

# **Job Postings and Employer Value Proposition to Attract New Talent**

A study of potential applicant's opinions on job posting content in the information technology field

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## DEGREE THESIS

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### Abstract

This study aims to give insight into the recruitment and talent acquisition process challenges at organizations when trying to attract IT workers, such as software developers, to be able to offer more relevant content in job postings and related ads. The focus is on the initial phase, where the idea with an ad is to get a potential applicant interested in a job posting.

What content is relevant to applicants? Also, when studying how the content attractiveness might relate to demographics such as age, life situation, and willingness to relocate? Depending on how much experience is expected from the candidates, what is important? What is the process behind creating a good job posting? Can the talent acquisition process be improved with an Employer Value Proposition (EVP) aligned to the potential applicant's opinion on which benefits matter?

A survey was created, giving examples of the content presented in ads on the Internet and on social media for IT-related job postings. Based on the content category, 64 respondents working in the IT field rated the attractiveness of 34 types of benefits. For this quantitative research, a mono-method approach was selected for the data collection.

The results show that remote work and flexible working hours were the most attractive benefits, but also that depending on the age and life situation, the interest could differ significantly between the benefits presented. Other benefits that received a high total mean score were the possibility of impacting what technology and projects to work on and health-related benefits such as dental care and extended occupational health care. An open-ended question revealed that many potential applicants wanted the salary range to be included in the job posting.

To understand the requirements of the talent acquisition process, there is a need to look at the whole process, from identifying the need for new talent in the company to onboarding the new employee that just got hired for the job. The thesis presents some conclusions and recommendations that can be valuable for organizations wanting to create a strong employer value proposition to attract the best talent.

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Titel: Arbetgivarens värdeerbjudande i jobbannonser för att locka nya talanger, en studie av potentiella sökandes åsikter om innehållet i jobbannonser inom informationsteknologi

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### Abstrakt

Den här studien har som syfte att ge en inblick i de utmaningar organisationer har med processer relaterade till rekryterings- och talanganskaffning för att locka IT-arbetare, till exempel mjukvaruutvecklare. Målsättningen är att visa hur organisationer kan erbjuda mer relevant innehåll i platsannonser och relaterade marknadsföringsannonser. Fokus ligger på den inledande fasen, där tanken med en annons är att få en potentiell sökande intresserad av en platsannons.

Vilket innehåll är relevant för de sökande? Och finns det skillnader i relevans när demografiska faktorer beaktas, som ålder, livssituation och vilja att flytta? Beroende på hur mycket erfarenhet man förväntar sig av kandidaterna, vad är viktigt? Vad är processen bakom att skapa en bra platsannons? Kan rekryteringsprocessen förbättras med ett värdeerbjudande från arbetsgivaren (EVP, Employer Value Proposition) som är anpassat till de potentiella sökandenas åsikter om vilka förmåner som har betydelse?

En enkät skapades med exempel på innehåll som presenterats i annonser på internet och i sociala medier för IT-relaterade jobbannonser. Baserat på innehållet bedömde 64 respondenter som arbetar inom IT-området intresset för 34 typer av förmåner via en enkät som samlade i huvudsak kvantitativa data.

Resultaten visar att distansarbete och flexibla arbetstider var de mest intressanta förmånerna, men också att intresset kan skilja sig avsevärt mellan de presenterade förmånerna beroende på ålder och livssituation. Andra fördelar som fick ett högt totalt medelvärde var möjligheten att påverka vilken teknik och vilka projekt man får arbeta med och hälsorelaterade fördelar som tandvård och utökad företagshälsovård. En öppen fråga avslöjade att många potentiella sökande ville att löneintervallet skulle ingå i platsannonsen.

För att förstå kraven i samband med talanganskaffning måste man se på hela processen, från att identifiera behovet av nya talanger i företaget till att skola in den nya medarbetaren som just har anställts för jobbet. I avhandlingen presenteras ett par slutsatser och rekommendationer som kan vara värdefulla för organisationer som vill skapa ett starkt värdeerbjudande som kan locka de bästa talangerna.

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Språk: Engelska

Nyckelord: EVP, branding, rekrytering, jobbannonser

## OPINNÄYTETYÖ

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Nimike: Työnantajan arvolataus työpaikkailmoituksissa uusien osaajien houkuttelemiseksi, tutkimus potentiaalisten hakijoiden mielipiteistä työpaikkailmoitusten sisällöstä tietotekniikalla.

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### Tiivistelmä

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on antaa tietoa haasteista, joita organisaatiot kohtaavat rekrytointi- ja osaajahankintaprosesseissaan houkutellessaan IT-työntekijöitä, kuten ohjelmistokehittäjiä. Tavoitteena on osoittaa, miten organisaatiot voivat tarjota relevantimpaa sisältöä työpaikkailmoituksissa ja niihin liittyvissä markkinointiviesteissä. Painopiste on alkuvaiheessa, jossa ilmoituksen ideana on houkutella potentiaalisia ehdokkaita työpaikkailmoituksen pariin.

Millainen sisältö on merkityksellistä ehdokkaiden kannalta? Ja onko relevanssissa eroja, kun otetaan huomioon demografiset tekijät, kuten ikä, elämäntilanne ja muuttohalukkuus? Mikä on relevanttia sen mukaan, millaista kokemusta hakijoilta odotetaan? Miten laadit hyvän työpaikkailmoituksen? Voidaanko rekrytointiprosessia parantaa työnantajan arvolupauksella, joka on räätälöity potentiaalisten hakijoiden näkemyksiin siitä, mitkä edut ovat tärkeitä?

Tutkimuksessa luotiin esimerkkejä IT-alan työpaikkailmoituksissa verkossa ja sosiaalisessa mediassa esitetystä sisällöstä. Sisällön perusteella 64 IT-alalla työskentelevää vastaajaa arvioi kiinnostustaan 34 etutyypin kohtaan kyselylomakkeella, jolla kerättiin pääasiassa kvantitatiivista tietoa.

