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Lahti University of Applied Sciences

DEFINING AND DEVELOPING THE EMPLOYER BRANDING STRATEGY

Case: Company X

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Abstract

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Abstract

The purpose of this functional thesis was to produce a guide on employer branding, for case company: company X. The thesis was commissioned by company X and the topic was also chosen because of the author's own interest in it. The intention and purpose of the guide is to aid company X in their employer branding development work and define their employer branding strategy.

Firstly, the thesis studied the concept of branding briefly to establish foundation for the actual topic of employer branding. After which, the thesis discuss its benefits, strategies, concepts and management. Furthermore, the thesis utilised recent research from literature relating to the topic and qualitative research methods in sourcing primary data to lay a solid and factual knowledge base for the guide. Moreover, data was collected through observation method and an unstructured interview. Observational data was gathered in the role of participant-as-observer, as the author had insider access to company X. The gathered information was utilised to personalise the guide specifically for the case company. In addition, the study of company X's previous work satisfaction survey found that there were more aspects, in which employees' satisfaction levels were below the average than above it.

The guide was created to be an 8-staged strategy plan of employer branding development work, that company X can follow and apply in their everyday business operations. It was concluded that the outcome of the employer branding guide was satisfactory, as the visuals were aligned with company X's own brand communication and the guide served to the original request and need of the company. However, the content of the actual guide was concise and limited as the theoretical framework could have been boarder.

All in all, the goal of the thesis was met and the end-product, employer branding guide was produced in time. The guide had 27 slides and was conducted conforming to the company X's wishes. In addition, due to privacy reasons, the guide will not be published with this thesis.

Keywords

Employer branding, guide, functional thesis, development process

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

As the global marketplace is becoming increasingly more competitive, so is the competition in attracting the right kind of talent. A company filled with its field's professionals is without a doubt in a position with competitive advantage. Furthermore, the commitment of these professionals increases the company's advantage.

What too is undeniable, is that it is becoming more difficult for employers to not only find, but to keep the best talents. According to an article written by Mosley (2015) 36% of employers globally reported having trouble with talent shortage. Moreover, according to a more recent survey conducted in 2015, 73% of CEOs globally are concerned about the availability of key skills. In this harsh competition for talent, how can companies compete? The answer lies in strong employer brand (Mosley 2015).

Strong employer brand attracts the best talent and improves company's overall image. A company with a strong employer brand does not need to convince applicants of why they should apply for their vacancies. Strong employer brand keeps a company's best talents from seeking positions in other companies as well.

The topic of employer branding is now trending more than ever, with companies coming to realise its significance in the successfulness of recruitment. Social networking service LinkedIn surveyed 4000 corporate talent acquisition leaders from 35 countries and discovered that 80% of them agreed that employer brand has remarkable effect on their ability to hire best talents. (Schnidman, Hester, & Pluntke 2017, 21.) Thus, the author's personal interest in this trending subject is one of the reasons the topic was chosen.

However, the main reason why this topic was chosen was because the commissioning company, later referred to as company X, expressed their desire and need for a customized employer branding guide.

In 2018, company X intends to invest more in their employer brand to gain that competitive advantage. This was a good chance for the author to study the topic deeper and utilise their personal knowledge of the case company and industry. The author is working as an HR-Coordinator for the commissioning company.

Company X is a personnel service agency founded in the fall of 2015. The company provides services in the field of HR: staffing, recruiting and consulting. Company X has CEB-certified aptitude testers and thus provides aptitude testing services as well. CEB is an IT research and advisory company, that is known for syndicated research and advisory services that are analyst-driven (Gartner 2018).

1.2 Thesis Objectives

This is a functional thesis with the aim to define and provide deeper understanding of employer branding in the viewpoint of the commissioning company. As the company X did not have an action plan for their employer brand and expressed the desire to develop not just the brand image, but the whole branding process, the idea of creating an employer branding guide came up. Company X wished the guide to be personalised but expressed that the guide should act more as a re-usable but up-to-date, business operation tool as well. A business operation tool, that the company can utilise in the future stages of their employer branding processes and development processes. In other words, the goal of the thesis is to create a guide for the commissioning company that simplifies and explains the steps company X needs to take towards stronger employer brand; a guide that is comprehensive yet functional. A guide that can be used as a business operation tool and frame of reference to the topic now and in the future by company X.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

As it was established, the goal of the thesis is to provide a personalised employer branding guide on employer branding for company X to use in their employer branding development work. Thus, branding theories such as the model of social psychology of the brand by Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy and Pervan and brand positioning diamond by Kapferer are implemented on the theoretical framework of the thesis to make the concept of branding more familiar to the reader. Subsequently, in the same chapter, employer branding is introduced and defined. Furthermore, the different concepts of employer branding are introduced, and their operating principles established. These concepts include employer branding management and the Employee Value Proposition for example.

The case company is introduced in Chapter 3. The information for the case company was gathered from the company’s website and through author’s observation and prior knowledge of the company. The author is in an insider-researcher position, which is defined in Chapter 3.2.1, because the author has an employment relationship with the commissioning company. Furthermore, the case company has had an employer satisfaction survey conveyed by another researcher earlier in 2017, and as it is vital information regarding the thesis topic of employer branding, the theoretical framework includes analysis on the findings of that survey.

1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

The foundation of any thesis or research is built with critically reviewed literature. There are two approaches one can use in their research; deductive approach and inductive approach. In deductive approach, the literature will help the author to identify different theories that they will then subsequently test using data they have gathered. To the contrary, in inductive approach, the author already has a data or maybe a hypothesis, that they want to relate or test with the literature so that they can either develop further theories from it or confirm/invalidate the hypotheses. However, the purpose of literature review is not to act as a summary of all and everything that has ever been written on the thesis topic, but to revise the most considerable and relevant research on the topic. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 61.)

After the author has decided which research approach to use, they have to focus on defining which research methods they want to use and how to collect their data. The author can choose to use either collect only primary data or only secondary data or implement a combination of both. Again, while keeping in mind what data collection style suits their research/thesis the best. Both published summaries and raw data can be secondary data –secondary data is data that has been initially gathered for other purposes, like for example payroll details, employee satisfaction questionnaires or minutes of meetings. (Saunders et al. 2009, 256.)

Saunders et al. (2009, 258) also stated that, secondary data is mostly used as a part of survey research strategy or as part of case study in business and management research. In fact, the thesis includes secondary data as well, as a previously done research on case company’s employee satisfaction is analysed later. The research will be analysed with the focus on how to utilise that data for their employer brand.

As mentioned previously, an author or researcher can also select to collect primary data – data that has been collected specifically for a thesis or a research. There are two primary data gathering and data analysis methods: qualitative and quantitative. In the Table 1 below are listed the distinctions between the two.

TABLE 1. Comparison of qualitative and quantitative methods (Saunders et al. 2009, 482)

Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data
• Non numerical data	• Numerical data
• Focus on words, pictures or videos	• Standardised data
• Collected through e.g. interviews and discussions	• Collected through e.g. surveys
• Non-standardised data	• Uses diagrams and statistics
• Conceptualisation used in analysis process	

A researcher can also choose to use both data analysing methods to solve their research question. This method of data analysing is called mixed methods approach (Saunders et al. 2009, 151).

The data collection methods of this thesis are pictured in the Figure 1

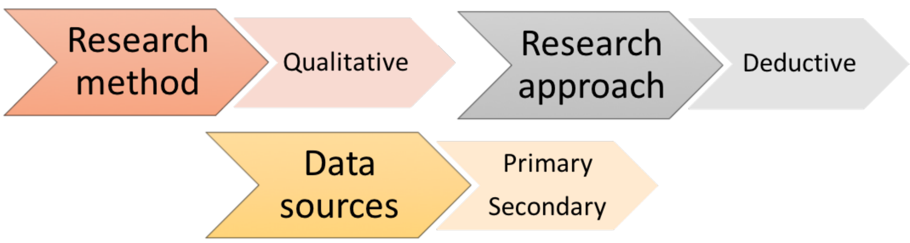

FIGURE 1. Research and data collection methods

Because the goal of the thesis is to provide a functional employer branding guide for the case company, the author has chosen to the deductive approach for the research and to support it by using qualitative research method. An unstructured interview will be conducted with the case company's CEO to gain more insights about the company's current situation and the personnel service industry. Primary data is also collected by observation method; through the author's own experience and knowledge in the HR-field and of the case company and how it operates.

In addition, this thesis has also sourced important data from a secondary data source as mentioned before, the previously conducted employee satisfaction research.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis divided into four parts: theoretical part, empirical part, the guide, and conclusion. The thesis structure is demonstrated in the Figure 2.

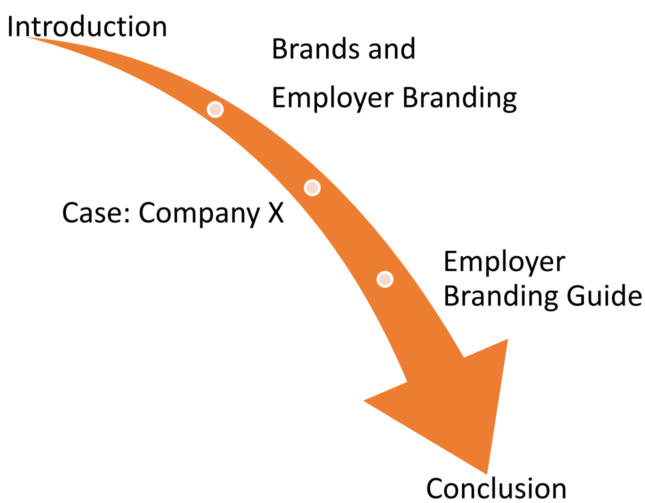

FIGURE 2. Thesis structure

Firstly, the theories of branding and employer branding will be defined, and the concepts used in both, described. In addition, the positive results of employer branding and its key elements will be presented, and the employer branding processes explained through concepts used in employer branding. Concepts like employer branding framework, management and Employee Value Proposition are used to support the thesis.

Furthermore, the case company is introduced and their current situation that led to the need of the guide further explained. This chapter then links the thesis to the empirical part, as results of the interview are studied and the secondary data from the previously done thesis, analysed as well. Secondly, after the empirical part, the thesis process and the process of creating the guide, are presented and assessed. However, only the process of the guide will be published as company X asked the actual guide to be private. And finally, the summary and conclusions are made in Chapter 4.

2 BRANDS AND EMPLOYER BRANDING

This chapter will first discuss brand definition in general. As the thesis focuses on employer branding, which is one field of branding and brands, it is important to briefly study the topic of brands in general too. Then, in the second subchapter, the concept of employer brands and –branding is described more in depth.

