden ammattilaismyyjien segmentissä. Kyseisen segmentin tavoittamiseksi ei ole aikaisemmin laadittu omaa strategiaa ja HR-päälliköt uskovat vahvasti, että tämän olisi todella hyödyllistä yrityksen kehittymisen ja kasvun kannalta. Tutkimuksen aihe on erittäin ajankohtainen Lindströmille, mutta myös yleisesti, sillä työvoimapulan vuoksi yritykset kilpailevat taidokkaan työvoiman houkuttelusta, rekrytoinnista ja sitouttamisesta.

Tutkimuksessa käytettävät menetelmät ovat kvalitatiivisia ja tiedonkeruu käsittää teemahaastatteluja sekä analyysiä edellisistä tutkimuksista, yrityksen nettisivuista, rekrytointimateriaaleista ja keskusteluista Lindströmin HR-osaston kanssa. Tämä tutkimus tarjoaa hyvän pohjan laajempaa tutkimusta varten ja esittää kehitystoimenpide-ehdotuksia tunnistettuihin haasteisiin. Tutkimustulosten perusteella Lindströmin HR-osastoa suositeltiin kasvattamaan yrityksen näkyvyyttä, lisäämään rekrytointikanavia, tarjoamaan enemmän käytännönläheistä tietoa avoinna olevista myyntitehtävistä ja tutkimaan palkkiojärjestelmän kehittämismahdollisuuksia.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Companies around the globe are battling against each other in attracting talented workforce. In order to succeed in the turbulent environment of today's business world, attracting, recruiting and retaining highly qualified people has become vital for companies across industries. (App, Merk & Büttgen 2012, 263) Moreover, the predictions of labor shortage in the upcoming years has accelerated the competition over skilled employees and resulted in various strategies in human resource management (Chhabra & Sharma 2012, 48-49).

Recruiting the right kind of people is not enough nowadays, moreover it is essential that companies are able to retain their human capital as boundary-less business environment has enabled employees to change their job more frequently and with less effort according to their preferences. Competitive edge can be sustained by attracting and retaining motivated employees. Therefore, managing the company's image in the eyes of current and potential employees has become important part of corporate strategies. (Rampl & Kenning 2014, 219)

Branding is commonly linked to trademarks and B-to-C products, however it is also applied in human resource management in the form of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 501). Employer branding can be characterized as a long-term strategy which aims at managing the perceptions of current and potential employees of the company as an employer (Chhabra & Sharma 2012, 49).

Employer branding has found to have positive impact on company's image which increases the organization's attractiveness and therefore is likely to improve the quantity and quality of applicants. Within the organization employer branding is focused on increasing job satisfaction in the hopes of generating loyalty and retention. Enhancing employer brand requires investments but the power of well-developed employer brand has been recognized and if companies desire to be top of mind as an employer, they need to incorporate employer branding to their strategic management. (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng

2010, 403-404)

Lindström, as many other companies around the globe, is interested in developing ways of finding and attracting motivated workforce. Lindström operates in the textile rental service industry and their HRM is eager to develop the employer brand of the firm. Despite the long and successful history of Lindström, the whole scale of Lindström's business is not that well-known outside the organization and increasing positive recognizability of the company would likely generate positive outcomes.

HRM of Lindström has identified this challenge and is hoping to step up a gear and strengthen their employer brand. The company has previously implemented actions to strengthen their employer brand among students and are now hoping to target experienced sales professionals in the job market. More specifically, Lindström has yet to deepen the knowledge on the factors that attract this segment and the channels which to use to better capture the interest of this particular segment. In addition, Lindström's HRM is interested to find out what could be done in order to develop the retention of the individuals of the target segment.

Although employer branding is relatively young field of study, it has already gained a lot of attention in business research. Researchers agree that there is need for further investigation and in order to achieve a good basis for employer branding strategy, each company should be reviewed as an individual. Some main guidelines may be applied to most of the companies but there are many factors that have an impact on the employer brand, such as industry and culture. Furthermore, company's employer branding strategy ought to have a unique approach in order to differentiate the company from its competitors.

1.1 Literature review

According to Uma & Metilda (2012, 109) employer branding was mentioned for the first time back in the 1990s but surfaced again in the academia in the 2000s as a relevant research avenue. There is a good number of studies (Backhaus

& Tikoo 2004, 501; Knox & Freeman 2006, 965; Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng 2010, 402; Chhabra & Sharma 2014, 49; Rampl & Kenning 2014, 219; Verma & Ahmad 2016, 44) concentrated on employer branding arguing that companies of today are applying branding to improve their employer image in order to attract and retain skilled workforce. In addition, Lievens, van Hove & Anseel (2007, 48) present that although employer branding is relatively young field of study, it has been empirically proven that it has a positive effect on the quality and quantity of applicants.

Rampl & Kenning (2014, 214) note that existing employees are in central role of employer branding and therefore branding should not be solely focused on prospective employees. Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng (2010, 404) share this view and point out that it is vital for organizations to pay attention on how they communicate their brand externally, but also plan how they are delivering the message internally in order to strengthen the employer brand as a whole.

There are different opinions on why employer branding has been incorporated to the business strategies. However, many studies (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng 2010; Rampl & Kenning 2014; App, Merk & Büttgen 2012; Arachchige & Robertson 2011; Uma & Metilda 2012) agree that the core idea behind pursuing employer branding is differentiation. Companies wish to attract people who will fit into the company and thus it is important that these individuals share similar values in order them to be able to represent the company in a best possible way (Wilden, Gudergan & Lings 2010, 60).

It can be stated that employer branding is applied simply to create a perception of a desirable workplace among the desired kind of applicants and existing employees (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng 2010, 403). Increasing the number and the quality of the applicants is the main objective on external level. Whereas, the internal focus is to improve job satisfaction and secure workforce retention (Robertson & Khatibi 2013, 18).

Employer branding and its impact has been studied on couple of different settings, for example; among business students (Arachchige & Robertson

2011), in the military (Lievens 2007), in the service industry (Knox & Freeman 2006) and in non-western cultures (Hoye et al. 2013; Kapoor 2010).

Robertson & Khatibi's study discovered a positive connection between strong employer brand and level of recruitment but also a correlation between well-developed employer branding strategy and employee retention. They also argued that strong employer brand has positive productivity-related outcomes. (27, 2013) Verma & Ahmad (2016, 42) highlight the importance of identifying the internal and external components of employer branding in order to build a coherent and strong employer brand.

However, there are still many untapped research avenues concerning employer branding. Gomes and Neves (2011, 695) point out that future research should focus on exploring what is the impact of employer branding on the application process of prospective applicant. They also encourage more research on whether the organization's familiarity has an impact on the attractiveness of the organization.

The relationship between corporate branding, internal branding and employer branding also needs to be further investigated (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng 2010, 401). Rampl & Kenning (2014, 230-231) suggest that future research could investigate the differences between industries, gender, age and culture as employer branding has been studied on more general level in the past. This might provide additional information on how employer branding should be positioned in different settings. Verma & Ahmad (2016, 51) point out that more research on prospective employees' responses to employer brands is required in order to draw more general conclusions on how the employer brand influences company's talent acquisition.

In addition, more research is needed on what tools should be used for internal and external marketing of the employer brand. Also, the difference between corporate and employer brand should be studied more in detail. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 512) Wilden, Gudergan & Lings (2010, 70) present that the impact of employer branding before and after recruitment should be more thoroughly

studied in order to analyze its overall effect on human capital. Derived from all these above mentioned research suggestions it can be stated that employer branding needs to be researched more from different point of views in order to make major conclusions about the true need for employer branding and its effectiveness.

1.2 Research problem and questions

The research problem has been constructed in cooperation with the case company, Lindström, and their human resource management (HRM). The research problem was identified from the challenges that many companies universally, as well as Lindström, have faced during the times of labor shortage. In a phone conversation on 26th of September 2014 A. Lönnblad, Development Manager at Lindström, confirmed that Lindström's HR professionals have discovered that occasionally their open positions attract lower amount of applicants than what they have expected, more particularly, it has been identified that the amount of applicants who match the criteria of the open position could be higher. This challenge has occurred in the recruitment of sales personnel.

According to a phone conversation on 6th of October 2014 A. Lönnblad outlined that Lindström's HR has the perception that the company's employer brand could be developed further. This perception has been strengthened in interview situations where it has become apparent that some of the applicants know fairly little about Lindström and its operations. It has also been discovered that many applicants had not have that high expectations about the company before the interview and in fact, were positively surprised about the company in general, once they were provided with more information. It seems that some people outside the organization have the perception that Lindström represents simply laundry business and Lindström's services as a whole are not that well-known. The size of the business, as well as Lindström's international operations are also surprising knowledge to some people outside the organization.

Lindström has already taken actions which target to attract students and graduates and therefore the focus of this study has chosen to be on a different segment; experienced sales professionals. This segment has been identified to have potential but somewhat challenging to reach. Therefore, investigating how to attract, recruit and retain these high performing sales professionals is the focus of this study.

The aim is to better understand the phenomenon of employer branding and identify concrete factors which could be improved. HRM of Lindström wishes to get deeper knowledge and tools for improving its employer brand especially inside the chosen aforementioned segment. As the competition of skilled workforce is rapidly increasing and Lindström has already identified the benefits of developing the attraction, recruitment and retention of people in this segment, it is useful for the HRM to gain more in-depth knowledge on what could be changed in order to improve their operations.

Thereby, the main research question is:

“How to improve organization’s attractiveness, recruitment and retention of high performing sales professionals through employer branding?”

Five sub-questions were formed to support the main research question to provide additional in-depth knowledge on the topic:

S1: How Lindström’s employer image is perceived among existing vs. potential sales employees?

S2: Why Lindström is not an attractive employer for high-performing sales professionals on the job market?

S3: How Lindström could improve its attractiveness among high performing sales professionals on the job market?

S4: How Lindström could more effectively recruit high performing sales professionals?

S5: How Lindström could improve the retention of current high performing sales personnel?

1.3 Preliminary conceptual framework

Presented below, in Figure 1, is the conceptual framework of this study. The framework introduces the key concepts related to this research as well as the relationships between these concepts. These key concepts were examined by gathering data and reviewing recent academic articles. Furthermore, these concepts were examined in context of the case company, Lindström. Hence, employer branding and its implementation was studied with the objective of finding tools and ideas to be used to target the aforementioned segment.

As the case company's HRM is interested in deepening their knowledge concerning employer branding, it is beneficial to study the previous findings on the subject and then research the image of the company in the eyes of applicants and existing sales personnel.

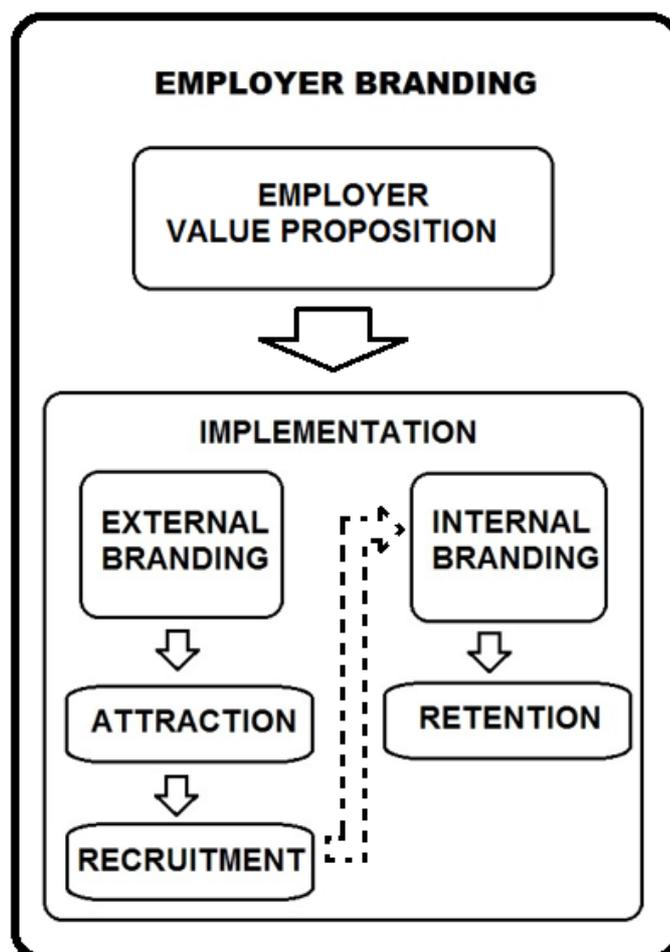


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

According to the framework, employer branding begins with the formation of employer value proposition. After the proposition has been fully developed, branding process divides into external and internal branding. Internal branding is hoped to lead into employee retention whereas, external branding is meant to increase the organizational attractiveness and enhance recruitment. After recruitment the process continues to internal branding and retention. Thus, implementing both internal and external branding is important for the employer brand as an entity. The process is continuous since the flow of workforce continues as well.

1.4 Definitions of key concepts

The concepts introduced in the conceptual framework are here defined to ensure better understanding of the study. These concepts are in central role in the study and are therefore discussed in certain point-of-views which are also presented below.

Employer branding

According to App, Merk & Büttgen (2012, 266) employer branding can be characterized as strategic management of the company's image and in short, employer brand aims to express what kind of values the company represents. Similarly to product branding, employer branding seeks to strengthen positive perceptions and to create loyalty (Uma & Metilda 2012, 111). Wilden, Gudergan & Lings (2010, 57) highlight that employer branding is a long-term strategy which not only aims at recruiting and retaining employees but to communicating the image of the company in a consistent way both internally and externally.

Employer value proposition

In this study value proposition will be discussed on employer perspective. Employer value proposition (EVP) introduces multiple benefits and through the value proposition the company should be able to establish perceptions which improve organization's attractiveness and internal development (App, Merk & Büttgen 2012, 269). EVP works as a foundation for employer brand and its

management (Robertson & Khatibi 2013, 20). Chhabra & Leekha (2014, 50) establish that the image of an attractive employer springs from the EVP.

Internal and external branding

Employer branding can be executed internally and externally. Internal branding is in question when branding operations are targeted to existing employees and these acts are not that visible for people outside the organization. Whereas, external branding is completely targeted to people outside the organization. More specifically, external branding is aimed to have an effect on stakeholders: customers, media, competitors and potential employees. On both occasions, the main objective is to create and strengthen a unique and positive perception about the company. (Lievens 2007, 52)

Attractiveness

In this research the term 'attractiveness' is used in the context of the perceived attraction that a current or potential employee has towards a particular employer. Thus, the word attractiveness refers to organizational attractiveness. Organizational attraction has been identified as one of the key components that leads to intention to apply for a certain job. To ensure effective recruitment it is crucial to understand the factors behind this intention as well as being able to identify what makes the company attractive to potential candidates. (Gomes & Neves 2011, 685)

Recruitment

Recruitment is the process of identifying the need in human capital which results in hiring workforce. Recruitment process has many stages and the objective of these stages is to find a fit between the open position and a candidate. Recruitment is always a risk because it requires lots of investments and the chosen candidate may not perform as expected. (Franca & Pahor 2012, 84)

Retention

In this study the term retention refers to retaining employees, i.e. a company being able to maintain its staff so that they will not apply for other jobs outside the organization. Retention is linked to loyalty and satisfaction of the employees. From the company's perspective, retention is more cost-efficient than continuous recruiting and therefore it is important to invest on factors which are likely to generate retention. (Franca & Pahor 2012, 85)

1.5 Delimitations of the study

This study is focused on the Finnish job market and more specifically on Lindström's operations in Finland. Therefore, Lindström's other operational countries have been delimited out of this study since all the countries should have been researched individually due to cultural and operational differences.

The chosen target group of this research is high performing sales professionals as this has been identified as one of the desirable segments for Lindström's future recruitment. This particular segment has not been targeted previously which also makes this research valuable for the company. Thus, other segments, such as graduates and students will be left out of this study. The study has been implemented both inside and outside the organization in order to gain both insights on the topic.

As the main problem is somewhat weak employer brand and the benefits of developing and strengthening it have been identified, the theory will concentrate on employer branding and its different components in HRM. However, recruitment will not be discussed further, only to the extent which is relevant according to the subject. Organizational attractiveness will be researched in relation to recruitment, delimiting other perspectives of organizational attractiveness such as brand loyalty. In addition, branding will be explored only in the context of employer branding thus, the general aspect of branding is not touched upon in this research. Retention of employees will not be examined broadly in this research, moreover the focus will be on improving the retention of this particular segment.

1.6 Research methodology

This research aims at gaining knowledge and deeper understanding of the topic in order to develop Lindström's operations concerning organizational attractiveness, recruitment and retention. The HRM has identified the benefits of examining the key factors influencing Lindström's employer brand and getting a deeper insight of the topic in general. Thus, the research is conducted with qualitative methods. Qualitative method was chosen also because the aim of the study is to gain better understanding of a phenomenon, rather than explaining a phenomenon with statistical data. Qualitative research is commonly used in cases where it is important to get a deeper understanding and open discussions used in qualitative research tend to deepen the understanding more effectively than quantitative, numerical data. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 1997, 160)

The approach of this research is inductive with the aim of getting deeper understanding on the issues concerning Lindström's attraction, recruitment and retention which were identified while gathering data. More in detail, this research is conducted as a case study since the objective is to gain insights on the topic specifically understanding the phenomenon at Lindström. The case study is focused solely on Lindström's operations in Finland and more in detail the recruitment process of certain segment. The data will be gathered from primary and secondary sources and analyzed in order to identify clear development areas.

Primary data includes the semi-structured interviews of existing and potential employees and secondary data discussion with Lindström's HR department, analysis of corporate website and recruitment material. Job satisfaction survey conducted in year 2013 at Lindström and national research on employer image conducted by T-Media in 2013 are also analyzed in order to clarify the current situation of Lindström's employer image and organizational attractiveness. Research approach and design are presented more in detail in chapter 4.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

Second and third chapter of this research are the theoretical part, which introduces the main theory of employer branding and most important aspects concerning the research topic in the area of HRM. Employer image and organizational attractiveness are presented together with different components of recruitment and factors leading to retention. Employer branding is discussed with internal and external point-of-views.