Tulokset osoittavat, että etätyö ja joustavat työajat olivat kiinnostavimpia etuja, mutta myös, että kiinnostus voi vaihdella merkittävästi esitettyjen etujen välillä iästä ja elämäntilanteesta riippuen. Muita etuja, jotka saivat korkeat kokonaiskeskiarvot, olivat mahdollisuus vaikuttaa siihen, minkä teknologian ja hankkeiden parissa työskennellään, sekä terveyteen liittyvät edut, kuten hammashoito ja laajennettu työterveyshuolto. Avoin kysymys osoitti, että monet potentiaaliset hakijat halusivat, että palkkataso ilmoitetaan työpaikkailmoituksessa.

Talenttien hankintaa koskevien vaatimusten ymmärtäminen edellyttää koko prosessin tarkastelua aina yrityksen uusien osaajien tarpeen tunnistamisesta uuden työntekijän kouluttamiseen tehtävänsä. Opinnäytetyössä esitetään joitakin johtopäätöksiä ja suosituksia, joista voi olla hyötyä organisaatioille, jotka haluavat luoda vahvan arvolupauksen houkutellessaan parhaita osaajia.

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Kieli: Englanti

Avainsanat: EVP, branding, rekrytointi, työilmoitukset

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This thesis aims to study what potential applicants think regarding benefits presented in job postings and what is attractive to an applicant. The results from the study can hopefully give guidance to employers on how they can attract talented employees to an organization. The idea came to be because it seemed hard to find the talent required at companies in the IT field needing engineers with experience, talent, and competencies in several technologies. There is, of course, the aspect of too few engineers available with the right skills on the market to fill the need. But companies might also just not know how to attract the right talent and get them interested in a job offer.

Job postings for IT engineers, and especially software developers, were almost flooding social media like Instagram and Facebook in the year 2022. The ads and the strategy for attracting applicants differed in content and expression, but what attracts an applicant? Can the ads be made better to be more attractive?

While being exposed to job postings and ads aimed at IT engineers on social media (as sites probably have identified the author as a potential applicant for these jobs), it was apparent how different the content in the postings was and triggered a thought on what details about a job might be interesting among the potential candidates.

By analyzing a sample of job postings aimed to attract engineers, published by Finnish IT companies in relevant channels for job postings, and then asking a selected target group of IT engineers how they rank the content, the idea was to collect data that can be analyzed to determine if there are things that can be done better to make the job postings more attractive for the engineers.

As the author has been working with software development management for almost two decades, it is clear that the market has changed from being the employer's market to be the employees' market. Finding the key personnel for projects that are also able to



contribute with creative ideas to make a business more successful is not easy. The topic is interesting from a professional perspective but also personally.

According to Edward Lawler (2008), the two most important management challenges in recruiting are:

- Recruitment of high-quality people across multiple territories, particularly as competition for top talent grows more intense.
- Improving the appeal of the company culture and work environment.

When matching these challenges together, there is a clear need to make the employer interesting for top talent by improving processes within the company and when approaching potential applicants for key positions on the market.

Increasingly, companies in a wide variety of businesses are finding that people can be their number one source of competitive advantage. But it is not enough for leaders to say that people are important, or to put people's issues high on their mental to-do list. What is needed are organizations that are designed and managed — from the boardroom to the front line — in ways that optimize talent attraction, retention, and performance. (Lawler, 2008)

The estimation of needed employees in the IT field is increasing by 3200 every year, according to the Technology Industries of Finland, a lobbying organization for technology industry companies (Teknologiateollisuus, 2022). 81400 employees worked in the IT field at the end of June 2022, says the same source.

And according to an article in Taloustaito (Remes, 2021), the software and IT-service companies in Finland would be able to hire 10000-15000 new employees if the right talent was available on the job market. This was stated in 2021 by the CEO of the "Ohjelmisto- ja e-business ry" organization, which is an association for software and e-business companies in Finland. Less than 4000 people graduate yearly within the IT- field in Finland.

Inspiration for this thesis was a master's thesis published in 2020 for the Degree Programme in International Business Management at Haaga-Helia UAS by Nora Alavuo, which studied the phenomenon of employment mismatch (also known as the "war for talent") and the modern recruitment process and how companies could use it as a competitive advantage in their talent acquisition and furthermore growth strategy. (Alavuo, 2020)

Alavuo's study was carried out in the form of constructive research, and the data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four recruitment or recruitment technology specialists and candidate experience professionals in Finland who seek to make recruiting more candidate-centric. The findings showed that the things that cause most bad candidate experiences are very simple; lack of communication and sharing information, as well as the difficulty and arduousness of submitting applications.

Alavuo's study, among others, shows that there are many steps that need to be taken to apply for a job, and the recruiting company needs to be aware of all the mistakes they can make. This is why Alavuo also produced a "Recruiter's Playbook", which is a modern-day recruitment process manual for anyone wanting to develop, improve or check the status of their recruitment process and candidate experience.

This inspired me to look more at the first step in the recruitment process from the applicants' view rather than the recruiter's. To get data to analyze, I found that a survey among potential applicants can give interesting answers to the research question.

During the process of collecting job posting ad content to use as a base for the content in the survey, it also became clear that the Employer Value Proposition (EVP) was going to be the main focus when analyzing the content and how the practices around EVP could possibly be used to improve job posting and the related ads. The EVP is the "perks" of working at a job and the promise an organization makes to the employee when recruiting but also when trying to retain an employee.

## 1.2 Research Question

The research question for the thesis is:

- “How can employers in the IT field improve job postings through the employee value proposition?”

The reason for mentioning the “IT field” in the research question is to make it clear that the answers from the respondents, for instance, regarding remote work, might be influenced by the fact that many jobs in the IT field are possible to do remotely.

## 1.3 Objectives

The objectives for the thesis are:

1. To empirically study what is interesting in a job posting for potential applicants with the goal of finding out if the employer value proposition can be improved.
2. To create a survey based on a quantitative research method and send it by e-mail to a sample of the target group.
3. To analyze the results from the survey and present the findings as recommendations when recruiting talent via job postings.