2.1 What Is a Brand?

According to Kapferer (2012, 7), the definition of a brand is one of the most disagreed topics among experts. Keller (2008, 2) describes brand in its traditional definition as the means to separate the products of one manufacturer from those of another. Another traditional and maybe even founding definition for brands is Aaker's definition (1991, 7):

> *A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors.*

In the first sense of the word, brand is the non-generic name for a service/product that tells the consumers the source of that service/product (McLaughlin 2011); A Big Mac is a hamburger type on the menu of a fast food company originated from the US.

Moreover, brand is also an experience that is not just compartmentalised into a known name or logo/symbol. Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy & Pervan (2011, 4) believe that brands only exist in consumers' minds, which means that the management of brands is really about managing perceptions. The brand's power to influence perceptions can transform the experience of using the product / service.

As it can be seen in the Figure 3 from Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. model of social psychology of the brand below, in the functional realm, the basic brand feature is that it is a product/service that keeps its promises of performance. In short, what you see is what you get. Brands provide replicable simple satisfaction of a functional need of thus serving very basic benefit for consumers; the solving of a problem. In a more intangible level, brands can bring certainty in an uncertain world. (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. 2011, 4.) Because consumers already know what they are going to get with certain brand, the choice is made easy.

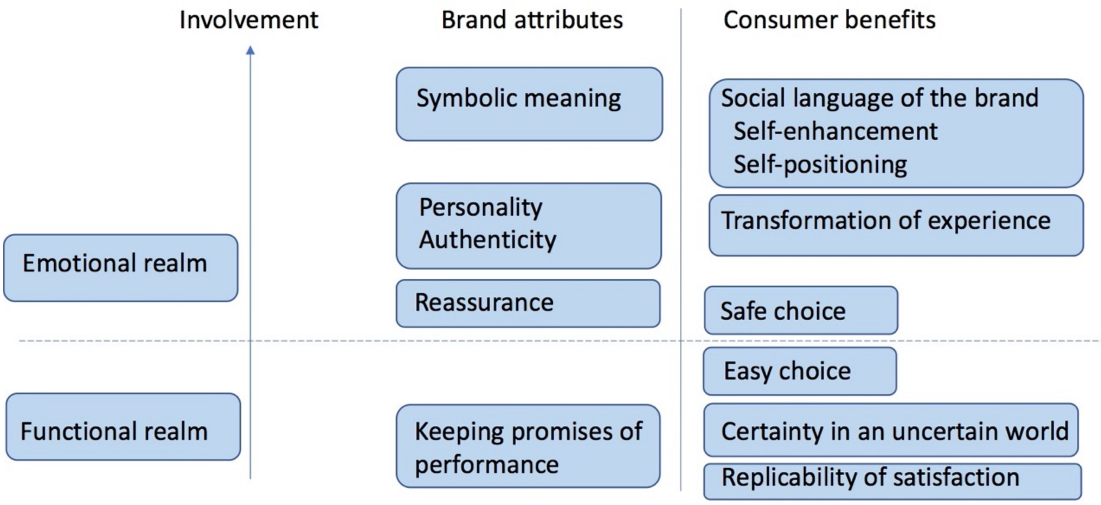

FIGURE 3. The social psychology of the brand (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. 2011)

In addition, the dotted line in the Figure 3 is expressing the border between the two realms. Brands that are the safe choices, rather than easy choices, are the one that locate in the emotional/symbolic space. The difference between the two realms, is in the increase of the risk levels in both functional and emotional. As the risk level rises, the purchase choice cannot be based just on easiness anymore, the consumers have to establish a trust relationship with the brand. Consumer benefit of the brand becomes a safe choice when consumers purchase decisions become more driven by their emotional processes. In other words, the brand's product/service is safe because the brand is fulfilling the consumer's expectations for e.g. performance, style and excitement. (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. 2011, 5.)

The traditional brand definition according to Kapferer also has two paradigms: customer-based and financial-based. Essentially, these two are connected to each other.

- Financial-Based Brand Definitions; Financial Equity

In this approach, the brands value is measured by the brands net additional cash flows confined. The financial based definition sees brands as both, intangible assets – eventually being posted on the balance sheet as one of the many types of intangible asset like e.g. trademarks and patents, and conditional assets.

Brands are conditional assets because for them to deliver their benefits (financial value), they need to work in liaison with other material assets like production facilities for example. Without services or products to lie on, there simply is no brand. Furthermore, brands need profitable business models to be recognised and succeed. The brand becomes real when its product or service effectively becomes the embodiment of the brand, thus becoming the main source of brand evaluation. (Kapferer 2012, 8.)

- Customer-Cased Brand Definitions; Customer Equity

As mentioned before, the financial equity and customer equity are connected; the additional cash flows are the result of consumers' eagerness to buy one brand more than the other, even in the situation where another brand is more affordable. Through marketing of the brand, strong affiliations and beliefs that have been created over time in consumers' minds are eventually the factors that make some brands more desirable than others. (Kapferer 2012, 7.)

In a word, customer equity is a preface of financial equity. Like Kapferer stated: "Brands have financial value because they have created assets in the minds and hearts of customers, distributors, prescribers, opinion leaders" (Kapferer 2012, 7). Furthermore, for consumers, brands provide simplification for their product or service decision making process. To quote Keller: "Brands allow consumers to lower the search costs for products both internally (in terms of how much they have to think) and externally (in terms of how much they have to looks around" (Keller 2008, 7). Based on their previous knowledge and what mental image they already have of the brand - its product characteristics, quality etc. – consumers can make presumptions and formulate reasonable expectations about what they perhaps do not know about the brand. (Keller 2008, 7.)

In addition, when a consumer prefers one brand clearly over another and regardless of the price, is willing to purchase that brand's goods over another brand's, that is called brand loyalty. This brand loyalty, results in a bigger market share, due to higher amount of repeated sales from loyal customers. (Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001, 81.) However, even though brand loyalty drives repetitive consumer behaviour, it consists of more; how consumers perceive a brand and its goods. Repetitive sales can be gained with price retentions and different discount promotions, but the consumers that these activities entice are necessarily not brand loyal, just price conscious. Once brand loyalty is established, it is easy to maintain as brand's only need to keep the quality of their goods and services the same. (Retention Science Blog 2018.)

2.2 Brand Identity versus Brand Image

Much like a person's identity serves as a sense of self-image and a provider of one's purpose and meaning, so do brand's identity. In 1986 Europe, Jean Noël Kapferer came up with this concept of brand identity, when seeking to identify the key elements of brands identities (Kapferer 1986, as cited in Kapferer 2012, 149). When the concept later on gained recognition around the globe, it formulated other names, such as "brand stewardship" and "brand key" for example but kept its main purpose.

However, brand identity is not to be mistaken with brand image, because the former is how companies, organizations or any other brand owner's intent to display themselves in consumers' minds. Brand image is consumers' actual mental picture of a brand and will be defined more closely later in this chapter (Riezebos 2003, 63-64). Brand identity is defined when it answers to these questions according to Kapferer (2012, 150):

"What is the brand's particular vision and aim?"

"What makes it different?"

"What needs is the brand fulfilling?"

"What are its value or values?"

"What is its field of competence? Or legitimacy?

"What are the signs which make the brand recognizable?"

Kapferer intended these questions to be used by brand creators to constitute their brand's platform and also to use it to better their brand management. Brand identity is how (for example) companies determine their name, logo; maybe shapes they use; style of font, colours and other visual elements in their logo and products and promotions. It is also how they communicate; interaction with customers, language in their advertisements and how they choose to communicate through social media and other communication services. (Kapferer 2012, 149-152; Investopedia 2018.) In the Figure 4, the author has collected external sources of brand identity according to Kapferer (2012, 149-153) and Lindroos et al. (2005, 64) for better visual presentation.

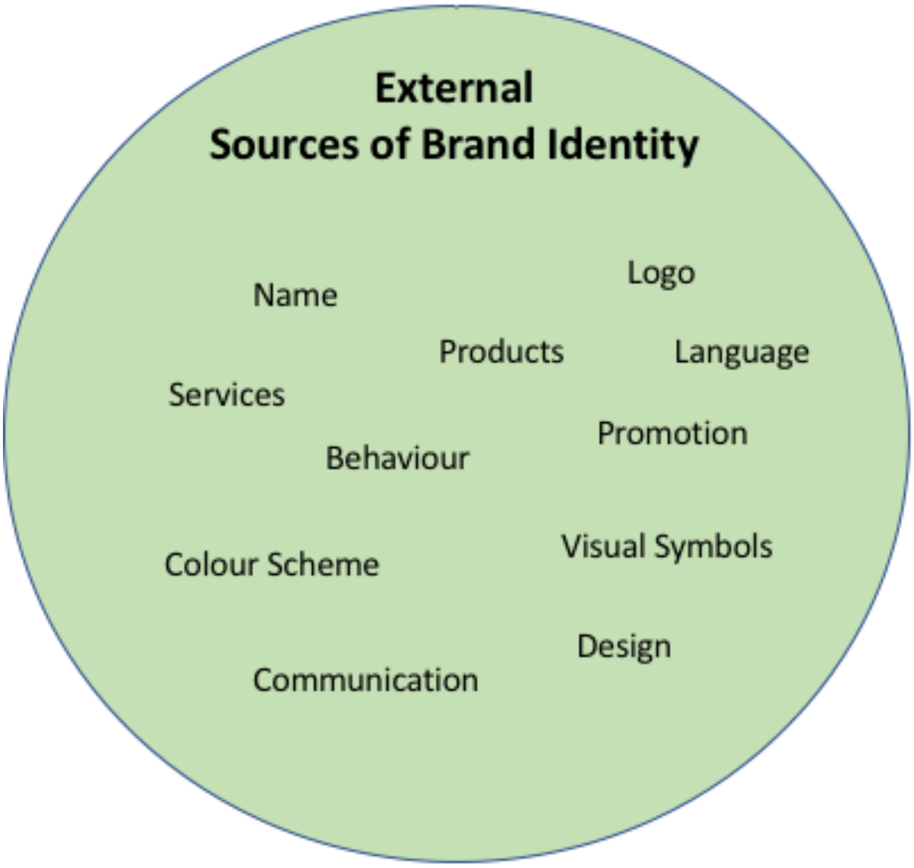

FIGURE 4. External sources of brand identity

The best brand identities are mirrors of their brand holders, in fact, the best way for brands to differentiate from their competitors is to possess a brand identity that is a true reflection of themselves (Lindroos et al. 2005, 100). For example, Nike's products are designed for athletes or to use in sports or as sporty leisure wear, which is why their identity is built around this concept. From their logo, company values, mission statement, all the way to customer interaction and in-store employees clothing, everything is reflecting their company and company culture, thus empowering and supporting their brand identity. (Nike 2018.) The Figure 5 presents the inner sources of brand identity.