After the theory, the fourth chapter presents the research methodology more in detail and the case company will be introduced shortly. This chapter also includes more information on data collection, data analysis as well as the validity and reliability of this research. Empirical results are presented in the following chapter including both perspectives, internal and external in order to provide more versatile comprehension on the topic. The final chapter of this thesis is focused on introducing the main findings and managerial implications together with future research suggestions in Lindström's perspective as well as in general.

2 EMPLOYER BRANDING

Employer branding can be defined as a long-term strategy which aims at managing the perceptions of current and prospective employees (Chhabra & Sharma 2014, 49). Employer branding emerged in HRM in the end of 1990's when skilled workforce was in high demand due to global growth of IT solutions (Chhabra & Sharma 2014, 52). Essentially brand is described as a promise of quality but the point of employer branding is to create a distinctive perception that differentiates the company from its competitors. Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng (2010, 401) point out that similarly to consumer brand, also employer brand should be unique, significant and distinguishable. Verma & Ahmad (2016, 44) reflect that even though the impact of employer branding to attraction as well as retention of talent has been found, there is still a clear shortage of knowledge on how to develop an employer branding model which predicts the attraction and retention.

Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 502-503) present that employer branding has three stages. First, company develops a value proposition based on organization's culture and qualities it wishes to embody in the brand. Secondly, this value proposition is to be marketed to the desired kind of prospective employees. Lastly, the brand will be marketed internally to the company's existing workforce, to ensure that the promise made in the recruitment phase is delivered. Verma & Ahmad (2016, 44) argue that employer branding has been the trend of HR management for the past years but it actually is a process which requires all the units of the firm to participate and HR department's work alone is not sufficient enough.

In short, employer branding is a process that many companies of today embark on in a quest of becoming more attractive alternative for potential employees and to strengthen the satisfaction of existing employees. One of the main objectives of employer branding is to clarify the image of the company as an employer and to generate positive associations among stakeholders. To implement employer branding strategy, it is critical to plan it thoroughly in order

to achieve complete integration and conformity in the organization. (Robertson & Khatibi 2012, 43)

There are some contradictions in the literature of employer branding and many of the concepts are used either without clear definitions or labelling similar concepts as one. Although the concepts involved in employer branding share similarities and they overlap to some extent, this chapter explains the meanings of these concepts in order to clarify the differences.

2.1 Employer value proposition

In the recruitment perspective drawing up a value proposition that attracts potential employees is very important. Basically value proposition embodies the value that the organization offers to the prospective employees and with the help of value proposition companies aim at becoming the employer of choice in the minds of potential employees. (Gowan 2004, 687-688)

Employer value proposition (EVP) is the basis of employer branding process and its components can be divided in five different categories: people, work, organization, opportunity and rewards. In short, with the help of these categories, EVP provides a statement which explains what the company is all about, what it provides for its stakeholders and what does the company require from its staff. (Robertson & Khatibi 2012, 32-33) According to Gowan (2004, 695) EVP has to explain work characteristics in such manner that the applicant gets an idea of what kind of responsibilities and tasks are included and in what kind of working environment those should be performed. Also, providing the information on how employees are rewarded is important since rewarding has been distinguished as one of the most critical determinants in attracting applicants.

It is crucial that EVP is built on existing and truthful factors otherwise it will lack in consistency and there is a risk of blurred message (Robertson & Khatibi 2012, 43). According to Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 502) after the value proposition has been drawn, it needs to be sold to the recruitment managers to ensure that they

are capable of selling it forward to potential employees. Depicting from this it can be said that developing EVP is the basis of employer branding and in order to plan an efficient strategy, EVP needs to be realistic and in line with the company values. In the figure below the importance of EVP is shown as it affects the organizational outcomes. According to Robertson & Khatibi (2012, 22, 28) employer value proposition needs to be build, communicated internally and externally as well as managed in order it to take the form of employer brand and afterwards it gets affected by organizational factors and can lead to organizational outcomes such as increase in attractiveness as an employer.

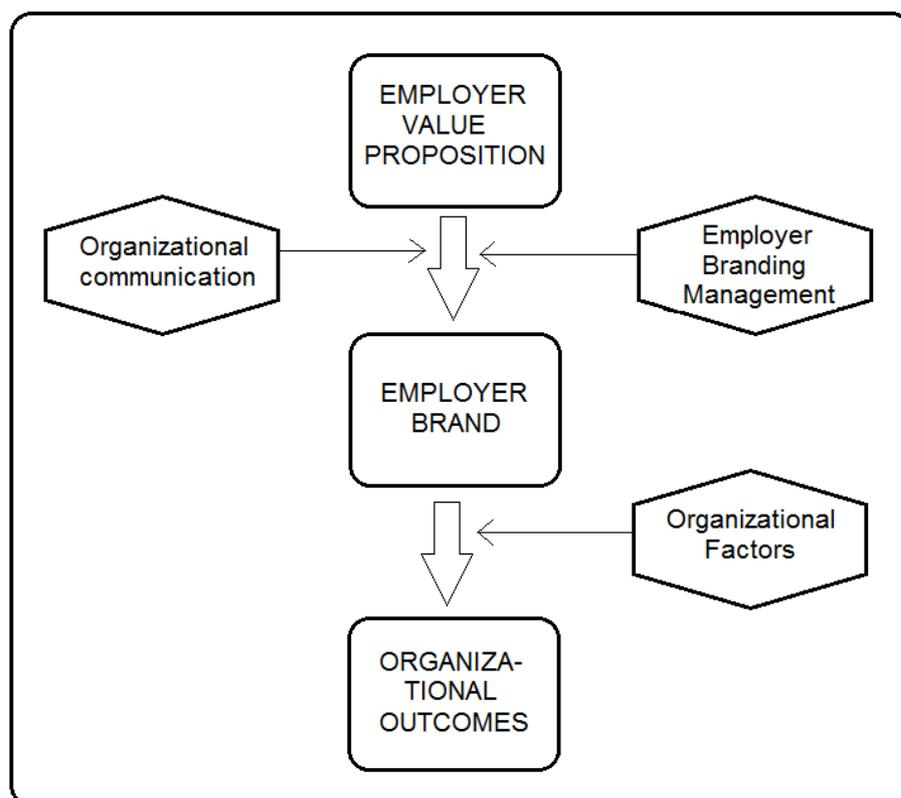


Figure 2. Illustration of the development of employer value proposition into organizational outcomes

2.1.1 Employer brand

EVP influences employer brand and its two dimensions; internal and external on different levels. Employer brand can be explained as psychological contract between an employer and employee and this contract is based on

EVP's components (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng 2010, 403). Employer brand represents a promise of certain values and organization culture for potential and existing employees.

As brands are often said to be one of the most important assets to company, employer brand can be described to be as important for recruitment and retention (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 501). Improving retention and organizational attractiveness remain as a challenge despite different kinds of strategies and tactics developed by human resource (HR) and branding specialists. Building an employer brand, maintaining visibility and promoting a certain image, is a way of tackling this issue. (Chhabra & Sharma 2014, 52)

One of the key issues in forming an employer brand is to fully recognize and understand what potential and current employees seek for. Thus, it is important to find out what kinds of values are important to the company's employees and develop the brand accordingly, so that it portrays those values. Simply, employer brand should be a reflection of the employees' values. (Biswas & Suar 2013, 100)

According to couple of researches (Uma & Metilda 2012; Biswas & Suar 2013) employer brand should be formed on the basis of employee's values which can be categorized as: interest value, social value, economic value, developmental value and application value. Interest value explains the level of attraction that the employee has towards the firm, social value describes the pleasant working environment. Whereas, economic value represents the information on employees' satisfaction on the compensation and promotion possibilities. Developmental value discusses recognition at work, professional growth and career enhancements and application value explains the degree of possibilities to apply things that employees have learned and also to teach others. Uma & Metilda (2012, 112) argue, that the better a firm is able to satisfy aforementioned values the better its employer image will be.

Franca & Pahor (2012, 83) argue, that employer's that have been able to build a strong employer brand also attracted more candidates and especially

candidates who fulfill the criteria for the open position. In addition, companies that have succeeded in creation of their employer brand are more likely to perform better financially. Therefore, employer brand is truly a crucial asset for any company.

2.1.2 Internal employer branding

Internal employer branding is the combination of human HRM and marketing actions. It has been discovered that internal employer branding leads to improved brand identification, commitment and behavior which supports the brand. (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng 2010, 403) Internal employer branding is important part of employer branding as a whole and as targeted to existing employees, it is likely to generate loyalty and at best resulting in positive word-of-mouth to be spread also outside the organization.

Internal branding is quite new approach and it is intended to distinguish and improve the firm's position at the market with the possibility to focus on their vision, mission and values. Internal branding is basically adopting initiatives internally with the aim of strengthening the brand among the current employees. Employees play a key role in adopting the brand and bringing it to life as they are the ones who implement the strategy in the end. Thus, it can be stated that internal branding uses employees in the making of the brand. In addition, HR processes, different organizational strategies including marketing and public relations are actively applied in order to build internal employer brand. (Raj & Jyothi 2011, 1-2)

2.1.3 External employer branding

According to Kapoor (2010, 51) external employer branding can be referred as a proactive solution for talent shortage which aims at securing regular stream of applicants. In external setting, employer branding is applied to create a top-of-mind position in the minds of potential employees.

Raj & Jyothi (2011, 6) argue that external branding is using external sources and possibly some investments to create visibility and presence outside the organization in platforms where job seekers are present. Franca & Pahor (2012, 87) point out that external employer branding is very important especially for the recruitment process, since it has been acknowledged that potential candidates look for the information about the employer on different sources and not all of these sources can be controlled and managed by the organization itself. Thus, strong employer brand needs to be built externally to reach a top-of-mind position in the minds of potential candidates.

Wilden, Gudergan & Lings (2010, 58) point out that if a company's products are not targeted for consumers but to other businesses it may be more difficult for them to attract recruits as the awareness of the company in general may be lower than compared to companies that operate in consumer markets.

2.1.4 Corporate brand

Corporate brands are a representation of companies' values which have a clear effect on the relationships in business life. In addition, corporate brands are created to characterize the identity of the firm and share its contents with an integrated concept. Corporate brand can also be described as an interface for communication between the firm and its stakeholders. Thereby, a strong corporate brand represents the center of attention and activities carried out by the stakeholders. (Vernuccio 2012, 212, 216)

Companies operating in business-to-business markets might not have well-known product or corporate brands, hence, employer branding demands more efforts compared to firms that are already identified by their corporate/product brands (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 512). Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng (2010, 403) suggest that corporate brand is a promise from the organization to its customers.

Corporate brand can also be defined as the immediate perception that comes to people's minds when thinking of the company. The difference to corporate

identity is that identity embodies the corporate culture and strengths and future direction. (Raj & Jyothi 2011, 4) In order to build a strong corporate brand the identity of the firm must be well managed and controlled. Strategic vision, corporate image and organizational culture need to be closely attached to each other including management and employees but also company's external stakeholders. (Vernuccio 2014, 212)

Nowadays there is a whole new way of building corporate brands, co-creation with stakeholders enabled by effective communication and fitting channels. This emerging open source branding is based on creative interaction and social media has been identified as the most promising environment supporting co-building of corporate brand. (Vernuccio 2014, 212)

2.2 Image

Image in the context of business world can be roughly defined as a perception of external stakeholders'. Therefore, image management requires investments as image is a critical factor for companies' success. (Cian & Cervai 2014, 182) Rindell (2013, 205) points out that images are not just impressions and associations of current status; moreover, they are a blend of past and present. Previous reflections of the image can be referred to as image heritage. Thus, image is under construction constantly and prone to changes.

It can be stated that image is in a starring role in affecting people's perceptions externally and internally. Having a strong, positive image that truly represents the company values and culture is likely to attract people with similar mindsets. However, building and maintaining desired image requires effort and strategic planning (Cian & Cervai 2014, 183).

Image can also be a construed image, where the image is built on the perception of how others feel about the organization (Cian & Cervai 2014, 189). Image is vulnerable and if there is negativity associated to the image it may have crucial consequences. Image has been conceptualized and measured in various ways but Van Hoye et al. (2013, 544) argue that images include two

dimensions: instrumental and symbolic. Instrumental dimension takes into account concrete and tangible attributes whereas; symbolic dimension consists of intangible and abstract traits. Van Hoyer et al. also point out that sometimes job seekers are more attracted to the symbolism that they associate with the company than to the actual job.

2.2.1 Employer image

Employer image is a perception of how people see the company as an employer. Employer image embodies the knowledge and the impressions regarding the company that people outside the company have (Gomes & Neves 2011, 687). Recently companies' interest to create an image of being a desirable employer has increased. People, both outside and inside the organization, evaluate the company partly based on the perception they have about the company as an employer. (Lievens, van Hoyer & Anseel 2007, 48) This perception is influenced by different determinants, for example, how the company treats its staff, how employees' well-being is valued, the things that the company is known-for, like the duration of careers, attitude towards corporate social responsibility etc. It is important to acknowledge that company may have a different kind of image as a business corporation than the image it has as an employer.

Robertson & Khatibi (2012, 32) present that employer image is part of employer brand and therefore it is one of the building blocks in a bigger entity. Moreover, employer image is not important only when fighting for the skilled workforce, in addition it may be a deal-breaker for possible partners in industries where transparency is valued.

Robertson & Khatibi (2012, 43) argue that well-developed employer brand strategy has a clear correlation with increased strength of employer image. Positive and attractive employer image is connected to the amount and quality of applicants and may also have an effect on stakeholders' behavior and willingness to co-operate. Thus, it makes sense for companies to pay attention

on how they are perceived as an employer, how to develop this image and manage it in accordance.

2.2.2 Corporate image

Corporate image has been labelled in many ways such as: company evaluation, corporate identity, organizational reputation and corporate associations. This inconsistency has led into confusion among researchers and practitioners. The definition of corporate image can be roughly stated as the sum of perceptions that external stakeholders have about a company. (Cian & Cervai 2014, 187)

Abd-El-Salaam, Shawky & El-Nahas (2013, 131) point out that corporate image is considered as a crucial determinant in the evaluation of the organization as a whole and they also propose that it plays a big role in successful positioning. Rindell (2013, 200) agrees that corporate image is a meaningful factor affecting the success of the organization.

Rindell (2013, 198) proposes that corporate image is more of a process than concrete entity because images change constantly in the minds of stakeholders due to interaction and culture-dependency. Corporate image is a way of differentiating the company and a well-managed corporate image may work as an asset in the market especially in situations where competing organizations are perceived very much alike on availability and price. (Abd-El-Salaam, Shawky & El-Nahas 2013, 130)

Reputation is often referred to when discussing corporate image, especially in the consumer perspective (Rindell 2013, 199). However, reputation is just one of the particles of corporate image. Corporate image is said to have two dimensions which represent different kinds of characteristics. First there is functional component which is easy to measure by tangible factors. Secondly corporate image contains emotional component which includes beliefs, attitudes and emotions that cannot be measured or assessed (Abd-El-Salaam, Shawky & El-Nahas 2013, 131).

3 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

One of the most important tasks of HRM is talent management, which basically means managing the human capital of the organization. This includes recruitment, assessment, development and retention of employees, the most vital resource for any organization. (Chhabra & Mishra 2008, 52) According to Mitchell, Obeidat & Bray (2013, 900) strategic HRM has risen to a valuable research topic and the influence of HRM as a strategic tool has increased in the past few years due to growth of competitive pressure.

The critical role of HR managers is to develop and build the organization's HR in order to achieve and sustain competitive advantage. Therefore, HRM can be evaluated on resource-based view which presents proof of the importance of effective HRM (Mitchell, Obeidat & Bray 2013, 902). Shaw, Park & Kim (2013, 574) add that today's HR managers have distinguished the possibilities of sustaining competitive edge through hiring and retaining high quality workforce and are forced to come up with more creative solutions as the increased competition has lead into so called talent war.

Mitchell, Obeidat & Bray (2013, 913-914) point out that during these competitive times HRM needs to focus on finding new ways to enhance the performance of the organization including improving processes and developing ways of doing work to ensure that employees' motivation and skills improve along the way. In order to succeed in this, HRM must evolve and obtain more strategic role inside the organization. Moreover, management should ally with HRM in order to become strategic partners who together achieve development.

App, Merk & Büttgen (2012, 265-266) note that sustainable HRM can be used to increase employer attractiveness and suggest that organizations should aim at more strategic and sustainable HRM in order to become the employer of choice. However, several organizations are falling behind as they are not being active on this field just yet and therefore their profitability and competitiveness are not reaching the full potential.

3.1 Organizational attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness is said to depend on the characteristics of the job and organizational attributes (Gomes & Neves 2011, 687). Attractiveness in this context can be defined as the benefits that that potential employees associate to the company (Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen 2013, 474). The perceived image of the employer has been distinguished as one of the most important determinants of applicants' attraction towards companies (Van Hoyer et al. 2013, 544) Therefore, increasing organizational attractiveness has become one of the targets of employer branding (Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen 2013, 474).

Organizational attractiveness is not important only for attracting best candidates but also in attracting best possible partners. Organizations that are generally seen in a positive light are more likely to get high amount of skilled applicants. The factors affecting to organizational attractiveness may vary a lot among applicants, but there are factors that are generally seen as determinants in evaluating the attractiveness of the organization. Researchers have found a positive correlation between organizational attractiveness and intention to apply for a job and in addition, it has been discovered that the perceived responsibility of the job tasks are related to organizational attractiveness. Thus, it can be stated that if the advertised position is associated to responsibility among potential applicants, the organization seems more attractive. (Gomes & Neves 2011, 691, 692)

Organizational attractiveness has also been linked to organizational familiarity, the state of awareness and exposure the firm has for potential candidates, as the companies' familiarity may increase the attractiveness as well (Gomes & Neves 2011, 696). Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen (2013, 474) points out, that there is an indication that potential employees seek for a match between the organization's image and their personality, values and needs and if these seem to fit, the organization is more likely to be perceived as attractive.