## 1.4 Scope and delimitations

The study focuses on workers in the Information Technology (IT) field, such as IT engineers and software developers. Besides studying the interest in job posting content, the study will also collect data on demographics such as age range, years of experience, life situation, interest in relocating for a job, and current salary range.

Excluded from the study is data on how the applicant meets the requirements in the job posting. Also excluded is the recruitment process after the potential new employee has decided to send in an application. As recommended in the Recruiters’ Playbook (Alavuo, 2020), the recruiter should “forget complex forms” to fill out when applying for a job and

possibly only make it easy to share a profile (for instance, from LinkedIn), but this could be the theme for another thesis and is left out of this study.

This thesis will not study the actual behavior of the potential applicants, only collect the opinions on job posting content presented in a series of ads.

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

The goal of the thesis is presented in part 1, the Introduction. Part 2, the Literature Review, will begin with an overview of the talent acquisition process and then focus on the ideas that are popular in recruitment process management today: talent sourcing, employer branding, and employer value proposition.

Part 3 of the thesis will present the research design, including the method, survey design, and trustworthiness of the study. In part 4, the results from the survey are presented, with graphs and demographic data analysis, including statistical testing with independent samples t-test.

Part 5 presents a discussion and conclusion with recommendations to employers regarding how the Employer Value Proposition can be improved to make better ads.

## **2 Literature review**

Creating job postings is just one step of the talent acquisition process. To create the best ads, we need to look at the whole process, from defining the need for new talent to actually getting the potential talent to act on the job posting. The process is not strict and may vary depending on many aspects. The literature review will try to give an overview of the theory behind modern recruitment processes with guidelines and examples.

### **2.1 Talent acquisition process**

To understand the requirements in the talent acquisition process, there is a need to look at several steps in the process and keep them in mind when executing each step, from

identifying the need for new talent in the company to onboarding the new employee that just got hired for the job.

Some authors want to describe recruitment as a process where an organization looks at the current need for workforce and talent acquisition process to a more long-term investment in building up an image for the organization to attract talent. According to Bhattacharyya (2015, p. 40), recruitment is a linear process, as it emphasizes more on current requirements or needs of the organization. Thus, the recruitment function is more reactive in nature. In contrast, talent acquisition is a dynamic process and proactive in nature. As the talent acquisition cycle is ongoing in nature, among others, it emphasizes employer branding, employer value proposition, and spreading the organizational information to the target talent segments to attract them to join the organization.

With this definition of what a talent acquisition process is, let's look at the key components of the process and what is good to know to get going.

### **2.1.1 The Workforce**

What is the value of the company workforce? It is easy to think that this might vary depending on the supply and demand of workers, but also the complexity of the tasks. But there are other points of view when estimating the value of the workforce: "The workforce represents the most valuable asset of any organization and defines its ability to drive performance and innovation. To succeed in today's marketplace, an organization must find the right talent at the right time and through the right channel." (Isson & Harriott, 2016, p. 132)

Isson & Harriott states that wisely investing in the workforce defines the ability of the organization to perform, innovate, compete, succeed, and lead. To achieve that success and high performance, organizations must hire the best people: the right employees with the right skills and who are a good cultural fit. As the former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt, said: "Hiring is the most important thing you do". (Isson & Harriott, 2016, pp. 157-158).

There is no reason to disagree with Isson & Harriott or Eric Schmidt at this stage of the process investigation. Finding the best talent requires proper investment in analyzing and perfecting the hiring process.

First, like financing or acquisition strategies, there are best practices for creating and driving an organization's recruiting and hiring strategy. Second, there are tools and technology to make the plan work. Third, if a business is going to spend time designing a strategic plan anywhere, it should probably start by creating one to define how it hires the people who create and implement all its other strategic plans. (Jones, 2011, p. 110)

Creative thinking, problem-solving, value creation, good and innovative design. These are some of the top-level skills that humans have. The best processor of information as well as the best muscle for creative problem-solving, complex thinking, and high-level design of any kind, is the human brain. To innovate, solve a problem in a way not solved before, and create a little machine of value creation to steer the ship of society, an organization has to use intelligence and leverage that with a good work ethic.

Decades of research in human performance show (Jones, 2011, p. 82) that better-qualified new hires

- Learn the job faster and achieve performance standards more quickly. Hence, the group that enters through the new program will consume less training time and resources.
- Hold potential for more demanding positions and serve as a talent pool so the company can rely on internal promotion rather than seeking outside talent to populate higher-level positions.
- Are less likely to be terminated or to quit. Hence, estimates of payoff are typically conservative, given that new hires can be expected to remain with the company longer than those hired without using the measures set out in this book.

- Will consume less time in disciplinary actions, retraining efforts, or performance counseling. Hence, the demand for overhead HR programs to deal with poor performers will drop.

As apparent, the benefit of finding the best possible workforce when recruiting can be crucial to the success of the organization.

### **2.1.2 Acting with precision**

What is required to hire the best? What process will a company need to go through to reach the goal of hiring the best possible talent? And how fast does the process need to be? Depending on the popularity of the open job requisition, hiring managers can quickly become overwhelmed with myriad resumes and job applicant profiles that they are required to sift through in order to uncover the best candidate matches. To succeed, employers must act quickly, precisely, and cost-effectively. (Isson & Harriott, 2016)

An Universum (2023, p. 12) research in Q1 2023 shows that global averages hide a tremendous amount of diversity — diverse career preferences by gender, age, geography, and area of study. It should surprise no one that what an IT worker in London looks for in a new job, for example, is different from what a business major in Texas is searching for. For that reason, a company's Employer Value Proposition (EVP) needs to be tuned to the needs of local markets and specific talent groups, according to Universum.

As a first step, companies should define their critical talent groups — which are the roles and skills that are mission-critical to the organization. Then develop a customized proposition for each segment: What messages will resonate with a particular group? Which employee profiles will align with that group's career goals? "Enlist help from marketing to develop personalized content for each critical talent group — much like you would do for customer personas and segments." (Universum, 2023, p. 12)

To act with precision is to be professional, and getting professional usually requires time and resources. If the organization doesn't have the people skills needed to act with precision, outsourcing the process or parts of it can be a good alternative.