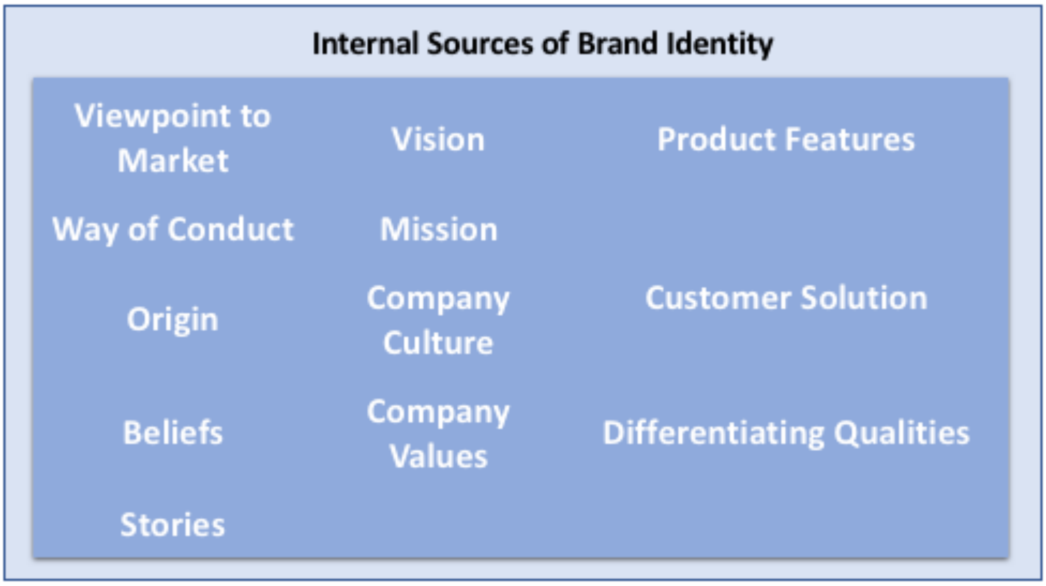

FIGURE 5. Brand core meaning (modified from Lindroos et al. 2005, 100)

The inner sources of brand identity help brand strategists to create and maintain the brand identity. These associations represent brand's values and imply a promise from company members to consumers. Even if the brand extends to new market areas or services, this core identity is presumably going to remain constant. (Aaker 2002, 68-69.)

As mentioned before, brand image is on the receiver's side; it is the mental picture that the consumers and others collectively have formed based on the signals emanated from brands products, services, communications (Kapferer 2008, 174; Aaker 2002, 69). To the contrary, brand identity is on the sender's side, it is what the brand wants to project. Figure 6 below by Aaker, compares the differences between brand identity and brand image with an example of premium beer.

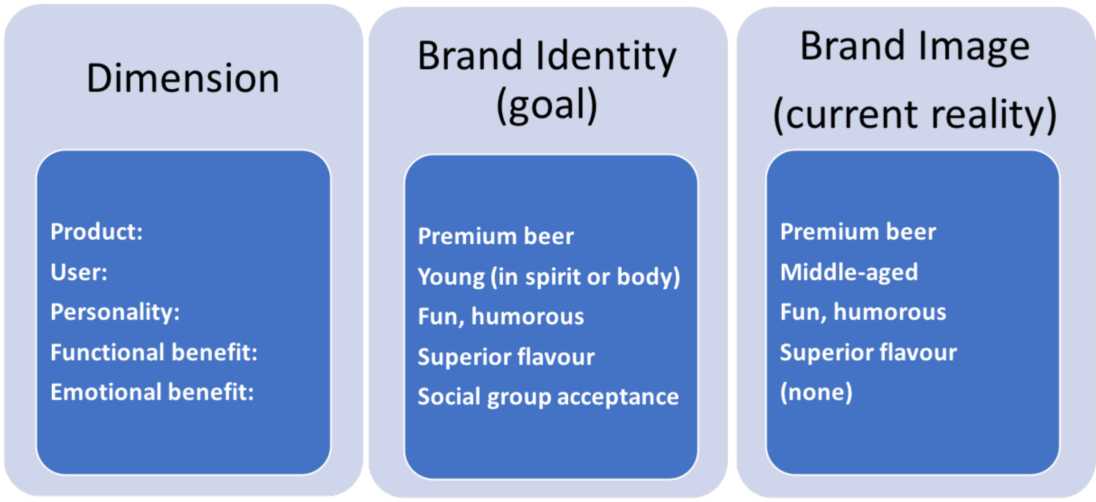

FIGURE 6. Differences between brand identity and brand image (Aaker 2002, 180)

As can be noticed in the Figure above, the real brand image is not always what the brand strategists have intended it to originally be. However, with the right measures it can be augmented, reinforced, exploited or diffused and even deleted. (Aaker 2002, 180.) To further clarify how brand image is created from brand identity, Figure 7 illustrates the of identity and image concept of Kapferer (2012, 152).

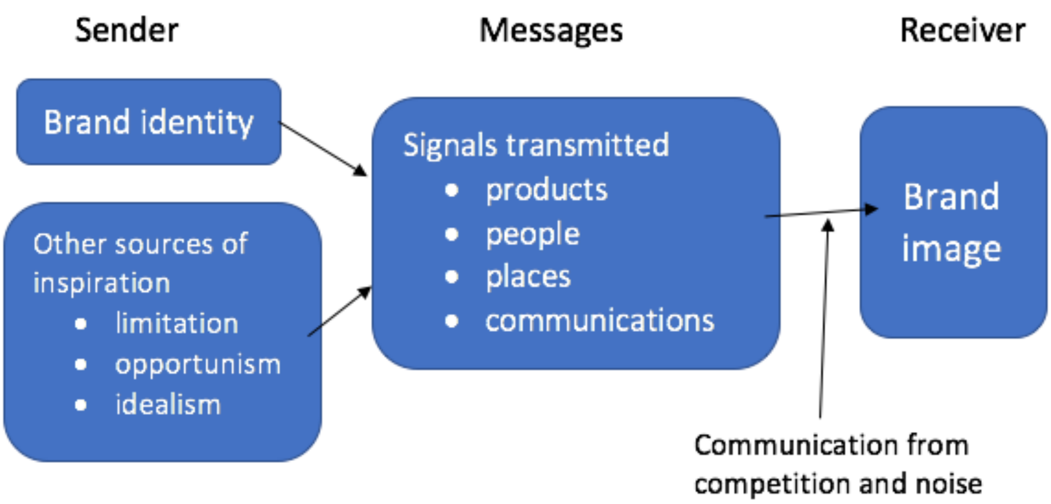

FIGURE 7. Identity and image (Kapferer 2012, 174)

2.3 Brand Positioning

Positioning is the act of creating a distinctive feature of the brand in the minds of consumers – a competitive advantage that makes the consumer purchase that exact brand and not the other brands goods (Kapferer 2012, 152; Laakso 2004, 150). Kotler and Keller (2016) define the goal of positioning as to "locate the brand in the minds of consumers to maximize the potential benefit to the firm". However, the goal is to strengthen the brands existing positive mental image, not to create a completely new and different image (Laakso 2004, 151). When done right, positioning can shape the consumers preferences and lead to higher customer loyalty, brand equity – driven by consumers and eagerness for brand searching. Furthermore, because a differential value and advantage proposition is created when a brand is well-positioned, it should appeal to the specific needs of a consumer segment. (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos 2010, 1764.)

Brand positioning requires marketers to identify and communicate the differences and similarities between their brand and their competitor brands. To achieve this, firstly, it requires identifying the target audience and relevant competition so that the frame of reference is clarified. Secondly, given on that frame of reference, recognizing the points of differences and similarities like mentioned before, and thirdly, summarising the essence and the positioning of the brand in a brand mantra. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 298.)

Moreover, brand position should be created so, that it has an answer to these four questions:

- For whom?
- For what benefit (why)?
- When?
- Against whom?

Because all consumer choices are essentially based on comparisons, products and services should be positioned so, that they are clearly a part of this selection process. (Kapferer 2012, 175-176.) The position diamond by Kapferer (2012, 176) in the Figure 8 below, is a commonly used tool by marketers who are responsible of brand positioning.

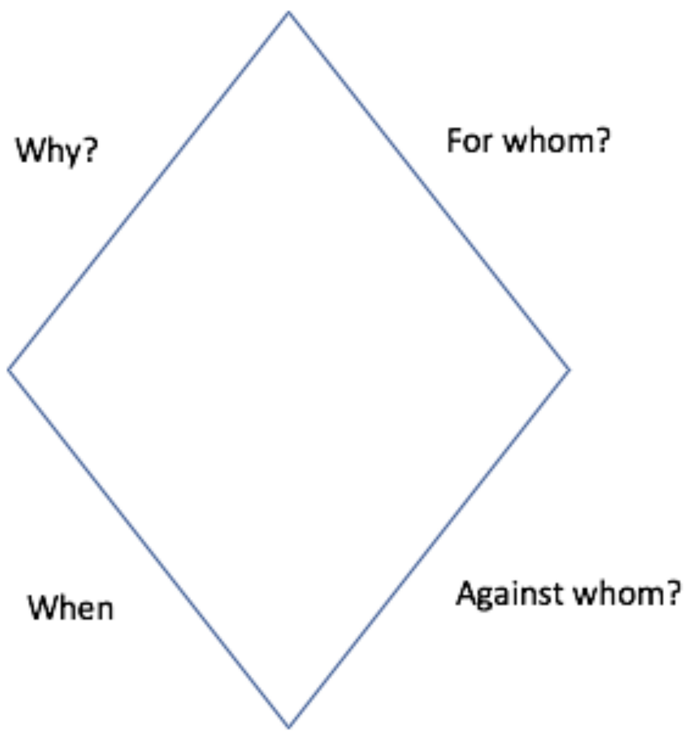

FIGURE 8. Positioning a brand (Kapferer 2012, 176)

2.4 Employer Branding

Times have changed since companies could just assume the best talents would automatically compete for their open positions. According to ManpowerGroup's 2016-2017 Talent Shortage Survey (2017), employers around the globe are experiencing difficulties in filling their open positions, especially the positions in IT, skilled trades and sales representation. Companies and recruiters are now realising that the competition for talents is real and the way to compete, is to make your company the most attractive for job seekers. The best way to improve one's attractiveness as an employer, is to invest in their employer brand.