The research of Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen (2013, 476) studied the organizational attractiveness with 5 dimensions evaluating the attractiveness

through interest, economic, application, social and development value and noted that all these values are determinants in the reputation of the organization which in turn has an effect on the perceived organizational attractiveness. According to Johnson & Roberts (2006, 38) there are 5 basic reasons why people choose to leave the organization: the reputation of the company is different what they expected, they don't feel appreciated and the environment is not supportive, advancement opportunities are not clearly communicated or they are not satisfied with the compensation. In addition, Johnson & Roberts point out that compensation is not on the top of this list which usually is a common perception. However, if a company develops all the aforementioned areas it will increase its attractiveness among current employees.

3.2 Intentions to apply

According to Gomes and Neves three main determinants of recruitment process have been identified in applicants' point of view: intention to apply a job vacancy, to pursue a career and to accept the job. The intention to apply has been researched in order to understand the decision processes of a prospective applicant and also what attracts the applicants in general. The intention to accept the job is closely related to the perceived characteristics of the job, such as the nature of the tasks and responsibilities, security and reward. Understanding these processes and identifying what triggers the intention to apply is important knowledge for companies during the times of labor shortage since it allows companies to fine-tune their recruitment processes. (2011, 685, 686)

Gomes & Neves (2011, 694) concluded in their research that perceiving the open position as meaningful work led to perceiving the organization as attractive and this resulted in intention to apply for a job vacancy. Therefore, organizational attractiveness has a strong impact on the intention to apply. However, Gomes and Neves point out, that there are underlying factors which may have an effect on whether the applicant actually applies for the job regardless of how attractive or non-attractive the company is perceived, for example the urgency to find a job (2011, 696).

3.3 Recruitment

Recruitment is a process that includes multiple stages and is usually pursued after identifying a need for hiring. After the need identification the company needs to develop criteria and profile for the position in question. One of the corner stones for a recruiting company is to be able to attract targeted group of applicants. In the past recent years recruitment has been one of the most researched topics due to the competitive markets and changes in the labor force. (Gomes & Neves 2011, 684)

Recruitment is a tool for companies to mold their company in the direction that is wanted. Recruiting individuals that have the skills which can help the company to succeed is important and therefore, companies invest a lot of time and effort in recruitment processes. Positions may be opened several times before the company makes a decision to hire a candidate as recruiting individuals who are not a fit with the organization, will be costly. (Franca & Pahor 2012, 83)

The process of recruitment has changed a lot during the last few years, since the job market has become more competitive and it is a struggle to identify perfect candidates but also to attract them. New techniques have been applied and nowadays recruitment has multiple stages instead of only one face-to-face interview which used to be a common policy. Due to the changes and competitive pressure in the labor market, there has been a change in the HRM's means and they are forced to develop strategies on how to sell the open positions for the right segment. (Franca & Pahor 2012, 79)

Recruitment is not only investing time and money into finding and hiring top talent but also an action targeted to maximize the effectiveness of the whole organization (Franca & Pahor 2012, 83). Kaliprasad (2006, 20) points out that even though recruitment process includes careful research, checking applicants' references, screening and interviews, it always has its risks since recruiting the wrong kind of person may result in lost loss on investments.

There are multiple ways to recruit people but there are some general guidelines which are good to follow, such as; meeting the applicants face-to-face and/or via skype or software as such which allows you to communicate with live video. It is also good to ask for more information on possible gaps in the applicant's job history and if possible verify the reasons behind those gaps. One general tip is to check if the open position and its requirements fit with the applicant's educational background and previous job experience. (Kaliprasad 2006, 21)

According to Gowan (2004, 687, 689) recruitment is likely to succeed when person-job fit as well as person-organization fit are taken into consideration when choosing the right candidate for the job. Nowadays recruitment meets the challenges of global recruitment as companies are so focused on finding the best possible candidate and jobseekers are willing to relocate if needed. In this case, cultural differences must be carefully considered.

3.3.1 Communication and promise

Communication is critical for every company especially in the recruitment process. Organizational communication needs to be clear and consistent, also informative but still attractive enough to create interest. Organization's communication is usually planned according to certain guidelines in order to ensure that conflicts are avoided. Well planned communication is also part of brand management. Every company has a promise that they try to sell to prospective applicants and simultaneously deliver for the existing employees. This promise is a package of impressions and perceptions that the company is deliberately marketing to the target group. The organization culture is a big part of the promise as it embodies most of the factors that are part of the promise. Therefore, the promise needs to be in line with the true organization culture and current perceptions for it to be credible. (App, Merk & Büttgen 2012, 270, 271)

Recruitment communication should provoke jobseekers' intention to apply for the open position. If the job advertisement is not appealing or interesting a company may lose many potential employees. The recruitment market is highly competitive especially nowadays when companies compete in identifying and

attracting the most skilled professionals that fit in to their organization culture. Thus, communication should be somewhat different in order to stand out from the crowd. In addition, it has been found that job advertisements which have detailed information are more likely to generate positive outcomes since the jobseeker processes the detailed information and therefore is more likely to form a deeper perception of the company in question and then the probability of one applying for the job increases. (Roberson, Collins & Oreg 2005, 322)

3.3.2 Channels

Nowadays there is a variety of channels where companies may communicate and inform people outside and inside the organization. Being visible is important but visibility also requires planning and well developed strategy in order to generate desired outcomes. However, choosing the best fitting channels is not an easy task especially in this technology-driven era where options are almost unlimited. (Kaur et al. 2015, 9)

Different channels reach different kind of audiences and thus it is important to do research on what kind of channels would better reach the desired kind of applicants. According to Chhabra & Sharma's research (2014, 55) many of job-seekers prefer to get information about the employer through job portals. Therefore, it is important to recognize the right job portals to reach the right target audience of potential employees as job portals have significant differences. However, Kaur et al. (2015, 8) argue that one of the most effective channels for communication of brand and recruitment practices is social media which allows screening of potential applicants. Social media offers a platform for interaction and during the past few years it has proven its power being the channel where millions of job openings are posted every month, mostly on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Emergence of social media has completely changed the way companies communicate to their shareholders. Not only communicating has become cheaper due social media, but it has also increased the chances of reaching bigger crowds. Yet, the information overload of social media is a major

challenge that companies struggle with. Thus, the content is crucial since social media users are merciless, they will not waste their time in something that does not appeal to them because they have so many alternatives available. It is also important to note, that even though the positive aspect of using social media is low cost, it still doesn't mean that it would be easy to make a breakthrough there and some companies are faced with entry barriers, for example on knowledge of how to use social media effectively. (Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene 2013, 306)

It is clear, that social media has become a vital channel for companies' marketing because it allows a closer relationship with wider audiences. Interaction is direct which has enabled deeper connection between the organization and the audience but in addition, companies are forced to take the role of an observer since they are not able to control all the content which is found on the social media. (Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene 2013, 306) However, according to Vernuccio (2014, 228) most companies should expand the range of social media that they use in order to develop their branding strategy as the researchers point out that many companies are present in social media, but they are not exploiting its full potential.

Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene (2013, 306) outline that communication processes has become more complicated due to these new channels because companies are still using the more traditional communication channels as well. Thus, each company should form a plan which channels to use in order to maximize the effectiveness. Investing resources on communication in less efficient channels is purely waste of money but departing from channels that are actively followed may result in loss of followers.

3.5 Retention

The importance of keeping qualified and talented employees inside the organization has increased significantly during the past years, as the competition over skilled workforce is accelerating. Many companies have defined retention as their objective because they simply wish to maintain the existing talent pool to generate success. Retention can also be seen as

minimizing the costs, as recruitment and training new employees requires resources. Therefore, retention is more cost-effective than recruitment. (Robertson & Khatibi 2013, 19-20)

According to Raj & Jyothi (2011, 2) it is important that the employees are connected emotionally and feel that they can relate to the experiences that they have with the company's values. Having positive reinforcement and the company being able to fulfill the promises which were made in the recruitment process are likely to result in retention.

Chhabra & Mishra (2008, 50, 51) point out that retaining employees is challenging for companies and the most common reasons for low retention rates are poor career path opportunities, unsatisfying remuneration packages and troubles with adapting to the organization. Due to the easiness of changing a job, relocating in other industry and moving to different area has decreased the willingness to be loyal towards a certain organization. However, retention has become more and more important to companies since baby boomers are about to retire, the expectations and capabilities of workforce have changed and the economy keeps on expanding globally.

According to Chhabra & Mishra (2008, 51, 52) there are different kind of retention strategies that focus on different aspects. They propose that top performers should be re-recruited before they start looking for something else or someone else discovers them, mentoring should be arranged to ensure that younger and new employees feel that they belong to the team, career opportunities must be clear for current and potential employees and alternative work options should be offered for employees who are about to retire. In addition, managerial style might need changes for the younger employees and it is important to identify and develop key individuals who have what it takes to step in the managerial position. Last, but not least, Chhabra & Mishra present that differentiating the company is crucial and striving for making the employees proud to work in the company should generate positive results.

Important point of view for retention of valuable workforce is also the fact that many companies are filled with poor performers which cause enormous costs for any organization. Identifying and moving on these individuals who are dragging the performance and are not achieving required standards may lead into affecting the whole team negatively and in worst case scenario weak performer escalates into group of weak performers and this damages the employee value proposition. It might even occur that underdevelopment inside the team discourages the high performing individuals so radically that they are willing to seek for other opportunities. (Chhabra & Mishra 2008, 55-56)

According to Stynen, Forrier and Sels (2014 196, 197) young workforce is more willing to sacrifice their expectations on the rewards whereas, more mature employees have better self-esteem and understanding of their worth to the organization. Therefore, people with more experience are more likely to expect higher salaries and compensation in return of their talent. Especially individuals who have proven track record of their success in business life have the tendency to demand more monetary compensation and rewards are the key drivers of their motivation since the learning curve has reached its top so to speak. Compensation naturally plays a big part of this kind of individuals' retention.

3.5.1 Job satisfaction

Ouedraogo & Leclerc (2013, 36) describe job satisfaction as an attitude, either positive or negative, that a person has about his employment in general and about the work environment. Chomal & Baruah (2014, 54) point out that job satisfaction is very intricate as a concept as it might be understood differently among people. However, satisfaction is an outcome of the past and captures the feelings that employees' have about their work, colleagues and the organization.

There are several identified factors which influence on the job satisfaction, such as employee's personality and the nature of the work tasks. Also, social relationships and satisfaction in life in general have an effect on the job

satisfaction (Ouedraogo & Leclerc 2013, 37-38). Chomal & Baruah (2014, 59) found evidence for the statement that employees who are less rewarded tend to feel less job satisfaction and therefore, companies should consider performance-based rewarding.

Job satisfaction is the key in retention and thus many companies actively investigate the job satisfaction of their employees on regular basis in order to keep track of the matters which could be improved. The higher the job satisfaction is the higher the retention rate usually is. Company's performance and job satisfaction also have a clear relationship and therefore satisfaction has proven to be in a crucial role in today's turbulent environment. (Ouedraogo & Leclerc 2013, 35)

3.5.2 Loyalty and motivation

Every company wishes to have loyal employees and since recruitment always requires lot of resources, it is worth investing in matters that are likely to result in loyalty. Commitment and loyalty of the employees are one of the major concerns for companies due to their effect on the company's performance. The nature of this concern is especially highlighted because of the economic pressure that many companies are affected by. Employee loyalty as a concept includes attachment, commitment, trust and participation and it is said to encourage employees to express their feelings but it also deters the likelihood of leaving from the company (Guillon & Cezanne 2014, 839)

Loyal employees represent competitive advantage to the organization and the link between loyalty and the quality of the service has been acknowledged. In addition, loyalty also affects customer satisfaction according to Guillon & Cezanne (2014, 842). However, Kumar & Shekhar (2012, 101) point out, that loyalty may be viewed on different standpoints and in the 80's loyalty was simply defined as the attachment that employees feel towards their employer, but nowadays there has been identified differences in the nature of loyalty. The level of loyalty can manifest in different ways in the behavior of the employee depending on the aspect, such as work safety, obeying the rules, maintaining

the required level of quality, being active in suggesting development ideas, committing to finishing tasks and staying in the service of the company.

Kumar & Shekhar (2012, 101) argue, that according to recent studies, the explanation for loyalty is that employee gives his best due to the feel of attachment towards the company. Furthermore, the possibility to further one's career is related to loyalty thus, loyalty can be generated through education which helps the employee to achieve better results in the daily duties and through career development. Therefore, employers should actively encourage to career development of their employees and make it easier to employees develop the skills which are required in their desired career paths. It is also important that career paths are marketed inside the organization as well as in the recruitment processes in order to achieve the position of interesting employer.

Motivation is in key role in retention. Motivated workforce is likely to generate efficient processes and have a positive impact on the company's overall performance. Motivation can be generated through different things depending on the individual. The most acknowledged motivation factors are the level of interest towards the job in general, appreciation of the job and the satisfaction of the possible rewards. If one does not feel interested on the job he has, does not feel himself or his work appreciated or feels that the rewards from the job are dissatisfying he will more likely look for other opportunities. If the motivation is hindered by any factor, it is likely that the performance of this individual is negatively impacted or at least the full potential of this employee is not put in to use. (Verma & Ahmad 2016, 43)

3.5.3 Staff Word-of mouth (SWOM)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is also known as bush radio, which expresses that the information is spread by people talking to each other. The risk of information flow through WOM is that the story may vary and change during its travel between different people. However, WOM has been identified as an effective way to spread information across consumers and most of the time information

moves quickly. WOM has been identified to have high level of credibility. As people's perceptions are open to other people's opinions and most of people are willing to hear other's experiences, negative WOM may be very harmful for company's image and employer brand. (Keller & Fay 2012, 460)

Staff Word-of-mouth (SWOM) can be defined as the process where current or former employees share information and views about the organization in their own social networks but also outside of it, for example to people who they do not know beforehand. SWOM at its best is cost-effective communication but its' downside is the fact that it is very difficult to manage and control. SWOM is considered to be important in the early stages of recruitment in generating recruits' interest. (Keeling, McGoldrick & Sadhu 2013, 89-90) Consumers are highly affected by WOM and it has proven effect on consumers' choice in purchasing therefore, it can be assumed that when WOM is about employer it may also have a strong impact on the employer brand and intention to apply among potential recruits (Berger & Iyengar 2013, 568).

Employee referral program (ERP) is more established recruitment method where a current employee introduces a person that he knows from his own social circles to his employer and references him as a good candidate for a certain position. ERP system rewards current employees for these suggestions if they result in successful hiring. It is good to note, that if the suggested person proves to be dissatisfying hire it may have an impact on the perception of the person who referenced him. However, ERP can be considered as more defined version of SWOM as it encompasses similar characteristics but is more official and may lead into concrete results. ERP systems are also company's way to control SWOM and generate sharing of positive matters about the company. (Keeling, McGoldrick & Sadhu 2013, 88, 90)

3.6 Measurement & control

After initiating the employer branding actions, management of the process is crucial and in order it to be a success its effectiveness needs to be measured and

monitored along the way. Measurement can be applied so that firm's performance and its development from before the process until this day are evaluated. Two main assets that employer branding usually generates are employer brand associations and employer brand loyalty and assessing the development of these factors also give valuable information on the success of the employer branding. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 512)

However, Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 512) also point out, that assessing whether the company's performance has been affected by the employer branding is difficult to examine. This is often the case with many HRM related actions and a direct link between employer branding and performance might be challenging to detect. In order to make it easier to investigate the link between these two, certain focus should be decided upon, such as whether the employer branding has generated changes in the human capital or in the behavior of the workforce. Identifying the changes in more practical level include detecting the differences in employee retention and the changes in the quality and amount of applicants. Also, if there are visible changes in the job satisfaction and employee productivity these could also indicate the success of the employer branding process.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following chapter will discuss the research methodology. The research design will be explained followed by case company description. In addition, the data collection stages and methods will be presented together with more thorough description of the nature of the gathered data. The last parts of this chapter includes data analysis and discussion on the reliability and validity of the research.

4.1 Research approach & design

This research has inductive approach, which means that the research aims at developing a theory which is based on the gathered data. In inductive approach the researcher collects data and then investigates the issues which appear on the data and then focuses on these. Whereas, in deductive approach the research is based on a theory and quantitative data with large samples. Using inductive approach prevents generalization, which in turn is one of the basic features of deductive approach. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 127)

The design of this research is exploratory by nature and it has been acknowledged that this form of research works well when the aim is to discover new insights and ideas by investigating a specific issue or phenomenon. In addition the results of exploratory research are often introductory thus, it provides good basis for more broad examination and testing of formed hypotheses on the topic. (Malhotra 2012, 101, 102) Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009, 140, 141) point out that exploratory research design allows the curiosity of the researcher to guide the process as well as be flexible with the process. However, this does not mean that the research would not have a clear focus moreover, it enables versatile perspective which typically is narrowed down as the research progresses.

In exploratory research design the data collection is usually carried out with qualitative methods even though some of the data can be quantified. It is common for qualitative research to use people as research instruments as it allows the researcher to trust his own observations and thus increases the

flexibility of the study. Qualitative method also enables the researcher to regulate the amount of data in the interview situation and get deeper in the subject if needed. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 160, 200) Maxwell (2012, 30, 31) points out that qualitative research aims at developing explanations that are based on reasoning, to comprehend the process more than the final outcome and to get a deeper understanding of the context in order to better perceive how different circumstances effect on different events.