A new trend in recruitment, to improve precision but also to act faster and be more efficient, is the adaptation of AI tools to find candidates. A profile in Computerworld suggests that between 35% and 45% of companies are using AI-based talent acquisition software to identify, interview, and hire candidates in 2023. In addition to these AI-driven approaches, there is also a more basic and straightforward need to simply ask your target audiences what drives their employer preferences. (Universum, 2023, p. 17)

### 2.1.3 Process timeline

Every process needs a recipe for the steps to be taken to reach the goal. As a talent acquisition process is not a strict process model that can be applied to any organization, we will look at some differing approaches.

Carasco & Rothwell (2020, p. 4) recommends that finding the best people for a startup or early-stage business should be approached with a proactive strategy that starts with thinking through short-term (1–3 years) contractual service-based or long-term (5– 7 years) skill-based needs.

To do so, you will need to:

- Determine whom to hire first
- Write solid job descriptions
- Know when to use a recruiter
- Use job descriptions to guide interviewing and getting people ready to work
- Learn how to make a job offer

“Be deliberate in building your company culture”. The Carasco & Rothwell model is easy to understand but can be challenging to implement without proper experience or knowledge about what the relevant process for each step is.



Nora Alavuo (2020) created a "Recruiters Playbook" based on the results and experiences from a thesis process exploring the modern recruitment process as a competitive advantage in talent acquisition. The playbook is for people who are working with challenging recruitment cases, such as software developer roles, and struggling to receive enough applications.

Alavuo's playbook combines all the results that were found through interviewing four recruitment or recruitment technology specialists in Finland and defined roughly the following timeline as a guideline for a successful recruitment process:

1. Define the need
2. Write the ad
3. Select the marketing channels (and the application form)
4. Distribute the ad
5. Source proactively (focus on attracting instead of demanding)
6. Explore people and potential
7. Pre-screening & pre-applying talks
8. 1st round of interviews
9. Technical testing
10. 2nd round of interviews
11. Decision-making
12. Collect feedback, measure data, and analyze

When doing the thesis and making the playbook, Alavuo had already worked eight years with information technology recruiting and sourcing. (Alavuo, 2020, p. 3)

#### 2.1.4 Defining the need

Let's look closer at the first step in Alavuo's list above, "define the need". As an example, a company might be aware that some employees are stressed and overworked. But only fixing the acute need, in other words finding a new worker to hire with short notice when the company is short of workers, might not be the best way to reach a stable and fruitful situation in the long run.

As Isson & Harriott (2016, p. 117) defines the dilemma: "You can then determine future needs and trends: Forecasting the future supply is about calculating the difference between your existing supply (internal workforce) and your estimated demand, which will also help you assess capabilities by job function and determine where there will be a shortage (deficit) or excess (surplus)."

Being able to forecast the need for new employees can improve the efficiency and profit of the company, though forecasting is often affected by external factors such as market demand or changes in supplier capacity.

Identifying the business challenge, in other words understanding the most pressing business goals the organization aims to achieve in the future and focusing on these mission-critical priorities will guide the assessment of the workforce need. Business goals are usually defined and revisited every year and should be tied to the company's mission, vision, and strategy.

The goals are obtained from business plan meetings with executives throughout the organization. These meetings can also help to capture the information needed to build the competency plan and to socialize the target objectives and desired state. Outlining major workforce questions and assumptions that must be addressed in order to get to the desired state of human capital and future changes is a key element of this step. (Isson & Harriott, 2016, p. 113)

What is getting obvious is that the initiative needs to come from top-level management. If top-level management is not involved in defining the workforce need and aligned to the business challenge, from time to time, it is quite obvious that outlining the business

strategy is not properly executed. Being able to define the need might be the most crucial step to successfully hiring the best talent.

#### **2.1.5 What is talent?**

To be able to hire a “talent,” we also need to define what talent is. Bhattacharyya (2015, p. 8) recommends being careful with the word “talent” as it does not automatically mean that the “talent” will “perform”: “Talent is difficult to understand when the work is assigned in the organizations. We have seen talented people who do not perform. Thus, getting talent is not the answer. Getting and making the talent work and continue with the organization is our responsibility.”

There is also a need to be honest about how well-fit the employees at an organization are. Is their talent used in the most productive way? Are they able to perform their best? Organizational designs get increasingly complex over time because companies tend to adopt the ideal design to fit their people rather than find people who fit an ideal design. It’s counterproductive and often leads to compromises which make it harder to achieve your aspirational goals. (Guest, 2016, p. 203)

Guest continues with other insights on the roles in his book “Built to Grow: How to Deliver Accelerated, Sustained and Profitable Business Growth”: “Once you have an aspirational picture of your organizational design, from a purely functional perspective, overlay your current roles and people to examine whether your real requirements match your current design. In most organizations, it won’t be the case at all. Redesigning from scratch gives you the clarity to identify the need for additional skills training, to reassign people into new roles, or hire new people altogether.”

Whether the organizational design is already optimized might need to be analyzed by consulting agencies to get an unbiased point of view. But as the talent acquisition process should have elements that are always ongoing and properties that attract talent when there is no apparent need, the organizational design should always be up to date. In a way, the organization is “always recruiting” and, at the same time, “always developing” the people in the organization.

The strength this gives the organization is aligned with a strong and clear view and vision of where the organization is heading. In the process of 'always be recruiting and developing people and talent', it's essential you first define what talent looks like, feels like, and acts like in your business (Guest, 2016, p. 204). And how should the organization manage the talent when it has been found?

Guest (2016, pp. 205–206) concludes that "Talent is about an individual's performance combined with their longer-term potential. If you're on a growth journey with your business, the potential part will be important for you moving forward." (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Talent performance and potential**

When studying the requirements for hiring talent and getting the best performance and potential, it becomes clear that the organization needs to have healthy management that is also aware of what processes need to be in place to be able to forecast the workforce need. It will be important that the employer has defined the need for talent before starting the recruitment process and that the organization is also able to define what "talent" means from a "performance and potential" point of view.