When two business models conjoined in the early 1990s, it originated the concept of employer branding. The first model being the recruitment communications connection to the corporate brands growing power. And the second model, the idea of psychological contract, that was born in the occupational psychology field. (Rosethorn et al. 2009, 4.) Rousseau (1995), a leader in studying the concept of these psychological contracts, defines it as the base of the beliefs and behaviours of employees' in their workplace:

> *From the recruitment stage of an employee's work life to retirement or resignation, it can have a profound effect on the attitudes and well-being of an individual. It is commonly understood as an individual's belief about the terms and conditions of a reciprocal agreement with an employer or manager; a belief that some form of promise has been made and that the terms are accepted by all involved* (Rosethorn et al. 2009, 9).

However, the first definition of the term employer branding was not published until 1996, when Simon Barrow and Tim Ambler first defined it in the Journal of Brand Management as: "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & barrow 1996, 185-206 as cited in Mosley 2017, 4).

Since then, the term has been defined in literature more frequently, but in its essence employer brand is the appearance - the employer identity, of the company that the employees and other stakeholders are perceiving, and a way for companies to differentiate their brand from other competitors (Sehgal & Malati. 2013, 51-65; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 501-517). It represents a brand promise that companies make to their employees, to people interested in working for the company, and to the talents that the company seeks to recruit (Mei-Pochtler, Strack, Sokolowski, Kanitz & Dederl 2014). In Figure 9, the author has illustrated the parties that have an effect and are affected by the employer branding activities.

FIGURE 9. The relationship between three employer brands

Furthermore, employer branding is also both a process and a strategy, where distinctive aspects of the company's employment offerings and environment are promoted to the talents whose skills and expertise are needed in order to meet the company's business objectives and goals (Mosley & Schmidt. 2017, 8). Moreover, the target of employer branding is to also create a work place where good employees want to stay in, thus one of the goals of internal employer branding is to retain them. By ensuring their employees' satisfaction in the employer and by assuring that they are comprehending and committing to the employer's vision and mission, the internal employer brand is reinforced. In its entirety, as was illustrated in Figure 9, employer branding consists of external and internal branding that are in coexistence with the employer brand management (Sehgal & Malati, 2013, 51-65).

2.5 Benefits of Employer Branding

Because the intangible nature of employer branding, some companies may be reluctant to invest in their own employer brand simply, because the costs of the investment do not produce immediate returns. However, it is studied that in the long term, employer branding can positively affect company's success in recruitment, employee engagement and retention as well their competitive advantage. These benefits are described more thoroughly in the Figure 10. (Mosley & Schmidt, 2017, 9).

FIGURE 10. The benefits of employer branding (Mosley & Schmidt. 2017, 9)

As Mosley and Schmidt had stated, the costs of recruitments are lower when employer's employer brand is attractive. In fact, in 2011 LinkedIn surveyed 2,250 US corporate recruiters and found out that the cost per hire is over 2 times higher for companies with a poor/moderate employer brand strength than for companies with a strong employer brand. The study also found that companies with a strong employer brand had 28% lower turnover rates than companies with a weak employer brand. The same study found that by investing in one's employer brand they can also attract passive candidates better, because passive candidates tend to value a good company culture above other benefits and compensations. (Gultekin 2011).

Additionally, a more recent study report written by Burgess for LinkedIn's talent blog (2016), stated that a positive employer brand can attract up to 41% of full-time workers in the US, without any pay increase. The same goes for passive candidates: 40% of which, would be ready to switch jobs without a pay increase if an employer possessed most of the qualities of a good employer brand. The report also states that, 23% of young professionals are even willing to accept a small pay reduction if they can work for companies with a good employer brand. (Burgess, 2016).

Moreover, there are other benefits of a good employer brand that the recruitment specialists at Nigel Wright Group have found (2018):

- Positive recruitment processes enhance word-of-mouth marketing

  When employers offer candidates a positive recruitment process that make them feel noticed and valued, often they will spread the word about their good experience to their peer group. This is how the right kind of talents are attracted through word-of-mouth marketing.

- Advantage in future recruitments

  If a candidate is not suitable for a position they primarily applied for, it is often noticed, that their knowledge and skills can be utilised in other job positions later on. This is why it is an advantage for employers to keep these talents active and interested in their employment possibilities by keeping in contact and maintaining a relationship with them, even after the first failed recruitment.

All in all, a positive employer brand does not only save money and in best cases is profitable but keeps current employees happy and engaged with the same employer. Engagement enhances effectiveness and retention, which mean lower turnover rates and competitive advantages.

2.6 Employer Brand Framework

The employer brand guidelines, also called as brand framework, frame and inform the procedures a company conveys in their brand marketing. Employer brand framework usually includes brand propositions; the desired brand associations and the frame of visual designs and messages, such as logo, design elements and colours. (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 83.) According to Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 83), the key to a strong brand is in consistency that is driven through a disciplined application of brand framework, thus employer brands should be constructed in a similar manner.

Moreover, employer branding should be aligned with company's corporate and customer branding, instead of being treated as its own process. Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 84) state that, like the corporate brand identity should be reflected in all of the branches of brand communications, so should the core of employer branding. In fact, for the whole company brand, meaning the corporate-, employer- and customer brand, to be truly effective in delivering unified brand communications and experiences, the alignment is essential. (Mei-Pochtler et al. 2014; Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 84.) However, the closeness of this collaboration between corporate-, customer- and employer brand must be defined before even launching a motion for employer branding, because situations in which e.g. the needs of an employee might intersect with the needs of a customer could occur. In these situations, the brand should mind the way of communication towards different target groups. (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 12.)

2.7 Employer Brand Management

Like established before, even though employer branding is a rising trend, it is still among the last areas recruiters are investing in. In addition, it is found that the major amount of the recruitment budget is still going on more traditional recruitment tactics like posting job advertisements. (Schnidman et al. 2017, 18.) The act of coordinating people management activities with important involvements for how performance- and talent management, leadership development, recruitment and on-boarding take places, is what employer branding management is. These key elements of employer brand managements can bring a bigger impact on growth and profit margin when compared to any other HR discipline. (Mosley 2014, 4, 8.)

A successful employer brand management focuses on the right target talents and thus saves company's resources and money. Mosley (2014, 11) describes employer brand management as an endurance sport, because its gains are seldom immediate and cumulative, but the progress is made when the focus is on all of the moving parts. Furthermore, Mosley (2014, 9) also believes that for a coherent and distinctive employer brand, the employer brand management needs commitment and braveness from all parties involved in its management. In addition, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, 513) argue that employer branding should be considered as an umbrella, under which managers should coordinate their HR strategies. As it is more beneficial and effective to integrate the HR activities such as recruitment, training, career management, than if each process is managed on their own (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 513).

Moreover, the benefits cannot be noticed efficiently without measuring the success of the employer branding strategy. Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 267) argue, that employers need to first define the measures of their success, before being able to measure the benefits. Nearly every aspect of the employer branding strategy can be measured, e.g. the effectiveness of recruitment advertising, the effectiveness of social campaigns and the referral-effectiveness are all measurable (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 267,269,275). For example, the effectiveness of recruitment advertising can be measured by comparing the investment made in the outlet, to the return of investment in the form of more applications, more vacancies and the effectiveness in recruitment processes (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 267).

In addition, for employer branding management to work effectively, companies need to add the concept of Employee Value Proposition, commonly shortened as EVP, in their processes. Employer brand management describes the measures, tools and techniques applied by companies to ensure people recognize, experience and trust in the key features defined by their EVP. (Mosley 2014, 4.) Because the EVP is an important topic related to the thesis, the topic is established more thoroughly in the next subchapter.

2.8 The Employee Value Proposition

According to Sjovall (2017) EVP is a critical tool in talent attraction in the competition for the best talents, especially for global organizations. While employer brand is the "image" of the brand – how companies are perceived as employers, the EVP is the "identity" – how companies would like to be seen. EVP is the key features of an employer that the company would most like to associated with, and it presents clear reasoning for why current and future employees should choose and stay with an employer. EVP also communicates the employer's expectations from their employees and vice versa, employees' expectations of an employer. (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 63.)

Much like the customer value proposition, is a promise of a certain quality and key benefits of a brands goods and/or experiences, EVP should be considered similarly. EVP offers clear point of reference for everything employers do to positively enhance their employer brand experience and reputation. EVP is also the so called 'offer' that serves as a foundation for an employer brand management and marketing activities (Browne 2012, 30). Furthermore, EVP allows employees to utilise the impacts of the different aspects of the psychological contract, that was referred to in Chapter 2.4. (Rosethorn et al. 2009, 20; Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 63.) Figure 11 below explains how the EVP and employee experience together form and define the true strength of the employer brand.

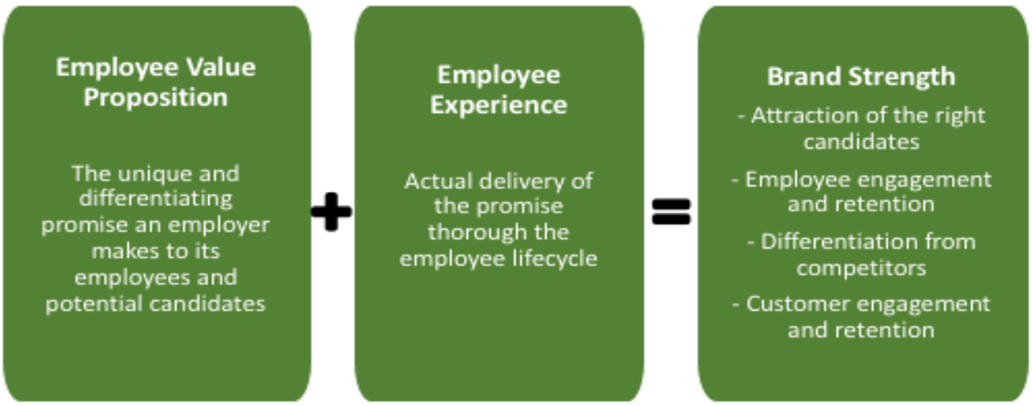

FIGURE 11. The employer brand in action (modified from Rosethorn et al. 2009, 20)

Even though EVP has previously appeared in various different formats in literature, the most commonly favoured format consists of a brand statement that is supported by 3 to 6 supporting pillars, which are the unique features the employer can offer. These pillars support and define the brand statement that summarises the overall employment deal or alternatively, focuses on one ruling aspect of that employment deal. The brand statement indicates the essence of the brand; its core positioning – the one key feature the employer most wants famous for. (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 64.)