It is typical for qualitative research that the research questions are not in the controlling role of the research and they may vary during the research process. In order to gain useful results it is important that the research questions are molded in the process, they may expand as a result of learning but they still need to have a clear relationship with the main objective of the study. Thus, qualitative research design is common to have elasticity and this requires that the researcher has the ability to embark on this nature. (Maxwell 2012 4, 5)

Qualitative research is often used when the objective is to improve existing approaches and case studies are often utilized when there is a need to understand a certain phenomenon with a specified segment instead of larger entity (Maxwell 2012, 32). It has been acknowledged that Lindström requires more in-depth knowledge on the topic and in order to improve the attraction, recruitment and retention it is crucial to truly understand the viewpoints of potential and existing employees on the matter.

Case study can be described as a study which focuses on specific case and in general is more intense in nature. Case study also involves more details and aims at more developmental direction. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2011, 301) case study is more detailed investigation of a phenomena and case studies are often used as a basis for broader examination's hypotheses. As mentioned before, this research aims at catering as an introduction to the topic and enables larger investigation in the future and therefore the research is conducted as an exploratory case study.

4.2 Case company description

The case company of this research is Lindström, which operates in the textile service industry, being one of the leading companies in its field. Lindström was founded in Finland in 1848 by Carl August Lindström. Originally the company dyed textiles but entered the rental textile service in 1950's. The company is family-owned by Roiha-family and the current CEO is Juha Laurio. Lindström is financially sound company with growth expectancies. (Lindström 2016a, Lindström 2016b)

Nowadays Lindström offers mat, workwear, hygiene, shop towel, restaurant textile and personal protective equipment services for B-to-B markets. The company's parent company operates in Finland and Lindström's subsidiaries operate worldwide in 24 countries in Europe and Asia; Sweden, India, Russia, South Korea, China, Serbia and Turkey to name a few locations. Together parent company and subsidiaries form Lindström Group. Comforta is part of Lindström Group, focusing more in hotel sector's rental textiles. Lindström Group employs about 3200 employees and is based in over 80 locations. The slogan of Lindström "cares for your image" resembles the core idea behind Lindström's services. (Lindström 2016c)



Figure 3. Logo of Lindström

Lindström's values are profitable growth, long-term customer relationships, responsibility and enthusiasm and the joy of learning (Lindström2016d). The mission of Lindström is: "Textile service company Lindström strengthens the company image of its customers. Our service makes our customer's everyday life easier and provides the best value on the market. We are a responsible corporate citizen and a respected employer." Vision for 2020 is stated "Solid,

half a billion euro company, achieving excellent customer experience with engaged employees.” (Lindström 2016e)

In a year 2015 Lindström Group’s turnover increased 0,2% compared to previous year from 301 million euro to 302 million euro even though the Group’s operations were slowed down by the weakened exchange rates on the Russian market. The aim of Lindström is to finance growth primarily through income financing. Main investments during the year 2015 included expansion and modernizations of laundries in Finland as well as establishment of new service centers in China, Kazakhstan, India and Finland. (Lindström 2015, 15-17)

Acquisitions of raw material, manufacturing, transportation and maintenance of textiles are optimized to cater customer needs as well as to reduce environmental impact of the operations. Water and energy consumption has been in descending curve during the past 4 years and while the total production has been growing from year 2011 the energy consumption has been in decline. (Lindström 2015, 18-20)

The Senior Vice President, Corporate Human Resources Minna Gentz has stated that “The growth target in line with Lindström’s vision requires all of Lindström’s personnel to be strongly committed to achieving our joint goals. Competent, committed and enthusiastic personnel bring profitable growth” Explaining that commitment and skillful personnel plays big role in Lindström’s growth plans. Gentz also described the expectancies of new strategy 2020 in regards of HR-perspective as follows “We believe that Lindström will grow and develop as the competence of our personnel develops, and we find new ways to operate and serve our customers.” (Lindström 2015, 24)

The importance of the research focused on the chose segment is validated with Gentz’s statement “Lindström needs to increase its turnover by 40% in the next five years, mainly through organic growth. As a result the company began the planning of competence charting and development paths in sales tasks already in 2014.” Lindström educates young potential sales talents in their Sales School and the program in question is specifically designed to training newcomers into

B2B sales experts. Thus, the group of existing high performing sales professionals has stayed out of reach. While Sales School has provided Lindström fresh new talents, Lindström's HR managers are still eager to attract rock solid professionals who have more experience in the field of sales and have already proven track record. (Lindström 2015 26, 27)

4.3 Data collection

Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009, 145, 146) present that case studies are often conducted by utilizing many different methods for data collection which provides more in-depth information on the matter. Methods may vary from documentary analysis to interviews, surveys and observation and order to get valid results triangulation is recommended. In this research data triangulation was utilized by deriving primary data through semi-structured interviews and secondary data was based on relevant literature, analysis of company website and recruitment advertisements as well as analysis on past research related to topic.

4.3.1 Primary data

The primary data collection is done by semi-structured interviews with two different groups of interviewees from different settings. Group of Lindström's existing high-performing sales personnel are interviewed in order to gain better understanding on what keeps them working for the company, their success factors and what kind of development ideas they might have on the subject. This internal perspective contributes to the improvement of retention. In addition, group of applicants that have already applied to Lindström but got barely rejected or declined the position are interviewed to clarify the external perspective on Lindström's attractiveness as an employer. Also, interviewing these both groups generates to identifying issues that need to be improved to boost the recruitment.

The interview questions were designed together with the thesis mentor from Lindström's HR department, A. Lönnblad. However, the point of semi-structured interviews was to generate discussion that leads to more in-depth viewpoints of

the interviewees. Use of semi-structured interview gives the interviewee a better opportunity to describe feelings and viewpoints on more of a personal level than structured interviews. Thus, the interviewer has the opportunity to ask more questions on some topic that may arise during the interview and this has the potential of discovering something on a different level that was originally planned. In semi-structured interviews there are certain themes which guide the interview but it could be stated that the true advantage of these interviews is the flexibility as it allows some unidentified issues to arise. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 161, 200)

The semi-structured phone interviews took place in 2015 between April and November. During June, July, August and September interviews were not conducted as summer holidays were interfering the schedule and in September there weren't potential interviewees for an interview. Due to lack of interviewees the research was put on hold until few recruitment processes led to finding suitable interviewee candidates. Most of the interviewees were at home during the interview, although a couple of them were at work at the time, however, they were advised locate themselves in rooms which are designated for telephone conversations where discussions could be done in private without the fear of other people hearing it. Phone interviews were chosen because of the long distances, scheduling challenges but also to ensure higher level of anonymity.

All the interviews were carried out in Finnish since it is the mother tongue of all the interviewees and all the interviewees were advised to book 1,5hours for the interview so that enough time was ensured. However, the interviews duration ranged from 51 minutes to 1hour and 12 minutes. All the interviewees were asked questions based on the semi-structured interview question list and some additional questions which arose from the discussion. To enable analysis of the interviews, all the interview discussions were recorded and later on listened multiple times and transcribed in written form covering the most relevant parts of the discussion. This allowed coding which was conducted in order to analyze the data more efficiently.

Throughout the interview the interviewees were encouraged by the interviewer to disclose their honest opinion and insights on the topic and reassured that the discussion will be kept in private and their anonymity will be secured. Interview situation was kept as relaxed as possible by giving in to the discussion even though sometimes the focus of the discussion shifted little to side tracks. The aim was to create as natural and open environment for open discussion as possible. Semi-structured interview questions worked as a guide for the discussion and thus, the focus of the interview did not get scattered.

4.3.2 Secondary data

Secondary data of this research is derived from analysis of the company website, recruitment material and past research on employer image and job satisfaction questionnaires. The company website was analyzed in the perspective of potential employees trying to search for information about the company, its operations and possible open positions. In addition, example of recruitment advertisements was analyzed in order to get an idea what is the current situation and whether there is room for development.

The company website was analyzed by the researcher herself with the help of benchmarking other corporate websites of companies, Kone (Kone 2016) and Fazer (Fazer 2016), which have been said to have strong employer brands by Universum which is an organization specialized in employer image research (Kauppalehti 2014). These companies were chosen because as they are seen as one of the most attractive employers they might have some solutions on their websites and social media which could inspire for new ideas concerning Lindström's website and social media accounts. The analysis was made based on the interviewees' feedback and comments on the website. In addition, the recruitment material for sales positions were analyzed based on the feedback from the interviewees.

Lindström has participated in T-Media's Employer image research in a year 2013 and this research was analyzed in order to gain insight on the state of Lindström's employer image. Even though the research is not from last year it

still provides a good basis for the analysis since people outside the organization have been evaluating Lindström's employer image. In order to get an understanding of the difference of employer image and job satisfaction at Lindström the job satisfaction survey from 2013 is also analyzed. The analysis on these researches from 2013 is likely to show the gap between the employer images externally and internally.

4.4 Data analysis

The data gathered for this research is analyzed according to qualitative content analysis. The semi-structured interviews were partly transcribed and these transcripts were coded. The coding method is used to identify patterns and organize the text. In addition, coding also provides efficiency for the analysis since it allows the researcher to categorize the mass of text in to smaller samples and distinguish similarities and differences. Even though the coding qualitative data tends to be more imprecise compared to quantitative data it still provides valuable information and gives deeper insights on the matter than quantitative data. (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003, 31, 32)

Interviews, especially semi-structured interviews which allows the discussion to flow more freely is prone to produce rich data mass. In order to narrow down the amount of data, the interview recordings were listened to 3-5 times and transcribed only partially. This allowed the researcher to get rid of the data which was not clearly in line with the topic. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, 32) point out that listening to the interview material it might seem difficult to draw the line what is important information and what is irrelevant. They encourage the researcher to decide which themes to focus on in order to get started. Transcriptions were written by first writing the key points, such as direct answers to interview questions and after that valuable insights were added to the transcripts to ensure rich data. However, the amount of data remained large and therefore the coding of the data was seen useful. The codes used in the coding process are provided in tables 1 and 2 below.

According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, 32) the nature of qualitative data, being overwhelmingly multidimensional it is more effective to group the data based on identified key themes stemmed from to the research questions. These key themes were identified as attraction, recruitment and retention. Due to two different kind of interviewee groups, existing employees and potential employees, the transcriptions were handled separately but according to same themes in order to draw conclusions from the groups separately as well as the whole group as one larger entity.

Table 1. Illustration of the utilized codes on existing employees' interview data

ATTRACTIVENESS	ATT
Lindström's attractiveness	ATT.LI
Lindström as an employer	ATT.LI EMP
Reasons for applying to Lindström	ATT.APP
Development ideas on attractiveness	ATT.DEV
Estimation on attractiveness outside the org.	ATT.OUT
RECRUITMENT	REC
Reasoning for sales position	REC.REA SALES
Development ideas on recruitment	REC.DEV
Estimation on willingness to apply from outside	REC.WILL APP
RETENTION	RET
Motivating factors in sales job	RET. MOT
Motivations to stay at Lindström Oy	RET.MOT LI
Improvements to strengthen retention	RET.IMP

Table 2. Illustration of the utilized codes on potential employees' interview data

ATTRACTIVENESS	ATT
Lindström's attractiveness	ATT.LI
Lindström as an employer	ATT.LI EMP
Reasons for applying to Lindström	ATT.APP
Development ideas on attractiveness	ATT.DEV
RECRUITMENT	REC
Reasoning for sales position	REC.REA SALES
Visibility/access to Lindström's job ad	REC.VIS
Used channel	REC.CHA
Job advertisement evaluation	REC.AD EV
Recruitment process evaluation	REC.PRO EV
Development ideas on recruitment	REC.DEV
Motivations to apply again	REC.RE-APP
RETENTION	RET
Motivating factors in sales job	RET. MOT

4.5 Reliability and validity

According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, 8) it is common for research conducted with qualitative methods to strive for excluding the possibilities of objectivity and universality which translate into statistical concepts of reliability, validity and generalizability. The importance of reliability and validity stem from evaluating qualitative research as well as the ability to prove the absence of subjectivity. In other words, reliability and validity speak of the research credibility describing whether the research actually is measuring what the introduction claims it to measure.

Theoretical saturation is also a measure for reliability and validity. Theoretical saturation has been reached when research interviews are not providing new

information which would expand and enrich the data. (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003, 21) In this research the theoretical saturation was partly reached. Every interview provided something new since the interview was semi-structured and discussion were allowed to flow quite freely. However, the data was seen to be rich enough and during the last interviews of each group there was not unique insights on the key themes and therefore, it can be stated that the research reached satisfactory theoretical saturation. The reliability and validity also might be affected due to the nature of interviews and possible hindering factors are presented in the next paragraphs.

Data collection with semi-structured interviews has its pros and cons when evaluating the reliability and validity. For example, there might have been something that caused the interviewee to feel uncomfortable or in doubt of the anonymity resulting in dishonesty. It is also possible that the interviewee wants to come across as something that he is not and that controls his answers in regard. Some aspects may also be left aside because the interviewees choose to not to tell about certain personal matters like their own financial situation. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 201-202)

Interviewees' personal motivation to participate in the research and the time of the interview of course has an impact on their answers. Sometimes the interview was carried out on a time of the day that the interviewee had already worked for many hours and was waiting to relax and unwind. This could have affected their motivation to answer differently for example giving shorter and simpler answers that would not generate much of discussion. The courage to speak their mind and the ability to analyze and elaborate based on their own personal views has an effect on the end results as well.

To avoid misunderstandings, all the interviewees were encouraged to tell more and describe their views more in detail. It was pointed out to every interviewee that their anonymity will be secured but it is possible that some interviewees did not feel safe to say what they really think because of the fear of getting negative consequences. Also, existing employees could have altered their interview answers in the hopes of generating positive consequences for themselves.

In addition, it is possible that all the interviewees were not honest in their answers or that they did not have a clear recollection of how some things were dealt with or how they felt about something. The fact that interviewees were not offered anything in return of the interview could have affected their answers as well. Some interviewees might have felt more motivated to answer the questions or more eager to discuss some topics further if they would have gotten something in return. Therefore, it is possible that the interviewees did not think that the interview was that important.

As the researcher of this study also works for the case company, it must be highlighted that the personal views and opinions may have had some kind of an effect on the data analysis and results as it is impossible to stay 100% objective. However, maintaining a neutral stand point was always the aim in order to get valid and reliable results. Auerbach & Silverstein (2003, 8) point out that some level of subjectivity exists in every qualitative research as researcher is a human being and his own perceptions always have a small effect on the interpretation of data.

5 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The following chapter will present the empirical results of the research. The data of the interviews will be discussed with certain point-of-views in order to address topics of attractiveness, recruitment and retention. All the interviewees are referred to in the text below as “he” no matter the sex. Thus, referring to him, is not an indication of the interviewee’s sex. By doing so the identities of the interviewees will be better kept anonymous. The objective was not to find differences between men and women nor does Lindström want to make differences between sexes, therefore, the sex of the interviewee does not matter. It is noteworthy, that all the interviewees provided their own opinions and insights and therefore these views may not be based in true facts.

Interviews were conducted as phone-interviews because of the geographical challenges as some of the interviewees were located in in the Northern Finland. In addition, since the interviews were not held face to face with the interviewer it has likely increased the feeling of being able to tell honest opinions. All the interviews were recorded and same information about the nature of the interview was told to all interviewees. They were told that the interview is private, it will be recorded and used so that their anonymity won’t be harmed. Interviewees were also encouraged to answer honestly and they were reassured that anything that they tell will not be traceable and linked to their identity and thus it won’t have any effect on their current/future employment/recruitment in Lindström.

5.1 Interviews of existing employees

Interviews with the existing employees were conducted in order to get an idea how existing employees perceive the attractiveness of their current employer and what could be done differently so that they would feel encouraged to stay in the company. The selection of the interviewees was carried out in the following manner: managers of the sales teams suggested individuals who they considered to be high-performing individuals, representing the kind of sales professionalism which Lindström is looking for. After this those individuals were

contacted and asked about their willingness to participate. Therefore, the selection of the interviewees was based on the vision of the sales team managers and random selection from the pool of high performing individuals. Before the actual interviews, one test interview was conducted with randomly chosen sales representative. The test interview and its content was not analyzed or taken into consideration in the final results.

The test interview was useful since it gave an idea how the questions should be presented and what kind of issues may arise and what matters would be useful to address in the interviews. It also helped to estimate the duration of the interview and thus an estimated duration could be told to the interviewees beforehand. Test interview gave also a good indication of the suitability of the used technical devices and needed alterations could be done accordingly in advance for the real interviews.

Four existing employees were interviewed in total and this amount was considered as sufficient since same ideas and issues arose in the discussions in all four interviews. Since the main focus of the research is to gain better understanding on the attraction and recruitment than retention, existing employees are not the main focus. After all the interviews, the recordings were listened multiple times and parts of them were transcribed for further analyzation. During listening the recordings notes were made in order to ease the process of analyzing the results and search of similarities and differences. All the interviews were analyzed with three focus areas; attractiveness, recruitment and retention and these three areas will be analyzed below in their own sections in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topics separately.

5.1.1 Attractiveness

The attractiveness of Lindström as an employer was evaluated based on the discussion around the following questions: Why did you apply to Lindström at the time you applied? How attractive employer you think Lindström is? How would you describe Lindström as an employer? These questions generated more discussion and also that is analyzed below.

All the interviewees told that they applied to Lindström for no specific reason; they needed a job, were interested in sales and had relatively neutral or positive perception of Lindström. Timing was also in key position, since two of the interviewees were looking for a job and found openings in Lindström at the time. One of the interviewees applied to sales position while working in Lindström in another position and one of the interviewees knew little something about Lindström since one of his friends had worked in the company in the past. Thus, not all the interviewees would have necessarily applied to Lindström, if there would have not been open position available at the time. Two of the interviewees mentioned, that they had heard positive things about Lindström as an employer and this strengthened their decision to apply for the position. Therefore, it seems applicable that the positive word-of-mouth had an impact on the attractiveness of the company and willingness to apply. None of the interviewees had applied to Lindström's sales positions with an open application previously and according to them they send open applications very seldom in general.