As can be seen in Figure 1. Talent performance and potential, the "Performance" of the talent is about "What" as in "What people do to meet their targets and objectives" and "How" as in "The behaviors we expect from our people in delivering their 'What' objectives". Moving to "Potential", Guest (2016, p. 206) states that "Capability" is "What an individual is capable of both now and in the future" and "Aspiration" is "An individual's

career aspirations and motivation to take on more complex roles". According to Guest, these elements make up the combination that defines a talent.

### **2.1.6 The sourcing process**

As can be seen in Alavuo's timeline in chapter 2.1.3, steps 2-5 are about the actual talent sourcing process, where the main goal is to find potential candidates. From step 6 forward, when the candidate evaluation starts, the first contact with the potential applicant has already been made (such as the applicant filling out a form or writing an email and sending it to the employer, a phone call, etc.).

The last step in Alavuo's timeline, to analyze feedback and data, is a very important step to be able to improve the first five steps (and all other steps). But without any contact with applicants, there is no data to analyze.

Looking closer at the steps in the talent sourcing process, they are closely related. For instance, writing the ad needs to be aligned with the channels selected and how the ad is distributed. Not too long, not too short, focusing on the key elements that can make the ad attractive. Whom are we targeting?

The playbook recommends including the team members and co-workers in the ad writing process. Alavuo's recommendation is that the team needs to pay attention to the relevant questions, for instance: "What makes this job special, what is the outcome, where are the people now that were in this role 3 or 5 years ago?"

The talent sourcing process is about knowing the audience and choosing the right channels, key messages, and questions for each ideal candidate group. Make sure to stay fruitful to the employer brand. Include employees in the storytelling. Make sure that the company culture values the same things as its employees - are the benefits appreciated and needed? (Alavuo, 2020)

## **2.2 Talent sourcing**

Alavuo recommends starting by defining the need and then writing the ad. But when writing the ad, it might also be good to think a bit about the distribution channels for the ad, as the format will impact the content that is supposed to fit the ad. An ad on social media usually links to a webpage with the whole job posting, but that does not necessarily have to be the case.

When applicants are moving more and more to mobile platforms when applying for jobs(Alavuo, 2020, p. 45), the format of the ad needs to be adjusted to the platform. The point of this discussion is that it might be good to keep the big picture of talent sourcing in mind when focusing on a particular step.

### **2.2.1 Write the ad**

Job postings or advertisements are often the first encounters with an organization for a potential applicant. The company and its brand might be familiar, depending on the size and location. But if the company is not familiar, a job posting can be the first impression for the potential applicant. What is important when designing a job posting?

According to the National Council of Social Service in Singapore, a job advertisement should cover

1. A brief description of the organization
2. A summary of what the job is about
3. The key competencies and skills required for the job
4. How candidates can apply and when the application closes

(National Council of Social Service, 2015)

Whether the organizations have thought about it or not, the job posting will give a first impression to the potential applicant. Whatever the source of recruitment, there is a need to sell the job and the organization. The job advertisement in the recruiting exercise

conveys images of the organization, its products, and its overall philosophy. It is a powerful corporate advertising tool that endorses the organization not only to potential employees but also to shareholders, business partners, clients, etc. Choosing the right medium and the right space, and the right day would all be futile if the ad is not well designed and executed (Rashmi, 2010).

Writing the “facts” about the job and the daily routine can seem to be a straightforward process when the organization knows what kind of talent is needed. But do IT companies really need to list all the programming languages and IT technologies they would like the applicant to know? Could the focus be more on “attracting” than “demanding”, as Alavuo mentions in the playbook? (Alavuo, 2020)

This is where the Employer Value Proposition (EVP) enters the picture, which we will dive deep into in section 2.4. But let’s continue with the overview of the steps in the talent acquisition process.

### **2.2.2 Recruitment channels**

Talent sourcing is the first stage in the talent acquisition process (when the need for new talent has been defined) and is one of the most important phases in talent life cycle management, according to Isson & Harriott (2016, pp. 132–133). We define talent sourcing today as the practice of identifying and uncovering job candidates, passive or active, through the use of online and offline recruitment techniques.

This can occur through a variety of recruitment channels, which can include (but are not limited to) employee referral programs, social media platforms, talent communities, resume databases, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), agency/third-party recruiters, job boards, niche sites, corporate sites, universities, and alumni groups, billboards, and print advertisements (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Talent sourcing recruitment channels (Isson & Harriott, 2016, p. 133)**

For most organizations, this initial step of the talent acquisition process is handled by internal recruiters or sources, contracted agencies, or a dedicated sourcing resource.

Companies face increasing competition for highly skilled workers in fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). In this new labor market ecosystem where skilled candidates are in high demand and can decide for whom they work with a single click, employers need to change their recruiting tools, strategies, and approaches to maximize their interactions with prospective candidates to successfully navigate through today's supply-and-demand talent equation (Isson & Harriott, 2016, p. 125). But



what are the most relevant channels? Where is the target group to be found, and what media are they using? Are they available on Facebook and Instagram?

In today's globally connected talent marketplace, the majority of job candidates use social media sites. Most job candidates and prospective hires will have access to a company's employment brand without stepping in the door or speaking to your employees directly. Social media sourcing companies can also leverage their interactions with passive job candidates (even if they're not interested in any current offerings) by keeping them active and engaged and by making them part of your talent community interested in future job openings. (Isson & Harriott, 2016, p. 158)

Social media also has the dimension of offering the possibility to aim ads where precisely at the right target group. This is where people interact, and with every interaction, the user also provides the social media platform with data on interests, demographics such as age and occupation, and so on. The data on the user can then be used to target which ads are shown while using the platform and sometimes also on interconnected websites.