See from Figure 12 by Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 64) how the mentioned structure of EVP is pictured.

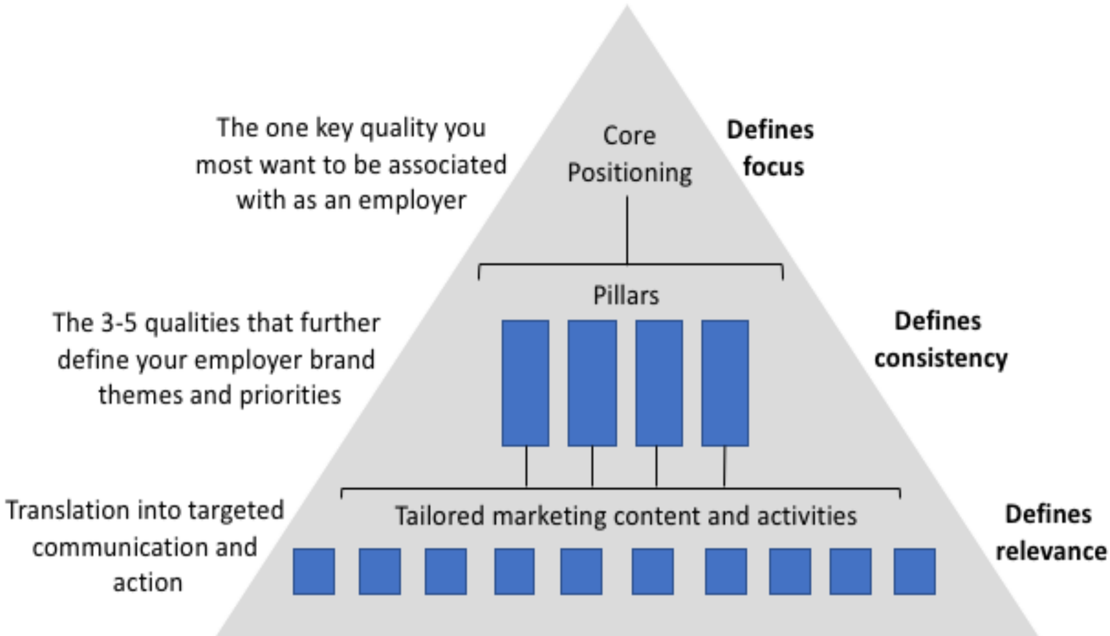

FIGURE 12. Structuring your EVP (Mosley &Schmidt 2017, 64)

Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 65) use Adidas as an example, and state that the brand essence of the brand is: “Shape the future of sport”. This brand essence is then supported by 6 pillars that further define the themes and priorities of Adidas’ employer brand. These pillars include qualities like: “Through sport, we have the power to change lives” and “Careers without borders” for example (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 65). Another example comes from Scotiabank; their brand essence is simply the word “´Together” with 3 supporting pillars.

These are the 3 pillars supporting Scotiabank's (CEB 2015, 8) brand essence:

- "We recognise and reward performance"
- "We are a successful company"
- "We believe in the value of strong relationships"

As was established before, EVP affects both external and internal perceptions of an employer, which is why the professionals of HR should work in collaboration with brand management to ensure the cohesion in both employee and customer experience (Browne 2012, 31). Mosley (2014, 9) further states that an effective EVP is clear focused and comprehendible, and once established can focus and clarify the organisation's people management activities. Moreover, there are five categories of attributes that affect and shape the EVP; Organization, Work, People, Opportunity and Rewards. In 2015, CEB gathered the answers from their Employment Value Proposition Survey into an analysis report, which described these following sets of attributes (see Figure 13) as the ones that the labour market and employees perceive as valuable. Figure 13 pictures the categories and their perceived values of employment according to the CEB (2015, 4) report.

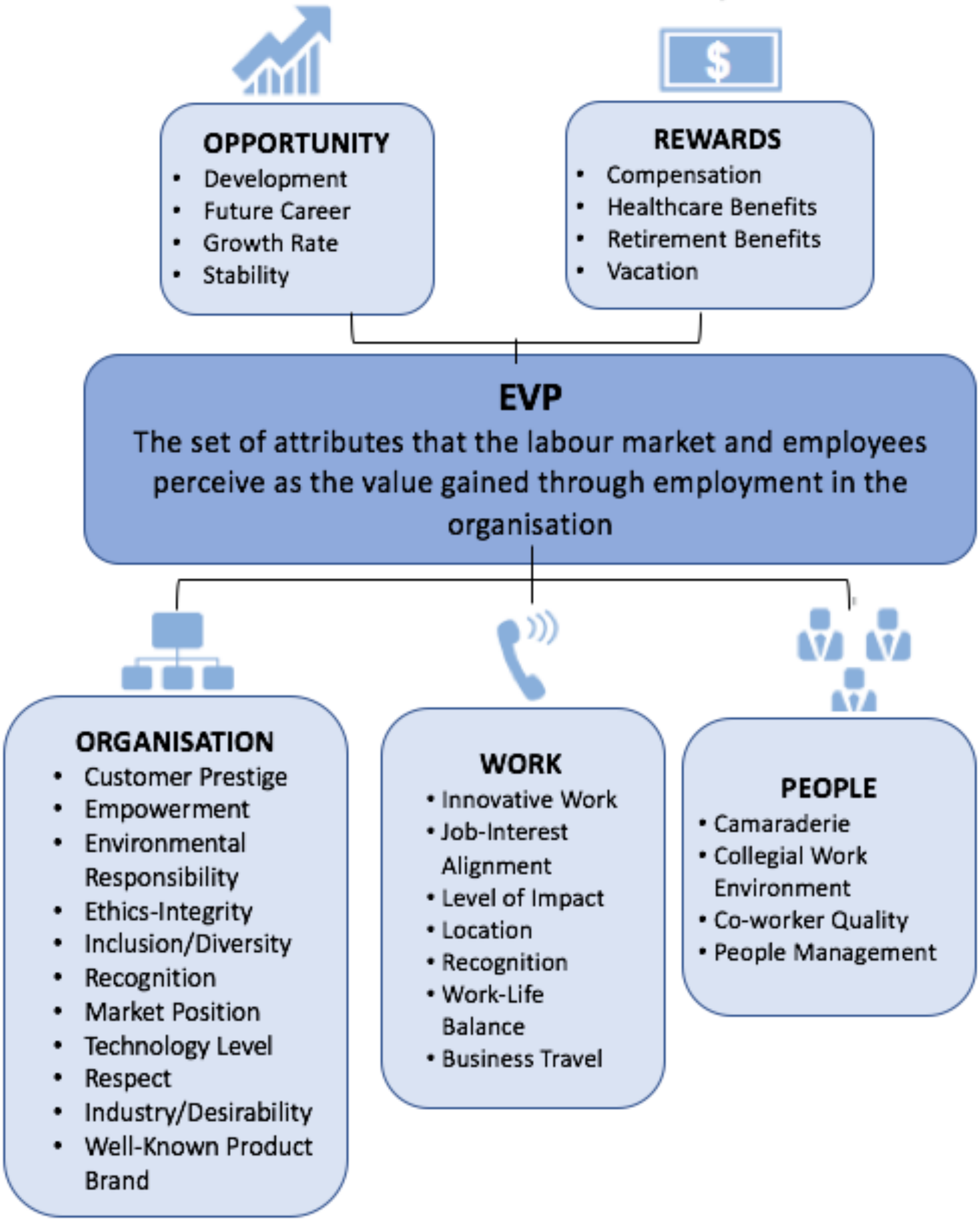

FIGURE 13. EVP Attributes (modified from CEB 2015, 4)

As can be seen from Figure 13, an effective EVP has many values from which employers can choose the ones that express their corporate culture the most and further emphasise those values that they most want to be associated with. Furthermore, the LinkedIn report on recruiting trends (Schnidman et al. 2017, 23) states that, both recruiters and job candidates think that company culture and values are the attributes that grab candidates' attention the most. The second influencing attribute reported was perks and fringe benefits, such as healthcare, yearly bonuses and vacations that the employer can offer.

Moreover, according to Sibson Consulting (2010) study where 1059 people were surveyed, there are differences in which EVP attributes motivate the most, between different age groups. In the research it was found that, the elements of career such as status, title and growth opportunities were more appreciated by respondents under the age of 30 than with the older generation. As a matter of fact, 81% of respondents aged 30 and younger thought that the career elements were important, whereas the respondents aged 51 and older ranked it as the least important factor in EVP. However, the same study indicates that respondents in all of the age groups agreed on work content being the best motivator and the primary source of good work performance. (Browne 2012, 33.)

As this chapter established, EVP helps employers clarify what their employer brand stands for and what are the benefits their brand promises and actually delivers. For employers to build a strong employer brand these aspects must be clear. According to Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 64) positive associations are the foundation of every strong brand and are obtained through relentless and consistent brand communications and experiences.

The concepts and practices that were introduced in Chapter 2: Branding and Employer Branding are all utilised and applied later in the guide. Supported by this thesis the guide will formulate its contents and procedures and have a researched knowledge-background. These employer branding concepts will form a step-by-step guide for the case company to utilise in their everyday business operations.

3 CASE: EMPLOYER BRAND DEVELOPMENT WORK

In this chapter the author introduces the functional part of the thesis. The chapter starts with an introduction to the case company for which the guide is intended for and briefly explains how the personnel service industry functions. It is important to introduce and establish the background of the case company for the guide to be understandable and coherent. Likewise, it is important for the thesis to introduce the theory of functional thesis and the means of data gathering. In the last subchapter the author describes the process of building the employer branding guide and assesses the end result. As was mentioned before, the guide will not be published due to privacy reasons.

3.1 Case Company: Company X

Company X is a recruitment agency, also called as personnel service agency that provides personnel services like HR-related consulting, recruiting and staffing for both, the individual customers and the businesses. The company was founded in 2015 by two entrepreneurs who have been involved with the personnel services industry for over two decades. They wanted to bring something new to the industry; instead of traditional sales-based thinking, they wanted to create a community that takes care of both its employees as well as its employer's while also pursuing their common benefit. (Company X 2015.)

Moreover, the company's name and logo encapsulate their business values and mission. In fact, company X's mission is to find work for great employees and vice versa, great employees for companies. All this while pursuing to take genuine care of its people. Moreover, company X has made over 750 employment relationships since it was first founded and has used over 33 different collective labour agreements in those employment relationships. (Company X 2015.)