“Well basically I needed a job and I was interested in sales so that’s why I ended up applying. For no other reason. Of course I applied other positions in other companies too but there were not that many openings when I was looking for a job.”

“It was little bit of a coincidence because the position happened to be available at the time I was looking for job and then one of my old colleagues used to work for Lindström and he had told me good things about the company.”

“I looked for information on the company what it does and I have to admit that I had no clue before that. The company name was familiar and it sort of looked good, big, old and stable company, something that I would like to work for because of my history of being laid off so it was important to me to be employed in this kind of company. The kind of company which did not have the history of laying off a lot of people in the past.”

The overall attractiveness of Lindström was rated as quite low among all the interviewees. When asked of the reasons behind the low level of attractiveness they responded similarly, referring to the low visibility, weak knowledge of Lindström's operations and dated image of the company. Half of the interviewees stated that lack of open positions in the job market is one factor that they believe would increase the attractiveness of the company momentarily. Two of the interviewees mentioned that they have had very narrow perception of Lindström's operations and they both had connected Lindström to small scale laundry business. One of the interviewees pointed out that the nature of sales in Lindström is very unknown outside the organization and that should be addressed actively in order to increase the attractiveness, as he feels that selling Lindström's services is selling solutions to the customers and reaching true win-win situations and therefore the selling process itself is different in nature.

The interviewees all agreed that they were not aware of the size of the company before applying and thought that if people would realize the size of Lindström, it would be perceived as more attractive since generally speaking the bigger the business, the better opportunities personnel usually has. All the interviewees agreed that they were positively surprised when starting to work in the company as it turned out that Lindström is quite a big player in the market and has wide selection services.

"It is very common that people only know some part of Lindström's services, like, they know about our mats and that's about it. But it was same for me when I first applied to Lindström."

"I don't perceive Lindström that attractive, in general service industry is maybe not that media sexy so to speak, probably technology industry is perceived more interesting but on the other hand since Lindström is big and stable that might be seen as attractive. Although, if you are not working for Lindström you won't know about it. Outsiders don't know about the possibilities we have inside the company. But of course Lindström can be seen as attractive since it is a family

business and secure in a way compared to listed companies where collaboration procedure negotiations are more common.”

“If we think about sales positions at Lindström then I would say that this is not that attractive as an employer. This is not like anyone’s dream job but when there are openings I think we have some amount of applicants. But of course it has an impact that people outside the company hardly know what Lindström does. Then again, if there are not that many openings available then probably there will be lot of applicants.

“There were many surprises early on about Lindström, for example, I thought that the company was operating in Finland and then I found out that the company is actually very big and international. I would say that when I started to work that is when I discovered how international the company really is.”

All the interviewees stressed that the branch itself may not be seen that attractive nor media-sexy which effects on people’s awareness of the company in general and in addition to the willingness to apply to Lindström’s positions. One of the interviewees pointed out that if a company is seen as old-fashioned it won’t attract young professionals as they generally speaking desire up-to-date experience with pioneering and developed companies. The visibility of Lindström in the media was also considered too low among all the interviewees of existing employees. However, they did not really have any suggestions on how Lindström should increase the visibility in the media.

“It is extremely important to have visibility that is how it works nowadays. I am not entirely sure what there would be to do better but I guess in marketing they would know. It just feels like we are nowhere, we should at least be properly presented on LinkedIn. And okay, I think we should make some videos or such where we tell our story and try to make it real, like staff telling their experiences. I would watch that kind of videos if I was looking for a job and was doing some research on the company.”

Two out of four respondents estimated that Lindström isn't seen as attractive as it actually is in their experience. In addition, they felt that if people would know more about Lindström, it could be seen as more attractive based on their experience of how Lindström takes care of its personnel, stability of the company and the possibilities that the company offers for its staff. According to the interviewees Lindström seems a bit bland in a sense of lacking clear and concrete identity in the job market. Interviewees told that their perception is that Lindström is considered very neutral among majority of people who don't have job history in Lindström or have not co-operated with Lindström. Interviewees agreed, that companies which have stronger visibility are easier to be rated as attractive, since it is easier to form an opinion about the company if one knows what the core business is overall.

"We rarely have collaboration procedure negotiations, there is always work to be done, the company has relatively good image. I mean there are lot of sales people going around and some of them are rejected very early on. We are welcomed to our customers and they have positive thoughts about us."

"Lindström is very good employer for a sales representative, you have the right to do things how you want them to do and you have been given the tools to do it and the guidelines to follow so that you can reach your goals like the way you want it."

One of the respondents evaluated, that Lindström is seen as an attractive employer nowadays in the area where he/she is located since there are not that many open positions available in general. Therefore, the geographical location and low amount of open positions probably have an effect on the attractiveness as well.

"There must be interest towards our sales openings since the job market over here is like frozen. So many people without a job and not so many open positions and not that many are willing to move around just to get a job if it's not like super promising."

The compensation model was also brought up when assessing the attractiveness of Lindström as an employer. One of the respondents stated that for sales professional it doesn't really matter what he needs to sell but the compensations is the key on whether the job is seen as desirable. All the respondents seem to agree that attracting high performing professional would be easier with the reputation of paying good, encouraging salaries that motivate people to carry on with the good work.

“Of course many sales professional are driven by the compensation so if Lindström wants to hire very effective sales people they need to think their compensation model again. I mean, money is a big motivator and if the money you get is only reasonable or below it doesn't really attract.”

“Good and well planned compensation is in the key role of getting good work force and of course, keeping it. I think Lindström has some improvements to make in this area. Simply, the amounts could be bigger because it is common that you hear people talking that in similar positions somewhere else you get paid more. This must have an effect on the attractiveness of Lindström as a potential employer. I mean who would even apply somewhere if they have heard that the salary is not satisfactory.”

When asked what kind of an employer Lindström is in their experience all the respondents used adjectives trustworthy and financially stable. Two of the interviewees agreed that Lindström has a good reputation and staff is taken care of. Lindström was also considered to be safe employer where things work pretty well in general. One of the interviewees brought up that in his opinion Lindström has not the ability to take risks and operations are sturdy because of the size of the company. Three out of four interviewees mentioned that Lindström seems to be willing to develop its operations but progress happens slowly.

“In general we have things good, I mean, everything works and you can trust your employer. We have the history of not laying people off but making wise

decisions with contracts so I would say that all in all Lindström is fairly trustworthy as an employer.”

“There is demand for more flexible decision-making and development. I think we are trying to take steps in that direction but in a big company like this it is very slow. There are many people against change and it’s problematic if those people are in manager positions.”

“I think we all know that we need to change but it won’t happen overnight. And sometimes you get frustrated when things are made so complicated when it is totally unnecessary. I feel like we want to be firsts at certain things but we still lack the attitude to get there first.”

All in all, it seems that the attraction of Lindström as an employer is not particularly strong, but once you get hired to Lindström the company’s attraction grows while getting to know the company’s operations, possibilities and culture. Therefore, people who are on the job market may not pay attention to Lindström if they do not recognize the company at all and are unaware of Lindström’s operations more in detail. It is likely that if the person looking for a job has heard something about Lindström from inside the company it has a positive effect on the attractiveness. The interviewees agreed that higher visibility of Lindström in general would affect positively on the attraction of Lindström as an employer.

5.1.2 Recruitment

The recruitment point of view was evaluated with the following questions and the discussion that was generated through these questions:

How Lindström could improve the recruitment of sales professionals?

How well Lindström is known among the interviewee’s sales colleagues? This focus was chosen since the actual recruitment of existing employees has taken place some time ago and they did not have clear memories of how the process was and it has evolved since then.

One of the interviewees suggested that Lindström should improve its availability and presence in the social media in the recruitment stage. The operations of the company could be opened up in different platforms of social media. LinkedIn was mentioned and the interviewee stated that all the open positions should be available there in order to have as many channels as possible for boosting the recruitment. In addition, according to this interviewee it would be useful to tell more in detail about the contents of the work of sales positions in Lindström. Telling more about the actual work and what the everyday duties include could generate more interest among potential applicants. In addition, another interviewee suggested something similar, that Lindström could add video posts about the sales work in their websites so that people looking for more information about Lindström could get better perspective on what sales actually means in Lindström.

“Those job advertisements should be more attractive, at least those ones that I have seen. Probably there are good amount of applicants but what kind of applicants..our website should somehow reinforce the message of the ad and strengthen the message that Lindström is a good employer.”

“We should somehow spread the knowledge of open positions better and maybe rephrase the job advertisements. They should be more informative, tell more about the work on a concrete level and stress the fact that in our sales process we try to find suitable solutions for the customer together with the customer.”

“Job advertisements could have deeper information about the actual content of the work because it might seem like being a sales representative means only being pushy and it does not describe how solution-oriented the job actually is.”

One of the interviewees stated that the recruitment ads should be more interesting and appealing but couldn't really give clear examples of how it could be done. This particular interviewee explained that the ads are too general and therefore won't generate interest with big volume in his opinion. In addition, he suggested that Lindström should attend more fairs and events where job-

hunters could easily approach Lindström's personnel and ask for more information about the positions and the company itself.

“The recruitment process seems quite good because some firms have very heavy recruitment processes and that is not good. However, even though mol.fi and Oikotie are probably the most searched options when looking for a job, these ads should be posted on LinkedIn as well. People who are looking for a job will most likely go to mol.fi but if these would be posted on LinkedIn someone might accidentally find the ad and get interested.”

When asked how Lindström is known among sales professionals in general the opinion seemed to be the same. It became clear that Lindström is known in their own field but in general not that well.

“I have no clear idea how known we are among sales people..I think that people who have been in touch with our service, like people in the restaurant industry or retail know us because they used to work for a company that has used our services. And of course sales people who work for our competitors must know us but other than that I am not so convinced that we would be that known. Or maybe they think they know us and instantly think of purely laundry business and don't understand what there is to be sold.”

“I don't think we are that known among sales people if they don't happen to be working for our competitors or have the experience of working with our services previously.”

Clear development suggestions on the recruitment were to be more visible and use multiple channels for recruitment. It was agreed that sales professionals in general are not so aware of Lindström and if this could be improved, Lindström could be more attractive employer for this segment. It seems that Lindström should think of new ways of reaching to existing professionals and pursue on making its name more known among the target group.

5.1.3 Retention

Retention was the third aspect on which the interviewees were questioned. Existing employees agreed that possibilities for professional and career development are important and they feel that if employer is not able to provide these possibilities it would affect their willingness to continue in the same firm negatively. All the interviewees evaluated that their fellow colleagues would also appreciate the possibilities to develop their careers and this factor was considered very important in the retention point of view.

One of the interviewees clarified that his retention could be increased through good educational possibilities and by offering advanced tools for sales purposes, for example touch pad which could be used in sales situations for product demonstrations. In addition, the early stages of new sales representative's career, it is noteworthy how he will be educated and whether he is provided with the needed information to start pursuing a successful sales career.

“The tools for sales are definitely something that could be developed, they are ok at the moment but we could definitely improve. For example, it would be great to have these touch pads which you could use to demonstrate the customer how something would suite their premises. It would make the idea more concrete and easier to imagine in real life when you see a picture. I think it would definitely increase the interest on customers' behalf when they could see the suggestion concretely.”

“The beginning is very important, sometimes when a new person starts the introduction and training is not handled that well. If the new person is not demanding a proper guidance it is common that they fall of the wagon very early on. It would be important to map out the challenges and development areas and actively search for solutions for those. For example if booking meetings with new customers feels difficult it would be very important to grasp that problem and help the person with it. I think it is very important that these things would be addressed from the early stages.”

One interviewee suggested that closer cooperation with other business units and between different sales teams would increase the comfort at work. Through sharing advice, experiences and knowhow the sales teams could improve their effectiveness and that could lead to improvement in overall comfort. In addition, training and educational possibilities were mentioned as a factor that has a positive influence on the willingness to stay in the company. One of the interviewees mentioned that possibilities to work abroad would increase retention rate in general. He believes that many of the current staff would appreciate this kind of possibility where you have the chance of experiencing something new in safe environment, meaning same company and similar processes. This would also be a good way to share information and develop functions. There were also a few other factors concerning the retention among interviewees. The versatility of the sales representatives, need for assistance with other than the sales work itself and the ability to be flexible when change and new ideas are needed.

“I think we need more cooperation across business units. When we have people from different backgrounds doing the same job, there must be something we can learn from each other and it would be great to share experiences together. Why not take the full advantage of the know-how we have inside the company already and put it to proper use?”

“It would encourage me to stay in the company if we would have more assistance available so that we could really focus on the essential, sales. Now there are many things that we need to do by ourselves and we don't get help with those tasks. Or if we do get help, we need to give so through instructions that by the time I have written those I could have finished the job on my own.”

“We are extremely process-oriented and high bureaucracy, things have been done in certain way for ages and our systems and departments work in a very complicated way. Things happen slowly and there is not much of flexibility. This affects directly to your work motivation and therefore also to your willingness to stay in the company.”

One of the interviewees stressed that it is a significant factor where you work geographically. If one has long distance to work it may hinder work motivation in general. Therefore, if he would find a suitable position in other company closer to where he lives, there is a strong possibility that he would change employer.

“One of the problems have occurred is that if you would like to continue on your career path you might need to move around and those distances hinder your opportunities to move forward.”

Three of the interviewees agreed that changing positions and trying out different tasks even for shorter periods of time would be something that would encourage them to stay in the company. Providing the possibility to see what other functions work with and how their daily duties are organized would give useful insight and needed change for them. One of the interviewees pointed out that he has stayed in the company just because things are ok, and nothing more interesting has not come up but if offered another job outside the company he would not feel sad to leave.

“Career paths have been totally forgotten for years and luckily those are reinvented and developed at the moment since we should offer opportunities for people inside the organization. I can’t even remember when was the last time that someone in the manager position would have been hired from existing employees.”

“It seems that there is a lot of talk that we have good opportunities to get involved with something new and different once you are in the firm but it feels like this happens only in Helsinki area, not so much in other business units. People are kind of stuck in what they were originally hired to do and even if they would be interested and show potential they are easily forgotten and career paths don’t really exist.”

The importance of manager, his ability to support and give valuable advice and understanding the nature of the job were assessed as important factors for motivation. In addition the nature of the work, being quite independent and social were also important for the interviewees in the point of view of retention.

“The role of the manager is very big when it comes to motivation. He should be able to support and encourage you and unfortunately that is not the case in every team. Some individuals are left alone even though it is clear that they would need the guidance. If the manager is able to be fair and actually participates in the daily activities of his team he is more likely to get more out of his team, resulting in good numbers.”

“My manager was hired from outside the company and you see that he doesn’t have the hands-on experience from the field and does not know how it goes down there these days. My former manager had worked for Lindström for several years and he had totally different approach to his work, in a good way. It has been very different to work with these two different managers, I preferred my old manager because I felt more passionate about my work, he was able to motivate me.”

“One of the most important factors is surely the possibility to plan your own schedules and also meeting people. I couldn’t stand working in just office environment from 8am to 16pm. I think most of the sales people appreciate the freedom of the work because you are not tied to anything.”

When asked what would encourage interviewees to stay in Lindström in the future they all responded that higher salary or better rewarding system would make them more loyal to the company and not so interested in other possibilities. This was the case with all the interviewees since they stressed that they are currently quite satisfied with their job but if they would be offered more money for what they do somewhere else, they would certainly change employer. One of the interviewees mentioned that if you are a true salesman you do not care what you sell, you care how much you get money from selling it.

All the interviewees agreed that in general sales oriented people are often driven by rewards and money. One of the interviewees pointed out that in his experience Lindström has not been able to catch the highest performing sales professional because they play in whole different league when it comes to rewards. He implied that since Lindström does not have the best salary in the market so the true professionals are not even considering to apply for Lindström's positions.

One of the interviewees told that he thinks that improving bonus/rewarding system would have a positive effect on his willingness to continue working in the company. Two of the interviewees mentioned that Lindström is not encouraging employer when it comes to salaries, prompting that higher rewards would make them feel more respected. One of the respondents mentioned that to better attract sales professionals Lindström could increase the salary and improve the rewarding system since sales personnel are often driven by money.

“As an employer Lindström is reliable, but not that big salary payer. The ability to take risks and possibilities to earn through those taken risks are in line meaning that we don't get paid as much as somewhere else..”

“Some of the sales professionals may think that our compensation model is not that rewarding and it could be improved but on the other hand it is quite safe. But probably it divides people, for others the rewards are too low and for others the safety is more important. When you think about high performing sales professionals I think that most of them do what they do because of money and in those cases the possibility to earn a lot is very crucial.”

“The compensation is quite ok but let's just say that when your job is very versatile and you are only measured with one factor, which is sales, it creates contradictions and problems. What I mean is that the compensations should really be more encouraging so that it rewards you whenever you succeed to sell something.”

All the current employees agreed that the motivation in general is another important factor in the willingness to stay loyal to their employer. All the interviewees linked motivation to above mentioned factors such as manager, feedback, educational possibilities, independency and possibility to organize one's own work according to own schedules, challenges, flexibility and the majority of the discussion was generated on the topic of salary and reward systems.

5.2 Interviews of potential employees

In total six potential employees were interviewed. This amount was the final result, since not all the suitable candidates were not willing to take part in this research. All these six applicants were chosen based on their performance at the recruitment process. They were good candidates who just did not make the cut but were very close. Therefore, the potential of these candidates was considered to be high and these individuals could have been chosen to be hired at Lindström. They possessed clear evidence of being successful in sales with good track record. Some of the interviewees would have been hired but eventually they declined the offer.

Interviews of the potential employees were also carried out as phone interviews and the interviewees were instructed to have reserved approximately one hour for the interview and be situated in a calm environment where they would be able to focus without distractions. All the interview discussion generated similar topics that arose within the discussion with each of the interviewees. Although more potential interviewees were not available at the time the content of the interviews were quite similar and during the last two interviews new significant issues did not arise and therefore it seemed that the amount of interviews was satisfactory.