In a competitive talent market and skills shortage, special attention should be given to understanding hard-to-fill positions and vacancies. This requires a profile for each employee segment that includes demographics, performance rating data, length of service, grade, location, and occupation. An overview of attrition risks is also important to include in the profile. (Isson & Harriott, 2016, p. 117)

Social media allows employers to go beyond the traditional barriers where work and personal life are strongly separated and to connect with prospective hires using platforms they access multiple times a day. It also helps to connect with passive job candidates who may choose to interact with your company and to provide unique insights about potential candidates before they are even involved in the recruitment process. (Isson & Harriott, 2016, p. 159)

It might be good to remember thou that software developers are not necessarily using social media, even if they are probably working mostly with computers connected to the internet. Would ads on software developer forums be a better choice when posting

content about jobs in the software business? This is one of many questions to be asked when choosing the recruitment channel, depending on what kind of talent the company is searching for and what the profile of that talent could be.

### **2.2.3 Distribute the ad**

Many platforms and channels for advertising also offer packages and possibilities to distribute and show the ad several times. As the old marketing rule of 7's says (Kaatz, n.d.), a potential customer must see a message at least seven times before they'll be provoked to take action. This marketing principle is a maxim that was developed in the 1930s by the movie industry, which found through research that a potential moviegoer had to see a movie poster at least seven times before they would go to the theatre to see a movie. If it still is a relevant rule today can be discussed, but apparent is that people might need to see an ad several times before acting. What features for distribution can the channel or platform offer related to this?

Before deciding on the optimal channel for reaching your candidates, it is also important to understand the journey your seeker will take when she or he decides to look for new opportunities. This will help you optimize the way you communicate with a candidate. (Isson & Harriott, 2016, pp. 136–139)

As with any marketing, the customer journey when reacting to a job posting is as relevant as when reacting to ads selling products or services. Think about how the job posting is marketed and map the customer journey, create potential customer cases, and try to think like the customer. Are you aware of when you act on an ad, how many times it needs to be exposed to you, and on which channels?

Even with the number of job seekers increasing and applying on organization websites, it can still be difficult to get a good candidate. Today, it is not about recruitment advertising but about Recruitment Marketing. This encompasses the creative, choosing the optimum media, web analytics, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), blogging, social networking, etc. It is a war for talent, and it takes an aggressive recruitment strategy to attract the best

talent. The recruiter needs to work hard to communicate the USPs (Unique Selling Proposition) of both the job and the organization (Rashmi, 2010).

There is often also a geographical component in the hiring process. People that have worked a few years might invest in a house to live in and can get more and more “rooted” at the location they are working. This might also affect candidates available, and when people are working in the same field in smaller communities, for instance, with IT, there is always the aspect of “everyone knowing everyone”. Some companies might want to keep good relationships with other companies around and not “steal” workers from friends. This might make the hiring and sourcing process a greater challenge than expected.

#### **2.2.4 Sourcing proactively**

With multiple options, job candidates will no longer tolerate shortcomings and bad recruiting practices. To remain successful, companies must understand today’s job seekers’ needs, preferences, and decision factors. Organizations must perform rigorous competitive intelligence to gain the full scope of what the competition is offering and use these insights to build a marketing sourcing strategy that will best appeal to job seekers.

Once your organization has this information and intelligence, you can begin to approach job seekers in a way that resonates with them, reaching out to them where they are and, more important, finding those with high-demand skills before they even know they are looking for a new job.

Any recruitment business model that relies on candidates making proactive applications for jobs is destined to fail, according to Savage (2019, p. 162). If the only candidates you have are those who come to you when they are ready, you will only have candidates that other people have too. Your job is to unearth unique candidates. That means candidates not available to your clients and candidates who have not yet started their job search through a competitor or by themselves.

If you look at recruiting today, unemployed jobseekers form only a small part of the overall candidate pool. Most of the new recruits are committed by directly job-to-job transitions.

(Petrongolo & Pissarides, 2001, p. 390). Sourcing candidates and possibly the frustration when not finding good candidates just by distributing ads might make organizations want to open the door to headhunting.

Headhunters engage in four analytically distinct steps to align a person and a job order, but in practice, they often overlap. (Coverdill & Finlay, 2017, pp. 67–68)

1. The first involves sourcing. In this step, a headhunter identifies prospects who might be qualified for and interested in a particular job or the types of jobs the headhunter commonly fills. Sourcing can be targeted to a job order in hand or those anticipated down the line.
2. A second step, qualification, involves contacting and investigating prospects to learn about them, their potential fit for the types of positions the headhunter has or anticipates, and their interest in exploring opportunities.
3. A third centers on prepping those who are qualified and interested to interview effectively— to, in other words, put their best foot forward in light of what the headhunter knows about the interview process, the hiring manager, the job, and the company.
4. And a fourth centers on how headhunters broker interactions between candidates and clients to maximize their mutual appeal and secure placements.

What would you do if a headhunter contacted you about an open position that might trigger some curiosity in you? Maybe look up the website of the organization and study what they are posting on social media channels? Then also consider the possibility that a potential applicant might do the same when you try to attract talent to your organization. This is where Employer Branding comes into the picture.

### **2.3 Employer Branding**

The employer brand is becoming an increasingly important tool in the presentation of a market proposition for talent. This is especially true for international organizations

because it affects such important issues as talent management and employee engagement. The employer brand is a way for organizations to differentiate themselves in competitive labor markets. Consistency in employer image is a critical part of this process. (Turner & Kalman, 2014, p. 164)

It might be tempting to have a look at the webpage and consider the brand to be good-looking. But how are the social media accounts of the brand looking? When was the last post? Are there opportunities being missed because of a poorly updated Facebook profile? Is LinkedIn updated, and is the Twitter account still alive? Did someone keep the Instagram account active, and who manages it? Depending on the business field and the size of the organization, these questions might be more or less relevant.

But not only the rate of updates is important. How relevant is the brand in attracting and retaining a broad range of employees? Does it embody a sense of community, and is it a 'great place to work'? Does it offer opportunities for development and a sense of corporate, social, and environmental responsibility and social justice? (Turner & Kalman, 2014, p. 171).

According to Mosley (2014, p. 38), the central challenge of brand management is to present a 'serene façade' to the world with a strong sense of unity, consistency, and continuity while at the same time actively evolving and adapting the brand to the changing environment. Brands need to be reliably constant to build familiarity and trust. They also need to be constantly changing to maintain their relevance and competitive edge.