3.1.1 Company X's Services

As mentioned before, company X focuses in offering three different service:

- Employee leasing services
- Recruiting services
- HR-consulting services

Employee leasing services provide help for organisations that need extra workers, but don't want to hire the people for themselves (Company X 2015). These organisations usually don't have own resources to find, interview and hire new employees, or / and subsequently don't have enough HR-resources to keep these employees to themselves. Furthermore, by leasing employees, the customers of personnel services only pay for the leasing fees. The personnel service that leases the workforce, is the one who is responsible for the employees' healthcare, work insurance, payroll administration, and other employment related matters (Cambridge University Press 2017).

Recruiting services offer help and consultancy for organisations that are currently looking to hire new talents, but don't have the resources to do so on their own. Company X manages the whole recruitment process, from mapping out the profile of the hiree, to job postings, interviews and aptitude testing. If necessary and requested by the client, company X will also take care of the occupational safety instructing of the new employee. (Company X 2015.)

HR-Consulting service provides HR-consulting for organisations that want to outsource their HR-sectors or for those, that don't necessarily have their own HR-departments or HR-managers. Company X's HR-consultants are there for all of the HR related needs and offer help with recruitments, legal aspects of HR like employment contracts, aptitude testing and work well-being among other things. In addition, company X's HR-consulting service also includes the option for interpretations and comparisons of labour agreements. (Company X 2015.)

3.1.2 Personnel Services Briefly

Temporary agency work or leased work, is a way of employment that is a growing phenomenon in labour markets. As the statistics from the Finnish national authority, Statics Finland show, employment is on a slow rise in Finland and in 2016, the temporary agency workers amounted to approximately 2% of the labour force. (Tilastokeskus 2017a.) The impact has an effect on the personnel service agencies' revenues as well, as Statistics Finland (2017b) reported that in 2016 personnel service agencies' revenues grew substantially.

In definition, temporary agency work is a way of employment in which the employee is employed under a personnel service agency but does the actual work for the client of personnel service agency. The personnel service agency is liable for the employee and is a subject to the same employment legislation as every employer. (Työsuojelu.fi 2017.)

The temporary agency work employment relationship involves three parties: the employee, the personnel service agency and the client company, also called as “workforce user”. The workforce user employs the personnel service agency to find the workforce to do a certain work and gives them a profile of the wanted employee. This profile usually consists of the employee’s necessary know-how and key talents. The employee then agrees on the terms of employment and signs the employment contract with the personnel service agency and does the work for the user party. Employment related labour code matters such as legislation, wage payment and healthcare are the personnel service agency’s obligations thus, the only responsibilities the user company has with the employee is the work familiarisation and supervision. (Lehto & Salonen 2018; Työsuojelu.fi 2017.) Furthermore, it is forbidden in the labour code to charge any commission fees from the temporary agency workers in any way as the agreement of lease is between the user party and the personnel service agency (Työsuojelu.fi 2017). Figure 14 illustrates the relationship and liabilities between the parties.

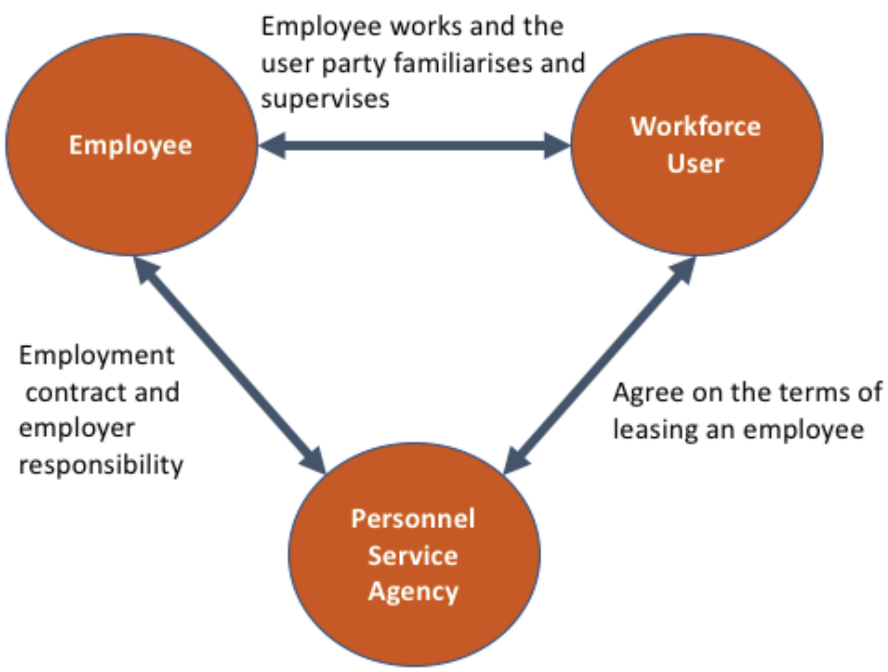

FIGURE 14. The parties of temporary agency work relationship (modified from Lehto & Salonen 2018; Työsuojelu.fi 2017)

Likewise, the recruiting services that personnel service agencies provide, follow a similar process. The user party expresses the need of an employee and commissions the personnel service agency to find this employee. To the contrary of temporary agency work employment relationships, the employee does not become employed for the personnel service agency, but for the user party. (Company X 2015.)

Moreover, there are multiple reasons why personnel service agencies are used. The author has, through own observation as an HR-coordinator, noticed five main reasons behind why companies/organisations are using personnel service agencies' services:

- Not enough own resources
- HR-expertise
- Cost-efficiency
- Anonymousness
- Instability between demand and personnel
- Business activity and need depending on season

As established earlier, keeping an employee can be costly as the employer expenses alone can be high. In addition, just the process of recruiting a new employee is often long and both time and resource consuming. According to the Global Recruiting Trends (Schnidman et al. 2016) report, over 50% of the recruiters estimate the average time to hire to be 1 to 2 months. Kaijala (2016) further states that even reactive and fast recruiting processes can last up to 3 months, but if the position requires rarer key talents or relocating the best talent from another country, the recruiting process can take up to 6 months. Thus, small companies often lack the time of their own to properly concentrate on the matter.

Small and medium-sized enterprises do not necessarily always have their own HR-managers or HR-departments, which often means that the CEO or someone with the authority to make decisions, is the one responsible for all the HR-related matters and recruiting new talents. When recruiting and HR is outsourced, the company can concentrate on its core business activities (Vuorensalmi 2016).

Another main reason behind why companies use personnel service agencies, can lie in the nature of the industry that the company is operating in. For example, ski resorts in Finland only operate during winter seasons, thus their need for employees is only seasonal. By commissioning a personnel service agency, skiresort entrepreneurs can leave the matters relating to recruitment and HR, in the hands of the personnel service agency and consequently save their own resources in this area.

Furthermore, the reason of anonymousness is closely attached to the topic of employer brands. If a company has an inferior employer brand, that does not incite many job seekers, the case might be turn out in a way that they don’t get any applications for their open positions. Vice versa, the employer brand of a company might be so attractive, that the quantity of the applications and inquiries might be overwhelming. Anonymousness offers companies a temporary isolation from their employer brand in the first steps of the application process. Moreover, it allows the applicants to only concentrate on the job description and make the decision of application on the grounds of the position, without being influenced by the employer brand. (Vuorensalmi 2016.) Of course, the applicants are informed about the identity of the employer and for company X, the information is given after the job interview.

3.2 Functional Thesis Process, Research Methods and Secondary Data

The difference between traditional research theses and functional theses is that, functional theses do not have a research problem, but accordingly, the research problem is the process itself. However, in functional theses too, reporting is the essence of the research. Through reporting, the general view of the process and its goals are communicated to the reader. Furthermore, functional thesis should always produce a tangible end-product; a portfolio, guide or a fair stand for example. (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2003, 51, 85.) The end-product of this thesis is a guide on employer branding for company X.

As established before, functional theses consist of two parts: the report and the tangible end-product. A functional thesis report includes descriptions on why and how an author has done the end product, how was the process of making it, and what are the results and conclusions. The report includes the theoretical framework based on literature review and it should also indicate how the author has evaluated and assessed their own work and the end product. Moreover, the theoretical framework that the author has chosen in their thesis, should be topic appropriate because it is used as the foundation for the end-product. (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2003, 41-42, 65.)

According to Vilkka and Airaksinen (2003, 65) the thesis end-product should be targeted to the target group. In this case the guide is targeted for personnel and management of company X, by both its content and linguistic style. Vilkka and Airaksinen (2003, 65) also state that, functional thesis is an effective tool in cultivating one's academic, professional and personal self.

Moreover, the primary data for this thesis was collected through observation method and an interview. Observational method of research is described more thoroughly in the subchapter 3.2.1, with the qualitative research method, interviewing, respectively explained in the subchapter 3.2.2. In addition, the data and the results from both research methods is analysed in their own chapters. Furthermore, thesis' purpose is to serve as a support and provide the research background for the guide. In addition, this thesis can be utilised as a frame of reference for company X's future development processes and other operational processes as well.

As the thesis, in its premises, is a research development project; developing company X's employer branding, the model of research development work process by Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti (2014, 24) is utilised to describe the authors own thesis process. Furthermore, research development work's goals as described by Ojasalo et al. (2014, 18), are to solve an organisation's/company's problems that are driven from used practiced or to renew them. It aspires to bring new information and practices learned from critically reviewing theories from literature and working life. Moreover, research development work highlights active interaction with different all stakeholders. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 18.)

The process of the functional thesis is illustrated in the Figure 15.

FIGURE 15. The process of this research

In Figure 15, the text boxes describe a stage of the development work process cycle and are modified from the process model of Ojanen et al. (2014, 24). The text boxes around the stages with a same number, refer to the actual process or this thesis. The thesis initially started when the author began looking for interesting thesis topics and noticed that their personal interest on the topic of employer branding had grown through their work in the HR field. The CEO of company X then suggested the author combine the two and write a thesis on employer branding. In addition, the CEO expressed their need for a personalised employer branding guide or another form of instruction package of the topic and gave the commission to the author.

The second stage of the process required familiarising in the topic both its theory and practise side. For this part of the process, the author sought information from literature, internet, videos and journals. The second and the fourth process stages, in a matter of fact, work in collaboration as all the information and knowledge gathered have to simultaneously be filtered and raked by their relevancy, source of information and usefulness.

The third stage of the process involved setting on the decision of the end-product of the thesis to be a guide on employer branding. Guide that uses the reporting part of the thesis as its theoretical foundation. The limits for the thesis are clear, as the main goal is to produce a guide precisely for company X.