5.2.1 Attractiveness

The attractiveness of Lindström among potential employees was studied through the following questions and the discussions that evolved from them.

What kind of an employer you think Lindström is? How attractive Lindström is as an employer? How Lindström could improve its attractiveness among sales professionals? These questions led to interesting discussions about the attractiveness of the company and the highlights of these discussions are opened below.

All six interviewees mentioned that they think Lindström is fair and takes good care of its employees when asked to describe Lindström as an employer. One of the interviewees felt that Lindström has good values based on the fact that it is a family business. One of the interviewees mentioned that Lindström takes responsibility for operations and one interviewee evaluated that Lindström has a good working environment. All these perceptions were based mostly on the recruitment process since all the interviewees agreed that it had affected their perception since they had very little knowledge of the company beforehand.

“I see Lindström as quite stable company and therefore it seems reliable employer. Although, I have to admit that I really don’t know why I have this perception and the more I think about it the only adjectives that comes to my mind about Lindström is stable and reliable but there are many companies that suite this description too. I guess they would need to work more on differentiating themselves somehow, they seem kind of faceless.”

“Before the recruitment I just thought that it is sort of basic Finnish company but during the process I learned that it is much more. I think I am not the only one with this experience.”

When asked to evaluate the attractiveness of Lindström as an employer one of the interviewees stressed that the attractiveness was fairly low at the time he applied but after the job interview it increased dramatically because that is when he was better introduced to Lindström’s business. Three out of six interviewees agreed that Lindström was not that attractive employer because the business was something they had not been in touch with before and did not quite understand what the company was all about. The other three interviewees mentioned that they knew something about Lindström through their work

experience or a friend that had previously worked for Lindström and therefore they evaluated Lindström as somewhat attractive employer but also agreed that after the first interview the attractiveness grew.

“I would estimate, that Lindström is fairly known, I mean if someone doesn’t know about Lindström they must have worn blindfolds. But of course it might just be a familiar name, I guess most of the people don’t know what the company actually does.”

“I knew Lindström because I have worked in restaurants and in those I had been in touch with their services. No bad memories of the company.”

“I really can’t say that I would have known Lindström that well..I knew about work wear service and that’s about it.

One of the interviewees also pointed out that the attractiveness has a good basis but it is just the lack of knowledge about the company in general that hinders the attractiveness. He thought that if Lindström would be more visible and people outside the organization would get in touch with what Lindström does, the company would be seen as more attractive than what it is currently. It was also mentioned by one of the interviewees that even though the public image of Lindström is not negative it is not that positive either, moreover, very neutral and if that could be boosted with something positive the attractiveness would likely increase. When asked why a company that job seeker does not know that much about is not seen as attractive one of the interviewees responded that it is hard to picture yourself working for a company that you know nothing about compared to a company that you have a clear understanding what their core business is and how they are situated in the market.

“I have to admit that I had no clue what Lindström actually does. It would probably be more attractive as an employer if people would actually know what the company is all about. It would be worth it to spread the word of the business in more detail.”

“The company itself is very important when you decide whether to apply or not. I do value Lindström and I believed that there are many good opportunities inside the organization. Lindström’s name has a good echo but I didn’t know the company in detail but for some reason I had the perception that it is a good company. All the information that I had, what they require from their employees and what the job advertisement stated gave this impression of a good company.”

Three interviewees mentioned that once they were introduced the salary and rewarding system of Lindström the attractiveness decreased to some extent. One of the potential employees explained that he felt that sales is not that appreciated in the company based on the rewards. In his opinion Lindström’s attractiveness in the job market among sales professionals with good track record could be dramatically improved through higher salary and better reward systems.

“My salary expectancy was 500 euros more in a month than Lindström could offer me. When you think about it, it is very small amount for the company but for the employee it is important. It motivates the employee and with this extra 500 euros the company could actually generate thousands of euros for the company.”

“High-performing sales professionals seem money-grubbing and compensations are very important to them. But it is all about balance, too high compensation roofs seem shady. But I will say that if Lindström could offer higher rewards, it would definitely be seen as more attractive as an employer. Effective sales professionals are not usually looking for jobs, they are already hired and they get paid very well so that they would not leave. I think that my base salary can be perceived as my value as a sales professional. Everything I earn on top of it is just extra and from that extra the company has made good money already. You would think that the company would be pleased to pay this compensation since it means that they have also earned a lot of money.”

How to improve Lindström's attractiveness proved to be a challenging question since all the interviewees had a pretty clear perception that the company itself is not seen that attractive but could not really give concrete development ideas how to fix the situation. One issue that they all raised in some form was the availability and visibility in social media and opening up more about the actual content of Lindström's sales positions. One of the interviewees pointed out that sales people usually move a lot and since the job itself requires mobility the company that is hiring sales professionals should in fact put more effort in making the mobility easier and efficient for this professional. He considered the car benefit in Lindström to be insufficient and not catering the needs of a sales person. He suggested that if the company could provide the car benefit in a way that it would actually be a significant financial benefit for the employee he would be more willing to pursue a sales career in Lindström.

"The job advertisement illustrated the company values and from the company website you can see that things are ok. Big corporations usually deal with their finances well and I knew Lindström already because I have sold some products for Lindström. The visibility should be improved but It is difficult to pinpoint what should be changed in order to gain more awareness.."

"Maybe Lindström should be more on social media, I mean I was looking for a job quite a long and I've seen loads of companies that are kind of everywhere, but not in annoying way. Lindström I didn't see in that many channels."

"The car benefit Lindström offers is really not a benefit. Very old-fashioned model. I mean, Lindström should really provide the car to the salesmen because don't they really want more sales and a car is an essential thing in order to do sales. The arrangements with taxation and the car are stupid in my opinion and if I understood correctly not that many are using this benefit..doesn't it speak for itself then that it really isn't a good benefit?"

The attractiveness discussion circulated around rewarding system a lot. Many of the interviewees seemed to think that when looking for a job and looking for

interesting opportunities, money is a big determinant on whether you even apply. Also, if the company is unknown and you do not have a clear perception of what the company does it is not a good combination. Improving the attractiveness proved to be a difficult subject, all the interviewees agreed that the visibility should be increased and the reward systems should be re-thought but they were not able to give clear development suggestions.

5.2.2 Recruitment

Recruitment aspect of potential employees was studied through following questions: Why did you apply a sales position specifically at Lindström? Where did you find the job advertisement of this position and was it easy to find? What emotions did the job advertisement bring up in you and do you think that the advertisement could be improved? What did you think about the whole recruitment process and what would you improve or what was especially good about it? How Lindström could improve its recruitment of sales professionals? Also they were asked if they would be willing to apply for a sales position at Lindström again in the future. These questions generated discussion, that offered a view on Lindström's recruitment, and how people applying to Lindström perceive it.

When asked why did the applicants choose to apply specifically to Lindström one of the interviewees replied that a certain recruitment company had found the position for him, two interviewees applied based on the references of their friends or family and the rest three told that there were no other positions available at the time. All the interviewees applied to Lindström for the first time. Therefore, it seems that the 3 interviewees were not particularly interested in Lindström, 2 of the interviewees decided to apply based on references and one was not looking for open positions on his own. Thus, five out of six interviewees had an opinion whether the job advertisement was easy to find. Four of them mentioned that they found the advertisement on www.mol.fi which is a Finnish employment office's website and therefore it was quite easy to find as they all told that when looking for jobs, they always check this website. One of the

interviewees told that he got the hold of the advertisement through his job union but could not recall details of it.

“I found the ad on mol.fi, I always look from there. This was the first time I applied to Lindström and the job seemed interesting.”

“I applied through mol.fi I think it’s quite ok channel..when I search for a job in there the companies that I know will definitely pop out and those are the ones I look more in detail.”

“Well..I guess it’s good to post the ad on mol.fi but I don’t personally appreciate that site. For me it’s a trashy place..somehow it’s a bit shady..the jobs that are available there are not that convincing. I prefer monster.fi.”

The interviewees were also asked what kind of emotions the advertisement brought up and if there was something to improve. Five of the interviewees told that the advertisement was quite basic and in had all the needed information on it. None of the interviewees had any strong emotions because of the advertisement not excitement or enthusiasm they all told that they felt quite neutral about the advertisement. When asked about the possible improvement ideas one of the interviewees mentioned that salary and rewarding systems could have been presented in the advertisement already since that is one of the major questions when looking for a new job. One other interviewee thought that it would be helpful to place the ad to different channels of social media so that it would be possible to come across with the advertisement on several occasions.

“The job advertisement was clear enough. The job description was good and all the needed information was there, and you could call for more information.”

“The recruitment process was ok, a bit too long. It took quite some time after they finally made the decision.”

“Everything was handled well, the same person dealt with all the stages so it left a good impression.”

The interviewees mentioned that all in all they had a good impression of the recruitment process; it was clear and had multiple stages. Two of the interviewees agreed that the internet based questionnaire about their personality was old fashioned and that it would not portray them in good way since it felt really simple and focused on somewhat irrelevant areas.

“The content of the job was clearly defined and the products and services were well introduced in the interview. One of the interviewers, who would have been my manager, was very professional. He answered all my questions very straight forward. In many cases when you ask about the salary they don’t go into details they just state something on a general level or they might tell you what one of their best sales person earned sometime and kind of give a wrong impression.”

“The personality test that I made online was a bit weird..we went through the results and I didn’t agree with how it portrayed me.”

“I had sales simulation task and I had 5 minutes to prepare myself with the material. I thought the material was ok and I was able to do the simulation well with the help of it.”

“I had sales simulation at the interview and I knew that they would probably do something like that because usually they want somehow test your abilities. Although, it was quite surprising when the simulation was not about the service that I was applying for. But maybe this suits for some purposes when they try to evaluate me and my skills.”

“It would be good to be more open and active about what kind of positions there are in general and what kind of functions are needed so that people could see beyond their first impression.”

Some of the interviewees mentioned that they were not quite satisfied with the information they were provided about the salary and rewarding systems. There were couple of negative comments about the recruitment. Two of the interviewees explained that when they were asking about the salary they did not get a clear answer and one of the interviewees mentioned that when the salary was told he immediately thought it was way lower than his expectations which made the rest of the interview pointless in his opinion.

“I didn’t get the exact figures but the main idea what the salary consists.”

“I didn’t quite get the information about the salary..compensation model was not that clearly explained and even though I asked repeatedly they didn’t provide me a clear answer. It kind of felt like they were trying to keep it from me which doesn’t make any sense.”

“It seemed that the goals were quite high..I have previous experience on selling similar products and I question whether that kind of goals are actually achievable. Also, when I asked about the goal they weren’t that happy to share them, I had to milk the information from them.”

Two of the interviewees agreed that in order to improve the recruitment process the job advertisement should include a link to a story of a person who works in Lindström in the same position to get a better idea of the job in real life. This kind of testimonials would work as a reference for the job itself and also strengthen the willingness to apply when the applicant would have more clear perception of the job. Other suggestions to improve the process were to cut the internet tests and be more precise about the salary in the job advertisement and in the interview situation in particular.

“To differentiate somehow I think it would be great to give a call to the applicant. Everybody sends emails these days and personally I really appreciate if someone takes the time to call me. You get the feeling that the person is more dedicated to what he is doing when they call you.”

All of the six interviewees would be open to applying to Lindström again and would recommend others to apply when asked. One of the interviewees mentioned that he would not apply for the same position again in Lindström if it would not be clear that the salary would be higher.

“I would be interested to apply again and will keep following open positions at Lindström in the future because I had a good feeling about the company based on the recruitment process.”

“If I was ever to apply again to Lindström the position would need to be very interesting as I get more experience day by day and the threshold of starting in this beginner-type of position in sales is getting bigger.”

“I could apply again, I am still interested in sales positions at Lindström.”

All in all it seemed that the recruitment process is fairly good, it leaves a good impression on the applicants but there a few improvements that could be done. One of the main findings were the fact that the job advertisement did not really generate any particular emotions on the applicants, for example excitement or strong interest, all the mentioned thoughts were quite neutral in nature. Although, the advertisement was assessed to have all the needed information by most of the applicants, some of the applicants mentioned that more detailed information about the actual job would be nice.

5.2.3 Retention

Retention of employees was not in the focus on this interviewee group since they have no real life experience of being employed in Lindström. However, they were asked what motivates them in sales and how they can be encouraged to continue working for a company for a longer time on a general level. The questions asked about retention were simply: What motivates you in sales? What would encourage you to keep on working for the same company?

These questions were asked to find out what factors influence on people's motivation since that is a big part of successful retention of workforce. Motivated people are more likely to stay in the same company than look for new job. Retention has been identified as one of the challenges in the future when the competition of skillful workforce keep growing. It is likely that companies will invest more on retention of high-performing individuals. Retention is challenging as it is affected by different factors depending on person's values and interests. Therefore it is almost impossible to plan a retention program with certain actions since different people are encouraged with different things. One of the interviewees told that even though a good salesman is able to sell anything it always helps if the product/service you are selling, is something you can believe in truly.

It became evident that interviewees all had a clear passion for sales and challenges. All of the interviewees liked sales because of the nature of the job, being independent, free and social.

"I love sales, it's a passion for me and that makes me keep on going. You cannot do this job if you don't have the passion. And you also got to love challenges, because that's what sales really is nowadays. "

"The freedom of this job is one of the good parts of it. I like that I can schedule my day however I want if I make sure to hit the targets. The fact that I can do this independently and I can move around and meet different people everyday is also very important and the reason why I like sales so much."

"Being able to work independently and you get to move around and see new places and people is very important to me. I want to be able to be social and move when I want."

"It is important to have interesting products to be able to believe in them, that makes the work easier. Of course selling anything is possible, but if you are able to stand behind the product and you are convinced that it really works it makes the process more meaningful."

The role of colleagues and general atmosphere in the work place were also considered as important factors for motivation. Even though the moving nature of sales jobs were discussed, all the interviewees thought that having colleagues that are able to support and share experiences are important.

“Colleagues are very important especially the ones who do the same work than you, to get support from them.”

“Good colleagues are important and the general atmosphere also. And of course well-functioning systems, these all have an impact on my willingness to work for the same company in the future. It is good to share ideas with colleagues, you can learn from them and get another point of view when needed.”

Interviewees also pointed out the importance of proper reward systems and reasonable salary. It was obvious that all the interviewees linked rewards to motivation. If they feel that the compensation is not applicable the job becomes more frustrating and it is difficult to keep on going the hard work if you are not satisfied with the compensation generated through it.

“Bonus from job well done is what motivates you. The fact that someone acknowledges what you have done and remembers to thank you and praise you.”

“The fact that your salary is reasonable and you have the chance to make more money with your own work is always motivating.”

“Rewarding system is in key role when thinking about salesmen’ motivation I can tell you that. The more you close deals, the more you should earn, it’s that simple. No one does this work because it’s fun, they do it because they get to challenge themselves and they get rewarded when they succeed.”

In addition, the role of manager and feedback were in the central role of motivation and retention. Interviewees mentioned that it is important to have a manager who is inspiring and supportive. When asked the features of a good manager most of the interviewees described good manager being supportive, realistic, willing to give and receive feedback and knowledgeable about the sales, preferably has real work experience in sales.

“Good manager is crucial for the motivation. It is important to get support from you manager and that he has the ability to give you advice on situations you have not faced before. That’s why it is very important that he has practical experience on the field.”

“I want my manager to support me, being able to help and give advice when I need it. You also need to be able to take and give feedback. It is important that manager is fair and he has the balls to admit when he has made mistakes. In addition, the manager must be open and honest.”

“Employer must give feedback on good work, set clear goals and show how those goals are possible to achieve. You need support in all stages and you have to be provided with the needed tools.”

The interviewees were asked about their motivations to stick with one company and what companies could do differently to motivate them to excel in their job. Many of the interviewees agreed that the overall motivation at work is in key role. If they do not feel excited about the job and unmotivated to keep going they start thinking about The thoughts interviewees had on what motivates them most on sales job were circulating around the independent role of sales representatives, good colleagues, reasonable rewarding and career opportunities which were mentioned as their motivators also.

Five out of six interviewees mentioned that in retention perspective it is crucial that they feel appreciated in their work. The possibilities to develop professionally and take steps on the career path were assessed as encouraging factors to stay loyal to the company. Many of the interviewees also pointed out

that if the nature of the job would dramatically change so that their independency would be restricted they would need to consider changing the employee since that is one of the key reasons why they enjoy the work. It seems that in order to have loyal employees who are willing to stay in the company, their motivation needs to be taken care of and nurtured.

5.3 Website and recruitment material analysis

The website of Lindström has been updated in the end of December of 2015 and this update occurred after the interviews. However, the website has been observed in the current state and the issues that interviewees pointed out were studied in order to make sure if these issues had been developed since the interviews and the renewal of the corporate website. The analysis was done by comparing the corporate websites of Kone (Kone 2016) and Fazer (Fazer 2016) with the main focus on the career section of the websites. In addition the recruitment material, more precisely the job advertisements of Lindström's sales positions were analyzed based on the feedback from the interviewees.

All three corporate websites, Kone, Fazer and Lindström has the career section placed in the main navigation panel, therefore it is easy to find. Fazer's career section has a lot of content, appealing pictures and multiple attractive videos. There is a large amount of information on Fazer as an employer, different possibilities for different employee segments, employee testimonials, link to open positions, stories about management culture, corporate history etc. Kone's career section is more narrowed down, providing mainly links to open positions and to pages where there is more information the company culture, company values, description of Kone as an employer and information packages targeted to different job seeker segments. All the information seems to be in text format and some tables and graphs are also utilized.