One way of "flexing" some of the propositions is through the development of the Employer Value Proposition (EVP), which is a compelling offer. The EVP includes financial benefits through the reward system and non-financial benefits, including the approach to ethics through:

- Corporate, social, and environmental responsibility
- The level of diversity and inclusion
- The organization's approach to work, life, career, and development opportunities

Whilst the employer brand describes the organization's attractiveness to current and potential employees, the EVP turns these into results that are both tangible (such as reward) and intangible (such as opportunity) (Turner & Kalman, 2014, p. 173).

## **2.4 Employer value proposition (EVP)**

EVP stands for Employer Value Proposition or Employee Value Proposition. According to Universum, there is not really a difference between Employer/Employee in the EVP acronym, as both refer to the same thing (Morgan, 2022).

Simply put, an EVP is the "perks" of working at a job. It is the value that an employer gives their employees in exchange for their time and the work they do. This could be the very reason an employee would choose you to work for rather than one of your competitors. A strong EVP is a prerequisite for any company to win the never-ending battle of attracting, recruiting, and retaining talent.

Something that might become very obvious when analyzing the EVP is that it can be used as a crucial component when writing job postings and related ads and when choosing recruitment channels.

The EVP is often called the DNA of all HR marketing activities. It is around this that the campaigns, advertising, websites, videos, and brochures are geared (Trost, 2014, p. 41).

### **2.4.1 EVP to attract employees**

The EVP is an employee-centered approach that is aligned with integrated talent management strategies. An organization's EVP is typically informed by existing employees as well as prospective employees. Therefore, an organization needs to understand what talent it needs to attract and retain currently as well as in the future and how it will differentiate its offering in the labor markets.

The challenge for organizations is thus to (Bussin, 2018, p. 93):

- Clearly articulate the EVP and package or brand it (also referred to as employer branding)
- Link the proposition to business strategy, talent needs, and business results
- Integrate the different components of the EVP with financial and non-financial reward elements

As an example, at Google, the EVP includes a culture that drives a fun place to work, subsidized broadband for all employees, pool tables in the tearoom, on-site dental care, free t-shirts twice a week, free meals, and the opportunity to bring your dog to work. (Bussin, 2018, p. 96)

#### **2.4.2 EVP is not only salary and benefits**

Personal job satisfaction is driven by far more than financial factors such as salary and benefits. Your EVP, therefore, must have the right blend of non-monetary rewards, states Guest (2016, p. 215). Increasingly, non-monetary rewards are becoming key differentiators, highly valued by employees. These include relocation services, career development, choice of location, and flexibility to spend time with children and attend school functions and sports days.

Organizations that consider people as merely a resource tend to have difficulty retaining good people. Organizations that value people as their greatest assets and demonstrate it through their actions are positioned to retain their good people and top performers, who are the strongest catalysts for business growth. A well-formed EVP will result in increased attraction and retention of key talent, help prioritize the HR agenda, create a strong people brand, help re-engage a disenchanted workforce, and reduce hire premiums.

If an organization's EVP matches its people's personal values, then a win/win/win scenario exists. An employer can count on a motivated, committed worker who will go the extra mile. The worker will experience his/her job as meaningful and fulfilling, and both will benefit from a mutually beneficial long-term relationship. (Guest, 2016, pp. 215–216)

It is also good to remember that the EVP is not only about the company showing how great it is directed to the potential applicant for a job. It is also about the communication happening between employees and friends, discussions on the Internet, and so on. A respected friend, or even a stranger, can make that lasting impression that a company is worth checking out. This is also relevant when looking at the application process for a job posting.

As Brian R. Dineen et al. (2019, p. 200) suggest: a transparent, consistent, and job-related selection system in which companies treat applicants fairly is likely to increase positive word-of-mouth generated by applicants. Moreover, the selection system should be in line with the company's EVP so that the message provided by applicants exhibits consensus with other third-party employment branding sources. For instance, an organization claiming to be highly innovative should use creative and technologically advanced selection methods, whereas an organization emphasizing teamwork might allow applicants to meet current employees during the selection process.

### **2.4.3 EVP generation preferences**

Although some may argue that there are no distinct generations and different preferences but rather individual life cycles and career stages, there is growing support for Generation Theory (Strauss & Howe, 1991) as a proxy for other empirically researched theories.

A study conducted in 2017 (Bussin, 2018, p. 102) with 303 participants from South African organizations revealed the following Top 7 retention preferences among the different generations, as presented in Table 1:



<b>Rated as important</b>	<b>Generation Y (&lt;31)</b>	<b>Generation X (32-47)</b>	<b>Baby Boomers and Veterans (47+)</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Performance management and recognition	Performance management and recognition	Remuneration
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Development and career opportunities	Development and career opportunities	Performance management and recognition
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Benefits and safety	Remuneration	Benefits and safety
4 <sup>th</sup>	Remuneration	Benefits and safety	Development and career opportunities
5 <sup>th</sup>	Work-life balance	Communication work enabler	Communication work enabler
6 <sup>th</sup>	Communication work enabler	Work-life balance	Work-life balance
7 <sup>th</sup>	Life convenience	Life convenience	Life convenience

**Table 1. Top 7 retention preferences among different generations**

As Table 1 shows, Bussin deduced that for Baby Boomers and Veterans, remuneration, performance management and recognition and benefits and safety are the top three components that will make them stay at their respective organizations, as they place a high value on hard work, obeying the rules, dedication and military principles.

Generation X is willing to develop their skill sets and take on challenges and is perceived as being very adaptive in this changing business world. Performance management and recognition, development and career opportunities and remuneration are important to them. They are excellent at multi-tasking and working on projects simultaneously and

place a high value on work-life balance. Generation X views their jobs as temporary and sees themselves as free agents.