As established, the fourth stage is the stage where all the data collected are sorted and filtered, so that only the most relevant information is utilised in the thesis. Moreover, both primary and secondary data are likewise collected at this stage for later use. At this stage, the author studies different research methods and approaches and according to the thesis objectives, chooses the right match. Like mentioned in Chapter 1.4. Research Methods and Methodology, the author chose to utilise deductive approach with qualitative research method in this thesis. Precisely, observation method and conducting an interview were chosen as the qualitative research methods. At this stage the author also decided to utilise the employment satisfaction survey of company X as it describes the current state of the company's employer brand and treat it as a point of reference for the development work.

The actual writing of this thesis started in the fifth stage and was the most time-consuming stage in comparison to the other stages. The author started by writing the theory framework, studying and analysing the collected data and collecting the findings in this thesis. After concluding these parts, the author created the guide based on the information and theories, such as brand image / identity, the EVP structure model and the benefits of employer branding established in this thesis. The theories were used to reinforce the message and procedures described in the guide.

The actual process of building the guide will be described more closely in subchapter 3.3. Building the Guide. Likewise, the final part of the thesis process, the assessment and evaluation of it and its end-product can be found in subchapter 3.4. Self-evaluation.

3.2.1 Observation Method and Results

Observation is a systematic process of recording, benchmarking, describing and analysing behavioural patterns and causal connections of people, objects and events. Researchers who use observation as data collection method witness/participate in the events and with the subjects to record the information and study the occurrences. (Saunders et al. 2012, 340; Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin 2010, 239.) Saunders et al. (2012, 340) further state that, observation method can be rewarding and educating and furthermore, can add noticeably to the richness of the research's data. In addition, the observed parties are usually called as informants instead of participants, thus that term is used in the thesis.

According to Zikmund et al. (2010, 239) there are seven kinds of phenomena that can be observed. These phenomena and the examples are listed in the Table 2.

TABLE 2. What can be observed? (Zikmund et al. 2010, 239)

Phenomenon	**Example**
Physical action	A worker's movement during an assembly process
Verbal behaviour	Statements made by airline travellers while waiting in line
Expressive behaviour	Facial expressions, tones of voices and forms of body language
Spatial relations and locations	Proximity of middle managers' offices to the president's office
Temporal patterns	Length of time it takes to execute a stock purchase order
Physical objects	Percent of recycled materials compared to trash
Verbal and pictorial records	Number of illustrations appearing in a training booklet

Moreover, in relation to observation as a research method, Saunders et al. (2012, 342) stated that there are two types of observation in business and management research, which are: participant observation and structured observation. For this thesis, the author chose the former as their method of research.

Participant observation is a method where the researcher attempts to fully immerge in the lives, activities and work of study subjects, or informants, and thus become a member of their organisation. The method is used to fully understand of "what is going on" and get into the so-called root of different social settings. (Saunders et al. 2012, 342.)

According to Gill and Johnson (2010, 167) a researcher can choose to adopt in four different participant observer roles:

- Complete observer
- Complete participant
- Participant-as-observer
- Observer-as-Participant

The researcher chooses the observer role depending on the factors and purpose of their research. When a researcher is applying the method of participant-as-observer, the purpose as a researcher is revealed to the informants. The role of participant-as-observer is board, and if a researcher is currently employed in an organisation/company that they are researching, they can use their existing employee status to adopt the observer role. (Saunders et al. 2012, 343-345.)

The purpose of this thesis, its objectives and nature in addition to the organisational access allowed by the case company, enabled the author to participate-as-observer in this research. Furthermore, Brannick and Coghlan (2007, 66) argue that the traditional theory-driven research method used in business, where the research is conducted by outsiders, can be done equally acceptably by researchers on the inside. However, in line with Saunders et al. (2012, 346) there are advantages and issues a researcher might face, when conducting research in a company that employs them.

Brannick and Coghlan (2007, 60) state that, insider researchers might be criticised because they have a personal stake and relevant emotional investment in the mix. Researcher's objectiveness might also become a disadvantage as they might have strong inclination to influence the research and findings by feeling empathy towards their colleagues or the company.

However, insider researchers can through the process of reflexivity, re-evaluate their comprehending of situations to which they are close to, by utilising their theoretical and experiential knowledge (Brannick & Coghlan 2007, 72). Brannick and Coghlan (2007, 67-69) further argue that insider researchers have the type of insider pre-knowledge and primary access on information and the networks of the organisation, that outsider researchers could not necessarily gain. Moreover, this pre-knowledge and experience is beneficial for insider researchers as they are already familiar with the company's organisational structure, the everyday industry jargon and how the other employees interact and work, not to mention the company's operating model. All in all, Brannick and Coghlan (2007, 72) state that: "In our view, insider research is not problematic in itself and is respectable research in whatever paradigm it is undertaken".

Accordingly, to the Table 2 by Zikmund et al. (2010, 239) author has pictured the subjects of their observation and what was observed in company X in the Table 3. The target of observation is simply headed "Observed" and what was observed headed "Phenomenon". The time frame in which the observations were made was from October 2017 to April 2018.

TABLE 3. Observation in company X

Observed	Phenomenon
Verbal communication	Verbal communication towards existing employees, customers, business partners and applicants during different stages of their recruitment process. Communication through different networking platforms.
Expressive behaviour	Non-verbal communication such as, body language, tones of voices and facial expressions
Procedures	Procedures company X are using daily that relate to or have an effect on their employer branding and employer brand.
Actions	Actions company X take daily that relate to or have an effect on their employer branding and employer brand.
Verbal and numerical records	Number of employees company X is employing and the direction the volume is headed.

Verbal communication was observed to establish further understanding on how company X interacts verbally with its employer brand stakeholders. In this case, verbal communications consist of spoken and written communication. The observations were noted, and access was granted to the natural extent that the observer was allowed in the limitations of their position. For example, the observer could not participate in private job interviews conducted by other employees. In addition, the observation method helped the author to understand the current state of verbal communication regarding employer branding and see if there was room for improvement.

The author found through observing verbal communication, that the HR-employees and the managers have friendly, informal and “laid-back” way to communicate. Authority was never established or verbally assessed between the employees and managers. However, the vocabulary used was professional and did not push any personal boundaries. Intrusive questions or remarks were never made during the observation period either.

Written communication was observed through e-mails accessible to the observer, social media and job postings. Similarly, the observer noticed company X’s informal and friendly way of communicating thorough these channels. For example, in their Facebook posts the company uses emoji’s and funny pictures to connect with the audience. Moreover, like in verbal communications, professionalism was kept in mind and no written communication ever got bad feedback from the audience during the observation period.

Furthermore, because the author noticed the adequate manner of communications in company X, the guide does not include an instruction to improve their employer branding through these manners of communication.

Expressive behaviour was observed in company X by paying close attention to body-language, facial expressions and tones of voices. In everyday life these aspects might go by unnoticeably, but because the observer was driven by the research purpose, they picked up on these visual signs.

What was noticed by the observer was that, the tones of voices of HR-employees and managers often shifted to negative in these following situations:

- an applicant is late
- an employee cancels a job without former notice
- an employee vanishes and does not do the work they promised

Expressive behaviour often is hard to control, especially body langue and facial expressions are matters that sometimes are uncontrollable. Tones of voice, however, can be influenced and should be influenced in professional situations. After noticing the negative tones of voices used, the observer wrote a remark on the guide for company X to remember to use more neutral tone in the future and as a point of development.

Procedures and actions of company X were observed to detect the positive and negative ways these aspects have on the case company’s employer brand and branding. The observer noticed that one common action that the HR-employees often forgot, was to keep the applicants informed about the process. As established before, the application experience has impact on the company’s employer brand image. Furthermore, if an applicant feels forgotten and not valued during the application process, they might not be so inclined to apply for that employer’s positions in the future and their perceptions of that employer could deteriorate.

The observer also noticed that the company had a procedure, where they would seek future positions for their employees that are known to be as good workers but are facing the end of their current employment relationship. By employing the workers again, both the employee and company X, benefit. The employee gets another job and thus continuance to their career path, and company X does not only gain financial profit from it, but also enhancement to their employer brand. Moreover, reflecting to the theory established earlier, this procedure improves brand loyalty, image and might incite positive word-of-mouth marketing, as the employee feels appreciated by the company.

The improvement ideas that the author came up with while observing the case company were written into the guide and the positively affecting aspect praised in it as well. This is so, that company X can acknowledge the areas where to improve in and the areas that they already are thriving in.

Verbal and numerical records were simply observed in the case of surprising shifts in the volume of the employees. Sudden rise in the number of hired employees communicate a successful employer brand and indicate that the company is heading in the right direction. To the contrary, sudden downturn in the number of employees might suggest increased employee dissatisfaction and a deteriorated employer brand.

During the time of observation, the volume of the employees stood quite stable with no noticeable shifts in either direction.

3.2.2 Interview Method and Results

Research interview is a discussion between two or more people that has a purpose. Interviewer should ask questions that are concise and not ambiguous, and an interviewee should answer to those questions truthfully. (Saunders et al. 2012, 372.) There are 7 types of interviews a researcher can conduct, depending on the purpose and the strategy of their research according to Saunders et al. (2012, 372):

- structured interviews
- semi-structured interviews
- unstructured interviews or in-depth interviews
- standardised interviews
- non-standardised interviews

For the purpose of this thesis the author chose to conduct an unstructured interview with the case company's CEO, from now on referred to as CEO X. In line with Saunders et al. (2012, 375) unstructured interviews are usually chosen to explore a general area in-depth, and in this case the area is company X's current state and understanding of employer brand. However, even in an unstructured interview, it is important to be clear on the aspects the researcher wants to explore, which is why the author prepared a list of themes of discussion and few questions related to it, to ask from the interviewee. The themes are numbered and analysed in similar order:

1. The state of current employer brand
2. The impact of the nature of personnel service industry
3. The workplace satisfaction of current employees

The first theme dealt with the state of current employer brand and according to the CEO X (2018), their employer brand state was good but not great, as they wish they would have more brand awareness. However, CEO X states that according to the feedback from both the clients and employees, the current brand associations are positive. Furthermore, CEO X feels like there is always room for improvement and states that the company is willing to invest in improving their employer brand and hopes that it will incite more job seekers, both active and passive, to apply for their open positions. In their current model of operations, CEO X feels like they could improve and evolve in these few aspects: communication during the recruitment process and taking more care of the employees during their employment relationship.