Whereas, on Lindström's career site there are greetings from the Senior Vice President of Corporate Human Resources, introduction of the HR department and rest of the information is behind links which are in the main navigation panel

at the end of the website. Behind these links one may find open positions, information on the trainee and sales school programs as well as 'Why Lindström?'-section. In comparison to Fazer's site there is only a few videos, less pictures and the information on Lindström's site is more hidden behind the links. The difference between Kone and Lindström's career sites is the amount of statistical data in the form of graphs.

The feedback from the interviewees was that they would have wanted to hear more about the job on a daily basis from someone who is actually doing it. Some of the interviewees suggested that they would have liked to see testimonials in the form of video, where someone who actually works with sales in Lindström would for example describe his normal day at work. Interestingly, in April 2016 there was a video (Lindström Group 2016) launched about Lindström's sales but it is placed on YouTube, not on the corporate website's career section. This video has few testimonials as well as information on the nature of sales job in Lindström. However, the video is targeted for global crowd and is not focused on providing information on the sales positions and the nature of the job in Finland.

The job advertisement for Lindström's sales representative gained some feedback from the interviewees as well. The job advertisement for Lindström's sales position for the past times has been more or less the same (appendix 3) and few observations were made about it based on the feedback of interviewees. For most parts the interviewees were quite satisfied with the advertisement in general but a few of them mentioned that there could have been more precise description of the tasks and responsibilities as well as an explanation of the reward system. Explaining the true nature of sales job in Lindström and giving more detailed insight on what the daily duties of sales representative include could generate more interest among potential applicants. Also, adding a link to a testimonial of Lindström's sales representative would truly give more personalized touch to the advertisement.

The advertisement provides a short description of Lindström in the beginning and then forwards to clarify what they are currently looking for. The description

of the position's tasks seems quite general as many of the interviewees agreed. In order to respond to the feedback of the interviewees, the nature of the tasks could be more precisely described, giving practical examples of sales representative's regular day. The advertisement then provides information about the company culture and the criteria of a suitable candidate. In the criteria there is not straight-forwardly defined that the candidate should have a strong track record of successful sales, instead it states that networking skills, perseverance in sales situations and preferably few years of experience in successful sales are the basic essentials. In order to attract larger pool of applicants this approach has probably been satisfactory but if the objective is to occasionally recruit remarkably driven, high-performing sales professionals, this could be more clearly mentioned in the job advertisement. Hence, that this would not be the case in every recruitment of sales personnel moreover, only in specific cases where the aim is to find experienced professionals with solid skillset that is needed in order to achieve high demands.

Therefore, the suggestion is that Lindström could differentiate its recruitment of sales representatives and high-performing sales professionals. These job advertisements targeted to high-performing professionals could be published in different recruitment channels than the regular advertisements. For example, not posting this particular advertisement in mol.fi instead, posting it on LinkedIn and some channels targeted directly to sales professionals, for example the recruitment portal of MMA (Myynnin ja markkinoinnin ammattilaiset) could result in higher amount of applicants that meet with the criteria of high-performing sales professionals.

5.4 Analysis on employer image research and employees' job satisfaction survey from 2013

Lindström participated in T-Media's employer image research in 2013 which indicates the situation of Lindström's employer image factors that have influence on it. The research includes of 105 employers, 33 industries and little less than 25000 interviewees of which 6394 represent employed professionals.

Most of the respondents agreed that satisfying income, good working environment, challenging and interesting nature of the work, certainty of employment's continuity and versatility of the job are the main factors that are most important in choosing a job. The possibility to influence on the content of the work was important factor especially among employed professionals which is closely related to the target group of this thesis. Good environment within the group of employed interviewees was defined as stimulating open communication, conversational, relaxed and authentic as well as encouraging in general. (T-Media 2013, 7)

Lindström is not ranked in the highest positions in the chart of the most popular employees in 2013 and about 58% of the respondents who answered to company-specified questions agree that Lindström is not interesting and attractive as an employer. In addition, another alarming result is that about 29% did not know Lindström and only 4,5% ranked Lindström as interesting or very interesting as an employer. Relative attraction in Lindström's case is defined as well-known but unpopular, which means that many of the respondents recognized the company but did not see it as an attractive employer. (T-Media 2013, 23, 25) The familiarity and attractiveness of Lindström as an employer among the respondents of T-Media's survey are represented in the figure below.

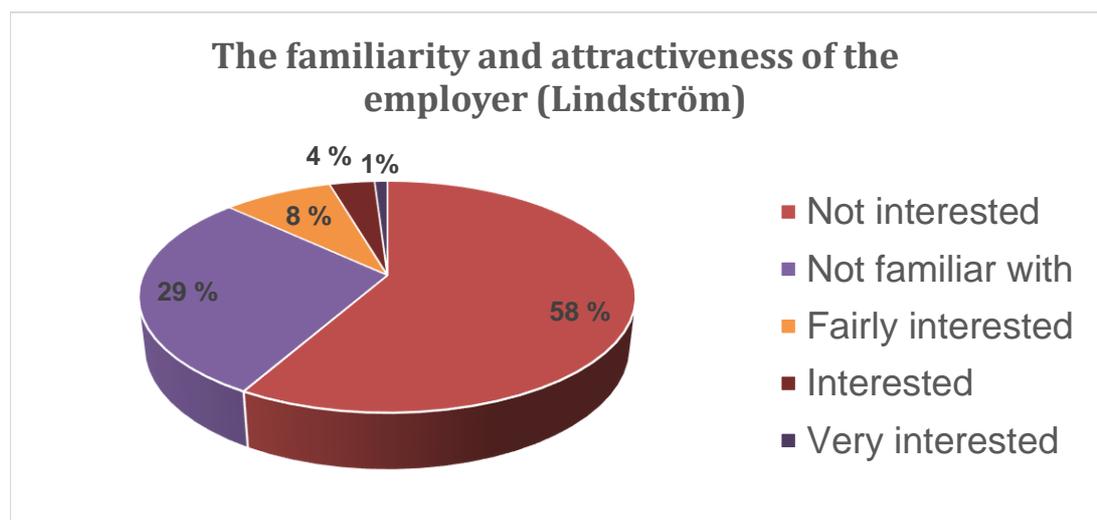


Figure 4. The familiarity and attractiveness of Lindström among T-Media's 2013 survey respondents

119 respondents ranked Lindström as interesting and two most common motivation profiles among these interested individuals are developers and money-centric (T-Media 2013, 46). This group of people who admitted interest towards Lindström agree on the following points: good reputation of the employer is important to them, they aim to proceed in their career relatively fast, they are loyal to their employer even though it means extra effort, they would like to have a safe workplace where they could work during their entire career and they strongly believe in their own capabilities. (T-Media 2013, 5)

Little over 10% of the respondents who were employed and have basic education would apply to Lindström if there would be suitable position open and 23% would recommend Lindström as an employer to their friends asking for their opinion (T-Media 2013, 87). In the open comments section respondents have the opportunity to say what the company reminds them of and many of the comments imply that people don't have a clear understanding and knowledge about Lindström's operations as many of the respondents point out only one service such as workwear or mat service. Also, couple of the respondents connect Lindström with low income but people interested in Lindström have used adjectives such as professional and successful. (T-Media 2013, 95)

Based on the research results it seems that Lindström is not well-known among the potential applicants. There are also misconceptions about the company which date back to the early days of Lindström and this influences Lindström's employer brand. In order to achieve more attractive image, Lindström should somehow increase its visibility and the knowledge of its services among potential applicants.

In contrast to the HUPPO Index-survey, which is an annual survey in Lindström, showing that Lindström's employees are satisfied with their employer. Over 90% of the respondents of 561 individuals in year 2013's survey agreed completely or agreed to some extent that they enjoy the working environment, they think that their job is suitably independent and 89% thinks that their work is meaningful. 85% of the respondents are proud of their employer and 74%

believe that individuals are respected in the firm. 50% of the respondents disagree that Lindström has encouraging rewarding system but on the other hand, 48% agree completely or to some extent that the rewarding is encouraging. (HUPO Index 2013, Motivation)

All in all, it seems that there is a gap between the attractiveness of Lindström among potential employees and the satisfaction among current employees of Lindström. Lack of knowledge about the company outside the organization seems to turn into high satisfaction inside the firm as long as Lindström is able to recruit the applicant. Thus, it can be stated that Lindström possesses the acquirements of developing a stronger employer brand to result in higher rates of attraction, recruitment and retention in general.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This following chapter will conclude the research and its main findings and also present the concrete managerial implications on how to improve the attraction, recruitment and retention of high-performing sales professionals. Sub-questions as well as the main research question are answered based on the findings. In addition, the limitations and further research avenues will be presented below.

6.1 Findings

S1: How Lindström's employer image is perceived among existing vs. potential sales employees?"

It seems that the employer image is perceived differently among existing and potential employees. All the respondents agreed that the image of Lindström is not negative, but it seems very neutral in a way that it can almost be perceived as lack of personality. All the potential employees interviewed in this research agreed, that after the recruitment process they think more positively about Lindström once being provided with better understanding of what Lindström actually is all about.

Existing employees agreed that Lindström is a good employer, but not outstanding in a way that they would not consider other career opportunities in the future. It was common for most of the interviewees that they saw Lindström as a reliable employer. The image of the company in general was perceived as trustworthy and good employer in terms of stability and reputation. Although, majority of the interviewees agreed, that Lindström has not been that visible in the media, they still agreed, that they perceive Lindström having a good reputation as an employer.

The main difference in the perception of Lindström's employer image is that the current employees see more possibilities inside the company knowing that the firm is international and operates on many service fields. Potential employees

seem to have relatively positive image of Lindström as an employer but discovered the versatility of the organization only during the recruitment process. Therefore, the full potential of the company is not acknowledged by the potential applicants. They assessed that knowing more about the company would increase the attractiveness of Lindström.

All in all, it can be stated that the employer image of Lindström could be enhanced with more knowledge among the potential employees and strengthened among existing employees. All the interviewees agreed that the company could use some more visibility and seeing the company in positive light in the public would reinforce their positive perception of the company. As mentioned in the theory part of this thesis, in chapter 2, employer image is the perception of the company as an employer and it ties together all the beliefs and impressions that people have about the company, nevertheless if they are current employees or potential. As the employer image is influenced through different factors, it is important that the company itself strives to build positive employer image through employee satisfaction. Employer image stems from the perceptions inside the organization and therefore, it is crucial to make sure that the image is taken care of internally in order it to flow outside the organization.

S2: Why Lindström is not an attractive employer for high performing sales professionals on the job market?

All the respondents implied or commented straight-forwardly on the fact that high performing sales professionals are motivated by money and Lindström's salary and reward systems were not seen competitive enough. Majority of the interviewees agreed that monetary rewards encourage to high performance and the possibility to have an impact on your income is a crucial factor when choosing the place of work. This perception was highlighted metaphorically by one of the interviewed potential employee that basic salary represents the value of the employee and the commission is extra which also generates added value for the company.

The lack of knowledge about Lindström's operations was also considered a hindering factor for Lindström's attractiveness among sales professionals. Many of the interviewees pointed out that they did not fully know what Lindström does and after they got to know the company better during the recruitment process, they saw the company more attractive than before. All of the interviewed potential employees told that they are willing to apply again to Lindström because the recruitment process was a positive experience and they got deeper understanding about the company. Thus, if potential candidates are not aware of the operations of Lindström they might not perceive Lindström as attractive enough to apply. This has a straight connection to the quality and quantity of applicants.

Understanding the nature of sales in Lindström was also pointed out as a factor that might have an impact on how attractive Lindström is perceived as an employer. Current employees pointed out that sales in Lindström is very solution focused and the work requires proper cooperation with the customer which affects the nature of the job. This was seen as a positive matter among existing employees and therefore they felt that it should be highlighted in the recruitment stages.

It was also stated that high performing sales professionals are already taken and therefore they might need to be lured away from their current employer and with the low visibility and fairly narrow understanding of Lindström's operations hinders the chance of catching those experienced sales professionals. As Lindström is not seen that attractive the chance professionals changing from another company to Lindström is not very high.

Interviewed potential employees stressed that they knew very little about Lindström as a company and as an employer. Thus, when the company is not that well-known, this might already be a crucial factor for many professionals looking for new opportunities, since they want to build up their CV and working for well-known company that has a good reputation is generally considered as an asset. Also, not knowing all the possibilities that Lindström has to offer for its

staff, some potential applicants may feel that Lindström cannot provide needed options and career paths for them.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the organizational attractiveness has a clear influence on the applicants' intentions to apply and therefore, increasing the attractiveness is likely to result in more skillful applicants. Attractiveness is strongly linked to the general knowledge and perceptions about the company, meaning that spreading the knowledge of the company in general and reinforcing positive image could result in higher organizational attractiveness.

S3: How Lindström could improve its attractiveness among high performing sales professionals on the job market?

All the interviewees agreed that Lindström should somehow improve its attractiveness. One clear suggestion was that Lindström should reward its high performing sales professionals more generously in order to attract professionals better. Especially the potential employees pointed out that Lindström's reward systems seem less than adequate. They agreed that having higher compensation would motivate to high performance more efficiently.

In addition, making Lindström more visible and sharing testimonials of high performers could increase the attractiveness as well. When potential applicants could have the access to deeper knowledge on the offered positions and the true nature of those positions, it could have a positive impact on the quality and quantity of applicants. Also, showing that there are high performing professionals inside the company who like what they do and are satisfied with the company overall, would probably lower the barrier of applying to Lindström.

Being visible with wider coverage on different channels could also increase word-of-mouth about Lindström in general and that could make the company more known among people outside the company. Companies that operate in B-to-B field may be faced with the problem of not being that well-known among private individuals. The fact is that many individuals are in touch with Lindström by wearing Lindström's garments, walking on the mats or using hand towel

machines at the restaurants but are not aware of the service provider. Since Lindström is not dealing with individuals as customers they are more likely to stay away from the spotlight. Making effort in standing out from the mass in order to get more recognized among individuals on private side could increase the knowledge about Lindström.

Similarly to the interviewed existing employees, potential employees think that visibility and knowledge about the company in general influences the attractiveness of the company. As presented in chapter 3, the attractiveness is a key determinant when applicant is evaluating the possibilities of companies where to apply. When the applicant knows about the company and its operations, one is more likely to be attracted to the company compared to a company that one has no or little knowledge about.

S4: How Lindström could more effectively recruit high performing sales professionals?

In general it was agreed that Lindström has relatively good recruitment process but there is still room for improvement. The job advertisements should be available in multiple channels in order to ensure wider coverage and visibility. Also, adding testimonial videos and more in-detail job descriptions could improve the effectiveness of recruitment. Some of the interviewees also suggested that Lindström should increase its visibility and maybe consider some alternative websites where to post job advertisements.

The usage of social media was also mentioned among the interviewees' development ideas. It is very common nowadays that companies are available in multiple channels and it also increases their chances of reaching to bigger crowds. However, it is crucial that the content creation for the chosen channels is done professionally in order to attract viewers and followers that stick on board for longer period of time and generate positive word-of-mouth. Therefore, the content needs to be something that creates values for the followers/subscribers.

Some of the interviewees mentioned that having testimonials of our current workforce from the department that has open positions available, would be beneficial for the applicant. Through testimonials Lindström could tell what the everyday job consists of, how solution-oriented the work actually is and how they would describe Lindström as an employer for sales representatives in general. This would be a good tool for spreading the knowledge of Lindström as an employer but also for providing more in-depth information on the job which could generate more applicants and maybe have an effect on the quality of the applicants as well. Modified version of this idea of staff testimonials would be to activate “Lindströmers” Instagram account where a chosen employee of Lindström could share his/her story through pictures and description each week. These individuals would represent Lindström’s different functions all over the world. This would enable the applicants to get to know the firm on more general level.

Depicting from the theory in chapter 3, recruitment is one of the tasks that require lot of resources and therefore should be effective. The current trend is to incorporate social media in the recruitment process. This has been noted to help in screening of the applicants and it also offers the possibility of versatile and interactive recruitment. The visibility of the firm could be increased through these social media posts, testimonial videos and stories but in addition Lindström’s HR needs to assess the channels for job advertisements. Usage of mol.fi should be more investigated, whether it really generates the type of candidates they desire in this specific segment. LinkedIn profile could be used more efficiently in the recruitment overall, posting multiple openings and activating the discussion on these openings on the page.

Re-evaluating some parts of the recruitment process all in all would be important as well. Examining whether more detailed criteria is needed, what kind of information the applicant needs more and should some of the information be given on earlier stages, for example many of the interviewees mentioned that they were not clearly told about the salary and reward system in the job interview. This should be made as clear and simple as possible, so that it is easy to articulate to applicants.

Most interviewees agreed that there should be more concrete information on the open positions on the website. It was also agreed that the recruitment materials were perceived as informative and satisfactory but they could have something to differentiate them from the mass, something that the applicant would remember. Providing more detailed information about the position itself could help the applicant to evaluate one's fit to the position and in addition, if nothing else, leave more unique memory trace of the company in general. The theory presented in chapter 3 also stated that the recruitment is based on finding a good fit between the organization and the candidate and his skills and interests. Therefore, offering more detailed knowledge of the position's requirements and tasks could result in more efficiency in the recruitment as the applicant would be able to evaluate his own fit to the organization more in depth. Identifying own skills and their match to the requirements could also result in more interest towards the open position.

S5: How Lindström could improve the retention of current high-performing sales personnel?

Improving the rewarding system, providing better career opportunities for all, having supportive foremen and more advanced sales tools were seen as factors that could improve the retention of the existing sales professionals. Potential employees agreed that money is a big motivation for sales person and therefore the rewards should get better based on your experience and track record.

Existing employees pointed out that their job is very diverse but the reward system is designed so that they feel that not all their efforts are valued even though completing these tasks are part of their job. They agreed, that if sales representatives must work on something else than sales, this should be taken into account in the bigger picture as it effects the time available for sales. Also, some of the employees told, that they feel that there is not enough guidance when you hit a rough patch. More advice and true support from foreman is

needed and this needs to be secured by training foremen and somehow monitoring how it is being implemented.

Offering more encouraging reward models for high performing individuals is likely to generate more retention since money was described as one of the motivators. Developing encouraging reward systems for sales professionals should be seriously considered as the majority of the interviewees agreed that this has a big impact on the motivation and attraction in the recruitment stage. It also has an effect on the retention rates, as the study showed that many sales professional are driven by monetary rewards.

Many interviewees also mentioned that the job itself motivates them because it enables them to freely decide on their own schedules, they can move around and meet new people. There was also feedback on the fact that sometimes it seems that there are so many tasks to be done prior or after the deal is closed that sales representatives feel that they are wasting precious time for filling out forms and writing down experiences when they could be selling Lindström on the field.

The possibility of developing professionally and having career opportunities was also seen as motivating factor that makes sales representatives feel more loyal to their employer and thus, it would be important to develop career paths for sales professionals. According to researchers and their views presented in chapter 3, there are multiple factors which have a clear impact on the willingness to stay loyal to the current employee. Motivation has been identified as one of the biggest triggers for retention. Even though it has been acknowledged that rewards and salary are not the dominant factors for retention, they still play a role in retention in a bigger picture. Studies show that especially mature individuals, who are likely to have gained experience in their field, have higher expectation on their rewards and therefore this should be taken into consideration while mapping out development possibilities of the retention of this segment.

“How to improve organization’s attractiveness, recruitment and retention of high performing sales professionals through employer branding?”

In order to improve Lindström’s attractiveness, recruitment and retention the company must gain more visibility, spread the knowledge of the company and its business outside the organization, broaden the channels for job advertising as well as keep focusing on current employees’ job satisfaction by taking good care of them, offering them interesting career paths and making sure that the full potential of each employee is put to use. Clarifying the EVP of Lindström and planning future strategies in accordance is likely to result in positive outcomes.

Attractive companies are usually companies that even the “average-Joe” knows about. As stated in the chapter 3, it is more likely that one applies a job in a company that one has heard of, knows roughly what their core business is about and that this particular company where talent is appreciated and opportunities offered. Internally Lindström is performing well and now it is time to spread the word to the people outside the organization. Even though Lindström has a neutral kind of brand personality, there is no harm in promoting the expertise within the company and its services. Lindström should be proud of the satisfaction of its employees and there is no reason to keep that kind of asset under the covers. Being open about things that are working out could generate in more interest towards the company in the job market.

Similarly to what chapter 3 presented, wider coverage on social media and adding more information and appealing content on the website’s career section and would probably also generate more visibility. Adding a real testimonial from Lindström’s employee in the same position where there are openings would provide lot of needed information for the jobseekers and contribute on the general awareness about the company. Allowing “average-Joes” to bump into Lindström more often would do no harm for the company. Posting job advertisements on multiple channels and targeting these advertisements more precisely could generate good results. Open position for sales representatives of whom years of experience and proven track record are in the criteria should

be posted in channels that are used by this segment, like LinkedIn. These actions would contribute to more effective recruitment in this segment.

In order to improve the retention rates of the chosen segment following matters should be considered. Continuing the good work with existing workforce by offering them career opportunities and mapping out their potential to ensure that it is put to full use, people are more likely to share their positive experiences about their employer. It is extremely important that during challenging times the appreciation for employees stays strong and they are constantly reminded of the significance of their contribution. Reflecting on the theory of chapter 3, it can be stated that motivation is one of the key components in retention. Similarly to the theory presented before, also the interviewees agreed that career opportunities as well as encouraging rewards are important and strengthens their motivation which is likely to generate retention. The sense of being appreciated as an individual is important and therefore each individual should be assessed to map out their career interests in order to be able make them feel appreciated. The rewards are one way of showing appreciation on the work done and thus, examining the possibilities of developing the current reward system could be useful.

6.2 Managerial implications

The main contributions of this research are that it offers a good basis for more in-depth and broader investigation on the topic as well as the fact that this research identified some key issues concerning the attraction, recruitment and retention of this particular segment of high performing sales professionals. With the help of the results and development ideas presented in this study, the HRM of Lindström is able to start evolving some of their on-going processes contributing to improvement of employer brand. This case study offers valuable insights of potential and existing employees and thus it can act as guidance in planning some key activities in the future.

Investigating the opinions of the groups of existing and potential employees and reflecting on those key themes that arose within the research, provides useful

knowledge for planning development on the areas of attraction, recruitment and retention. Also, as mentioned before, this research can be used as a basis for examining similar themes in other operating countries of Lindström if this is needed. Furthermore, investigating other segments for similar purposes is also possible with the help of this case study as it can be benchmarked when planning other studies. In addition, the challenges of conducting research on the topic are also more easily tackled in the future as some of the problem areas were identified during this research process.

All in all, this research identified key issues on the topic and with the help of data analysis some development ideas were presented. Presenting theoretical framework the key concepts were opened up and explained which can also contribute to the strategic planning in the future. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this case study should not be generalized in the rental textile industry as a whole, since only one operating company was examined and the nature of employer brand being extremely personalized and unique. In order to plan concrete employer branding strategy to improve the employer brand as a whole more research is needed. Notwithstanding, this research provides tools for planning changes in certain areas which are likely to generate positive results tackling the challenges of Lindström's attractiveness, recruitment and retention in the segment of high performing sales professionals.

6.3 Limitations and further research

Limitations for this thesis were mainly resource constraints including the suitable type of interview candidates and flexible budget which would have allowed research interviews to be done face-to-face. There were certain challenges concerning the scheduling of the research which also affected to the duration of the research process as a whole.

The quality of the interviewees had also its limitations as the interviewees did not represent homogeneous crowd, furthermore, the demographic backgrounds were not compared or analyzed in this study. Despite the heterogeneous sample, the interviewees of potential employees all shared

similar goal, i.e. getting hired in sales position. The interviewed current employees also did not represent a homogenous crowd but all of the interviewees work for Lindström's sales.

The amount of interviewees was relatively small due to the practical limitations. The interviewees consisted of Lindström's current high-performing sales personnel and as the company has roughly about 80-90 people working in sales positions in total, the ones who have the highest success rates were chosen and not all of them were interested in taking part to the study. Also, the number of interviewees that represented the potential employees were chosen from the pool of people who have just applied to Lindström for sales position. The chosen individuals were picked among the most suitable candidates of whom not all were interested to participate in the research.

It is good to note that interviewing people is a demanding task and requires lot of experience in order to result in valuable in-depth answers that can be used as a basis for development and change. Interviewing more candidates with more professional interviewer could result in added value. Since the interviewer has not conducted similar kind of interviews before, it is likely that there are matters that have not been addressed properly or some things may have left unregistered purely due to lack of experience.

The field of employer branding needs to be studied more in-depth and there still remain many untapped research aspects. For the case company, it would be interesting to expand this research to other countries where they have similar challenges within this particular segment so that cultural differences could be identified. Also, similar research could be done in other segments and the differences between the segments could then be investigated. If Lindström decides to use some of the suggested tools this research could be conducted again after a few years to see if those actions have had any effect.

For Lindström's perspective it would be interesting to research more differences between different countries so that recruitment could be focused more efficiently. Therefore, in order to get more detailed information on the topic this

research could be done again with more specified demographic backgrounds of the interviewees. For example, the differences between sexes or different age groups could provide interesting data. Also, studying the topic in other companies similar to Lindström would also provide more insightful information about the importance of employer branding and the factors that need to be considered for it to be successful.

Developing reward systems needs more investigation on what kind of systems would be most effective. For this investigation it is recommended that different options would be mapped out, choosing couple of those alternatives and then do some sort of survey among the existing sales personnel to gather feedback on which model would be most welcomed. Asking feedback from the existing employees would give valuable insights and the decision between different options would be easier to justify.

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APPENDIX 1

Semi-structured interview questions of existing employees

1. Taustatiedot

- Millainen työkokemus sinulla on myyntitehtävistä? (kuinka monta vuotta, tulokset)
- Kokemus B-to-B myynnistä ja palvelumyynnistä ennen Lindströmiä?
- Milloin olet aloittanut Lindströmillä? Missä työtehtävässä aloitit?
- Miten olet päätynyt myyjän tehtäviin?

2. Houkuttelevuus

- Millainen työnantaja Lindström on mielestäsi myyjälle?
- Onko Lindström mielestäsi houkutteleva työnantaja?
- Miten uskoisit Lindströmin paremmin houkuttelevan muita myyjiä Lindströmin palvelukseen?
- Miten hyvin Lindström mielestäsi tunnetaan myyjien keskuudessa?

3. Rekrytointi

- Miksi aikoinaan hait juuri Lindströmille?
- Monta kertaa hait tehtävään?
- Miten Lindström voisi mielestäsi tehostaa ammattimyyjiä rekrytointia?

4. Sitouttaminen

- Mikä motivoi sinua työssäsi Lindströmillä?
- Mikä on kannustanut sinua pysymään Lindströmillä myyntitehtävissä?
- Mikä kannustaisi sinua vielä lisää jatkamaan Lindströmillä?

APPENDIX 2

Semi-structured interview questions of potential employees

1. Taustatiedot

- Millainen työkokemus sinulla on myyntitehtävistä? (kuinka monta vuotta?)
- Kokemus B-to-B myynnistä ja palvelumyynnistä?
- Minkälaisia tavoitteita sinulle oli asetettu edellisissä myyntitehtävissä ja onnistuitko saavuttamaan ne? (miten ja jos et saavuttanut niin miksi?)

2. Houkuttelevuus

- Millaisena työnantajana näet Lindströmin?
- Kuinka houkutteleva Lindström on mielestäni työnantajana?
- Miten Lindström voisi olla entistä houkuttelevampi työnantaja ammattilaismyyjille?
- Miten hyvin Lindström tunnetaan myyjien keskuudessa?

3. Rekrytointi

- Miksi hait myyjän tehtäviin?
- Miksi hait juuri Lindströmille?
- Oliko tämä ensimmäinen kerta kun hait vastaavaa paikkaa Lindströmillä?
- Mitä kautta hait Lindströmille?
- Oliko Lindströmiin työpaikkailmoitus helppo löytää?
- Mitä tunteita Lindströmin työpaikkailmoitus sinussa herätti? Voisiko ilmoitusta parantaa jotenkin?
- Mikä rekrytointi-ilmoituksessa oli hyvää/kehitettävää?
- Minkälaiseksi koit rekrytointiprosessin (haastattelut, yms)?
- Mitä parannettavaa rekrytointiprosessissa oli?
- Mikä oli erityisen hyvää rekrytointiprosessissa?
- Miten koet, että haastattelusi meni?
- Miten Lindström voisi tehostaa ammattimyyjien rekrytointia?

4. Sitouttaminen

- Mikä innostaisi sinua hakemaan Lindströmille uudestaan myyjän tehtäviin?
- Mikä motivoisi sinua myyjän työssä?
- Miten sinut voi sitouttaa palvelemaan yritystä, jossa työskentelet?

APPENDIX 3

Lindström sales job advertisement 1

Tekstiilipalveluyritys Lindström vahvistaa asiakkaidensa yrityskuvaa. Palvelumme helpottaa asiakkaan arkea ja on kokonaiskustannuksiltaan markkinoiden edullisin. Toimimme vastuullisesti ja olemme arvostettu työnantaja. Lindströmiläisiä on noin 3000 henkeä Euroopassa ja Aasiassa. Konsernin vuoden 2014 liikevaihto oli 301 miljoonaa euroa. www.lindstrom.fi

Myyntineuvottelija hygienia- ja mattopalveluiden myyntiin, HKI

Haemme nyt tulosvastuullista myyntineuvottelijaa hygieniapalveluiden ja mattopalveluiden uusasiakashankintaan Helsingin tulosyksikön alueelle. Meillä on vahvat konseptit sekä selkeät tavoitteet. Koko organisaatiomme tekee systemaattista työtä asiakaslupaustemme lunastamiseksi. Työsi on suurelta osin uusasiakashankintaa, ja apunasi ovat kehittyneet työskentelytapamme ja järjestelmämme. Tehtäväkenttäsi kuuluu koko myyntiprosessin hoitaminen asiakkaiden kartoittamisesta ja ensimmäisestä kontaktista aina kaupan päättämiseen saakka. Maantieteellinen työkenttäsi on Helsingin, Espoon, Kirkkonummen, Keravan, Vantaan, Järvenpään ja Tuusulan alueella ja toimisto sijaitsee Helsingin Kalasatamassa.

Tällaiseen joukkoon olet tulossa

Kanssamme sinulla on mahdollisuus tarjota yrityksille ympäristöystävällisiä palveluita heidän hiilijalanjälkeään pienentäen. Uskoaksemme arvostat myös matalaa hierarkiaamme sekä mutkatonta yrityskulttuuriaamme.

Vaikka olemme jo suuryritys, toimintaamme leimaa ihmisläheisyys ja perhearvot. Vakavaraisena perheyrittäjänä teemme pitkäjänteistä työtä asetettujen tavoitteiden saavuttamiseksi. Meillä on mahdollisuus testata ja kokeilla uusia ideoita sekä toimintamalleja. Tuloksen tekemisessä tukenasi ovat parhaat, vuosien saatossa muovautuneet toimintatavat ja hiotut konseptit sekä uudet työkaverisi. Omalla tontillasi olet itse vastuussa päätöksistäsi. Tulet meillä kehittymään työssäsi sekä rakentamaan asiantuntemustasi myynnin parissa.

Menestymisen perusta

Me lindströmiläiset näemme itsemme yritysten kumppanina. Tästä syystä meistä jokaisen odotetaan panostavan kumppanuuden ja palvelukulttuurin kehittämiseen sekä korkeaan asiakastytyväisyyteen ja asiakaspysyvyyteen. Työkaverina olet rempseä, arvostat sosiaalista kanssakäymistä ja suosit yhdessä voittamisen meininkiä.

Muina tehtävässä menestymisen kannalta oleellisina asioina pidämme:

- Luontevuutta verkostoitumisessa ja uskallusta kontaktoida uusia ihmisiä. Näitä taitoja olet hyödyntänyt aiemmissa työtehtävissäsi tai harrastuksissasi.
- Mielellään vähintään muutaman vuoden kokemusta tuloksellisesta B2B-myyntistä
- Kykyä toimia itsenäisesti ja tuloksekkaasti omalla myyntialueella
- Sujuvaa suomen kielen suullista ja kirjallista taitoa sekä tyydyttävää englannin kielen taitoa
- Myyntiprosessin edellyttämää sinnikkyyttä

Lisätiedot

Kiinnostuitko? Lisätietoja tehtävästä antaa Myyntijohtaja X, x@lindstromgroup.com. Lähetäthän hakemuksesi tehtävään mahdollisimman pian, mutta viimeistään **28.2.2016** sähköisen lomakkeemme kautta.

APPENDIX 4

Sample of interview transcripts

 = REC. REA SALES
 = REC. CHA
 = REC. VIS
 = REC. AD EV
 = REC. PRO EV

Teemahaastattelu 2 15.5.2015

Haastateltava=V Haastattelija=P

P: Voisitko kertoa tarkemmin miksi hait nyt myyntitehtäviin?

V: varmaan just sen takia et kun on aina tehnyt myyntiä ja se on tuntunut sillei omalta jutulta, et kun siinä onnistuu ja se tuo haasteita ni ei oo tylsää ikinä. Joo sen takia varmaan.

P: Voisitko viel vähän tarkentaa, et miksi myyntihommat ovat tuntuneet omalta?

V: no siis se vaan jotenkin kolahtaa tietsä. Et kun joka päivä on erilainen ja saat olla ihmisten kaa ja sillai. Et ei tarvi tehdä mitää liukuhinnahommaa vaan voi ite päättää aika paljon ja sit kuitenkin siinä on se et ei ikinä tiedä kuinka käy, niin kai se on sellasta et siitä tykkää ja siinä viihtyy ku sitä tekee.

P: Mistä sä löysit Lindströmin työpaikkailmoituksen?

V: se tais olla mollin sivuilta mistä sen löysin..joo, sieltä mä sen huomasin.

P: Oliko tuo ilmoitus sun mielestä sit helppo löytää?

V: nosiis joo tai et sieltä nyt yleensä tulee katottuu jos töitä etsii. Oon mä kyl käyttänyt monsterii ja LinkedIniä jonkun verran mut toi molli on sellanen perus minkä tsekkaa.

P: Mitä ajatuksia se Lindströmin ilmoitus sussa herätti? Oliks siinä jotain erityisen hyvää?

V: ööö..hetkosen..mites se nyt oli..se oli kyl aika sellanen perus. Et tietsä kaikki perusjutut kerrotaan ja vähän yrityksestä ja sit et kehen voi olla yhteydessä jos halua lisätietoja. Et en mä nyt tiedä oliko se niin erityinen..et aika perus mitä siellä mollissa aina on.

P: Oliko ilmoituksessa jotain mikä vaatisi kehittämistä mielestäsi?

V: tota emmä nyt sillee tiä. Tai et kun..niin. No siis voishan siinä olla vähän enemmän et mitä tää myyjä niinku Lindströmillä tekee. Et olihan siinä joo jotain kerrottu mut jotenkin sillai et saisi vähän paremman käsityksen. Niinku et jotain konkretiaa. Ku sit siel haastattelus kyl sai sellasen käsityksen ettei se myynti oo siel sellasta pelkää luukutusta vaa et oikeesti pitää niinku ratkasta sen asiakkaan ongelmia ja et ollaan niinku apuna ja et se ei oo vaan kerran käynti ja sit ei kuulla enää vaa et käydä ehkä moikkaa parin kuukauden päästä ja tsekataa kuulumiset ja katotaa jos ois tarvetta jollekin muulle jutulle.

P: Mitä ajatuksia tuollainen myyntityö sitten sussa herättää?

V: joo, siis et kyl mä tykkään. Et nytkin ni ei oo vaan sitä et myydään ja terve vaan just et palataan asiaan ja vähän sellasta et tuntee ne asiakkaat, ni se on kiva.