The second theme discussed the impact that the nature of personnel service industry has, and during the discussion CEO X brought to attention that the personnel service industry used to have bad reputation in the past. According to CEO X (2018), about two decades ago, people used to have presumptions towards temporary agency work. Often, this lead to the situation where about 1-2 out of 10 applicants would only accept the job offer. Nowadays, the situation is different and can be clearly seen in the amount of job applications received alone. CEO X states that fixed-terms contracts are what 'scares' and prevents people from changing jobs the most. In fact, CEO X believes that if a company has reputation of only making fixed-terms contracts, it can lead to an inferior employer brand.

The third and final theme concerned the workplace satisfaction of current employees. The secondary data from the previously conducted workplace satisfaction survey in company X was used as reference and points of discussion. The survey is examined and analysed more thoroughly in the hapter 3.2.3. but the main reasons behind few of the inferior answer results are explained by the CEO X in this chapter. The topics that company X was rated poorly in, were in related to work orientation, occupational safety and feedback. CEO X felt that these aspects are hard to influence as most of them are the responsibility of the workforce user company but agreed on that they could do more to ask the user company for feedback and for their occupational safety instructions and thus, communicate the information to the employee. Employees also felt that they did not get enough information about the user company before working there. CEO X somewhat agreed on this and stated that sometimes because lack of time and depending on how urgent the order for workforce is, the HR-managers in company X do not always have all the information about the job or user company themselves either. CEO X agreed that there is definitely a space for evolvement in that area.

3.2.3 Secondary Data Study

One of the steps of employer brand management, is to understand the current situation of an employer's employee satisfaction. An effective and common way to gather this information is to conduct a workplace satisfaction survey, which is what company X had previously done. The survey was conducted for a research by another author but because it contains important and relevant information regarding this thesis, some of the answers are analysed in this chapter.

According to the research by Ruokonen (2017, 13), total of 44 employees answered to the survey and of those, 21 respondents were women and 22 respondents were men. Moreover, 61% of all respondents were younger than 35 years old. For the majority of the respondents, the length of their employment relationship was 4 to 6 months. Employment relationships lasting over 6 months came as close second, with 10 respondents choosing that answer. (Ruokonen 2017, 13-14.)

The workplace satisfaction survey was constructed using the Likert scale, where respondents are asked to respond to different statements relating to the topic, in terms how much they agree with the statement. The scale has 5 levels where level 1 equals "completely disagree" and likewise, level 5 equals "completely agree". Moreover, the option of "don't agree and don't disagree" was added in the questionnaire as well. (Ruokonen 2017, 15.)

From the survey only the most useful answers regarding the thesis were picked. The statements and the average of the answers of these statements can be seen in Table 4, where the statements that got higher scores than the average are in green font and the statements that got the lowest scores than the average are in red font.

TABLE 4. Statements and Answer Average (modified from Ruokonen 2017, 15, 17)

How accurate are these following statements?	The average
I'm happy with the content of my job.	**4,1**
User company familiarised me thoroughly to the job.	**4,1**
I have been thoroughly informed about the occupational safety.	**3,6**
The user company gives me enough feedback.	**3,4**
The recruiting process was clear and professional.	**4,2**
I have been familiarised with the work hour registration system thoroughly.	**3,9**
I got enough information about the user company prior to working there.	**3,5**
I am notified of the continuation of my employment contract in an appropriate timeframe.	**3,3**
I am satisfied with the payroll administration.	**4,5**
Company X keeps enough contact with me.	**3,8**
I have received enough information about the occupational healthcare.	**3,1**
All in all, company X's procedures evoke trustworthiness.	**3,8**

As describe earlier, the closer the average rating is to 5, the more respondents have agreed with the statement and vice versa, the closer the average goes to 1, the more the respondents have disagreed with the statement. These statements were especially chosen because they have a strong relation and causation to company X’s employer brand. Overall, the respondents disagreed with most of the statements, as 5 out of 12 statements’ average was rated more poorly than 4. Furthermore, according to Ruokonen (2017, 15), the statement that got disagreed on the most was: “I have received enough information about the occupational healthcare” and only got the average of 3,1. To the contrary, the survey found that the highest average of 4,5 was with the statement: “I am satisfied with the payroll administration”, with 60,5% of the respondents completely agreeing with the statement (Ruokonen 2017, 15). As can be seen in the Table 4, there are two statements that are contradictory: “User company familiarised me thoroughly to the job” and “I have been thoroughly informed about occupational safety”. The two statements contradict, because, as stated before, the occupational safety instruction is mainly the responsibility of the user party. Indeed, as an employer the personnel service agency’s responsibility is to provide, if necessary, adequate work clothing, such as safety vests, safety shoes, helmets and safety goggles.

The survey also included a question of “How likely would you recommend company X to your friends?” on the scale of 1 to 10, where 1 equals “highly unlikely to recommend to a friend” and 10 equals “highly likely to recommend to a friend”. Ruokonen (2017, 18) states, that the average sum that was formulated from the survey answers was 7,38 which can be considered as a good result, as it is above the average. The distribution of responses is portrayed in a bar graph in Figure 16 (Ruokonen 2017, 18).

FIGURE 16. Vote distribution bar graph (Ruokonen 2017, 18)

3.3 Building the Guide

The end-product of this thesis, the guide, was built to offer the case company guidance and direction on the process of developing and managing their employer brand. Moreover, the data acquisition process conducted in this thesis is purposed to culminate in this guide as both preliminary and secondary data were utilised in building the guide. In addition, every theory-based aspect of this thesis were carried out to serve purpose in the guide and lay the theoretical framework for it. However, this also sets the limits of and to the guide's content. The guide can only consist of the principles, the steps and directions on employer branding process, that have been established in this thesis before.

The 8 steps process in the guide were the following

1. Groundwork
   Groundwork, addresses the starting point of the company. It suggests that the company define the goals they want to set for their employer brand, agree on the costs and preparing for the involvement of the stakeholders.

2. Evaluation
   This is the step where company X should evaluate their current state of employer branding as fairly as possible to define the starting point of their employer brand. For company X' this evaluation has been done through Chapter 3, which is why it was not added to the guide itself.

3. Defining the EVP
   The guide instructs company X' in defining their EVP through aiding questions, Mosley and Schmidt's (2017, 64) EVP theory model and suggestions. In addition, the guide also provides help in deciding on and creation of the EVP.

4. Employer Branding Framework
   In this step, company X is instructed to build their employer brand framework in align with their corporate and customer brand. The

company’s existing visual brand is set guidelines and the material available instructed.

5. Create
   Creation step encourages company X to use different outlets that are specifically targeted to their needs, to communicate and create content in. The example of what kind of content can be created through certain channels are also uniquely designed to company X.

6. Engage
   The positive methods of engagement are reinforced in this step and the negative methods sourced from the empirical part of this thesis pointed out.

7. Measure
   This step offers company X a check list that they can utilise to measure the successfulness of their employer branding efforts.

8. Adapt
   The methods of adapting and adjusting are described to company X at this step.

The decision on choosing these 8 steps was derived from the theoretical framework of the thesis. As like mentioned before, the information used in the guide was sourced from both the theories from literature and the analysis from the primary data. Through observation and research, the author could provide the case company with an employer branding guide that was tailored to their needs.

Furthermore, each of the steps and the actions the step required from the company was explained and clarified. The author also provided their own deliberation on the topic and visual aids to help the company truly perceive the concepts. The visual look of the guide was created by utilising the existing artwork of the company and applying the brand colours that company X use. Their logo was visible on multiple page and the guidelines on how to utilise the brand visuals in communications were given as well.

3.4 Self-evaluation

Self-evaluations are natural and necessary way of reflecting back, and part of growing process as both, a person and as a researcher. The overall goal is to evoke critical thinking through enforcing analytical and evaluative thinking. Self-evaluation is a fundamental tool of learning nowadays and confronts the traditional roles of education. (Boud 1995, 183.) According to Boud (1995, 183) self-evaluation is a process that optimises learning and thus, is critical part of all learning activity.

In process of writing this thesis, the author learned how to construct and write an academic research paper and especially, the field of functional research writing and the differences compared to traditional research writing became familiar.

The thesis process started slowly as it was challenging to decide on a topic. Fortunately, the author had help from the case company and through the authors own interest, the case company found their own need as well, and the thesis was commissioned. Likewise, at the beginning of the process the author found it hard to critically define, sort and filter the information received. However, that is also the aspect the author felt like the most rewarding learning experience and self-improvement.

Moreover, a clear picture on the structure, content and layout of the guide was not formulated until the very end, which brought extra complications and stress for both the author and the process. However, as the theory framework extended, and the author gained more personal knowledge from the topic the end-product was produced in time. The author was pleased in the visuals of the guide and felt like they succeed in that aspect. To the contrary, the author felt like the guide could have had more content in it and comprise more theory. For the author, that was the dissatisfactory part of the guide.

Furthermore, the author reckons, that this thesis writing process taught time-management skills, as the deadlines were moved few times. The actual workload was greater than estimated, and at the beginning the author could not find the time for the thesis writing process along with their full-time-job and thus, did not manage their own time properly.

Despite the struggles, the author feels like the traits learned through this process, accompanied with enhanced problem-solving skills, are going to be very useful in both in their professional and personal path. The end product is satisfactory, because it met with the demands of company X and contained many useful theories and personal guidance.

4 CONCLUSION

Employer branding is now trending more than ever, and there is no denial in its benefits and significance in the successfulness of recruitment and talent retention. The purpose of this thesis was to produce a customized, comprehensive yet functional employer branding guide to the commissioning company: company X to use as one of their tools on development in their business operations.

The theoretical framework included literature research, and both collecting and analysing the primary and secondary. It was found in the secondary data, that company X had more aspects in which the employees disagreed on than agreed. Observational research method was utilised and combined with unstructured interview, to formulate the empirical part of the thesis. Both of these research methods are qualitative and thus suitable and fitting for the thesis' nature and objective. Furthermore, by observing, the author noticed few factors that influenced the employer brand negatively.

The employer branding and its theoretical knowledge-base were discussed and different employer branding strategies, principles and the process described. In addition, the ways of measuring the success of employer branding strategy was briefly studied.

In the functional part of this thesis, the case company was introduced and the process of creating a functional thesis was described. The research results were then established. Moreover, the purpose and the goal of the thesis was to create an employer branding guide for company X that meets their requirements, thus the process of creating the guide was written. The theoretical framework was the foundation on which the guide was built on and the source for its models, principles and steps of process. In other words, every source of information in the guide were sought from this thesis. The guide had 27 slides and included an 8-step strategy guidance for company X.

To summarise, the goal of this thesis was met and the end-product, employer branding guide was produced in time. The guide was conducted according to company X's wishes: to be comprehensive, functional and most importantly for company X to utilise as an operational business development tool.

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APPENDIX

Employer Branding Guide