Talent management is a comprehensive, multi-dimensional concept with a myriad of perceptions that influences its effectiveness. It holds the potential to influence talent retention amongst different generations of employees and therefore confirms the proposition that talent can make organizations perform to their true potential. The key to attracting and, most importantly, retaining excellent employees is based on the creation of an improved diverse total reward model that is a vital foundation for the EVP. (Bussin, 2018, p. 103)

#### **2.4.4 The three basis EVP dimensions**

During the analysis phase, Trost (2014, p. 39) recommends an example company, assuming a technology company has identified the international, technical sales department as a key function, and experienced sales managers with a university degree in engineering as its target group to answer these questions:

- Why is it attractive to work at our company, particularly in the technical sales division (strengths)?
- Who are our competitors in the labor market when it comes to the technical sales function, and what do these competitors offer (competition)?
- What is important to the target group in terms of employer and job (preferences)?

Starting with strengths, the target group must ultimately be told why it's worth taking an interest in this function and the company. The communication measures which build on this, and their content in particular, must be convincing and, most importantly, authentic. What's needed here is authenticity, not unrealistic promises, according to Trost.

Companies are quickly punished if they make EVPs that do not reflect the actual work. People will talk about it on the Internet and on social media. EVPs that don't match reality also have a negative effect when it comes to retaining talented new staff members.

Talented employees often leave their employer during the probationary period because the EVP was ultimately not upheld.

Trost stresses that the company also needs to look at the competition. An exercise with HR managers and managing directors addresses the issue of why an applicant should be interested in their company. In order to position a function successfully on the labor market, it's important to set the company apart from other companies offering jobs in similar functions. This is why the issue of competition when devising the EVP is highly relevant. This aspect involves finding out which companies on the labor market are competitors.

The proposition should also fit the preferences of the target group. It can be assumed that different target groups will have different expectations of an employer or function. Each employee has their own way of thinking and their own personal standards. (Trost, 2014, p. 39)

Understanding these three dimensions – strengths, competition, and preferences – forms the basis for defining an EVP for the target group, according to Trost.

#### **2.4.5 EVP to retain employees**

Bussin (2018) suggests that the EVP will also be needed for a retention strategy. An EVP for attracting talent might be good to align with an EVP for a retention strategy if the EVP is to be authentic for the employee but also for the employer.

EVP as a retention strategy is specific and unique to each organization, according to Bussin. In order for an organization to retain employees to perform optimally, it must match its rewards to its employees' preferences.

There are several types of labor turnover, namely:

- Involuntary turnover – this is where staff leaves the organization involuntarily, i.e., not of their own free will. Examples of this are death or retrenchment.

- Voluntary turnover – this is where staff members leave of their own accord.

Organizations need a healthy balance of the two; the average labor turnover is approximately 12%, i.e., about 12 out of every 100 employees leave their organization each year. People decide to switch jobs for a wide variety of reasons. New blood is a good thing, but constant turnover is detrimental to performance, morale, and overall sustainability. Some reasons are related to personal and life changes and completely unrelated to the job itself, so a business cannot expect to impact or change all departures, although with workers switching jobs roughly every 4.4 years, businesses do need to be focused on the aspects of employee retention they can influence (Bussin, 2018, p. 83).

No doubt, there are many other employee retention strategies for engaging and retaining employees. However, to be transparent, having a clear employee value proposition, communicating with employees early and often, knowing what they want and what you want, and understanding what motivates them should serve as a good start. (Bussin, 2018, p. 90)

There is no doubt that Bussin's conclusion on retention strategy also can be used when attracting employees. The communication during an application process, even how the ad for the job posting is communicated, will show the potential applicant what is to be expected from the company.

It might be good to remember that the first impression has a tendency to last, as with all marketing and branding experiences.

## **2.5 Recruiting is Marketing**

“Recruiters are now in marketing, whether we like it or not. More specifically, we are in the business of brand-building.” (Savage, 2019, p. 165)

Developing an EVP for an organization with a conventional Human Relations (HR) department plays to its often untapped strengths. HR has been under pressure to become more commercially minded and strategic. Bearing in mind the people data HR

departments have at their disposal, they are ideally positioned to undertake strategic people planning delivered through a compelling EVP. (Guest, 2016, p. 200)

In building the EVP, it's important to consider the entire end-to-end lifecycle of the strategy. From identifying gaps to building a robust people pipeline: growing, developing, and retaining them. The recruiter needs to be very "customer-centric", as with all successful business aspects.

It is common for product or service brand marketers to use some form of brand relationship ladder that starts with basic awareness and progresses through trial and repeat purchase to brand loyalty and active brand advocacy. This is an interesting concept to apply to the employer brand, although it involves a number of additional dimensions. In the context of employment, Barrow & Mosley (2005, p. 107) suggest that it would be useful to have a viewpoint on the answers to the following questions in relation to each target group.

Barrow & Mosley invite the reader to think about the "Brand experience":

- What are people's first impressions of joining the organization? To what extent does it meet their expectations?
- What are the most significant gaps between their image of the organization before joining and their experience?

Brand mapping is a common technique that marketers use to understand their relative positioning in the marketplace. Even though people may only have a very superficial understanding of the employment practices of each company, it is surprising how readily they can categorize different organizations into general types. How is your organization categorized? Is there something in the brand building that has failed, or "do we look as good as we think we do"?

In addition to researching people's perceptions, it is, according to Barrow & Mosley (2005, p. 108), valuable to conduct an analysis of the competitors who tend to turn up in your target market's salient sets. Most organizations' websites incorporate material aimed at

prospective employees, and this information, along with their recruitment advertising, can be used to analyze their underlying proposition. It can also be used to compare more specific details about the kind of benefits employees could expect from different organizations.

It might be tempting to build a very “professional brand”, but don’t forget that branding is closely related to “having a personality”. Brand personality in the corporate context is sometimes geared to what investors and regulators may be looking for in a brand: competence rather than excitement. If this is the case, you may need to mix in a little more emotion to ensure the organization doesn’t come across as too “corporate” or “stuffy”, particularly among Gen Y talent. (Mosley, 2014, p. 138)

Suppose it seems hard to create “the brand”, Rosethorn et al. (2009, p. 58) point out that nobody who embarks on an employer brand journey starts with a blank piece of paper. The business comes to the party complete with heritage, cultural origins, stories, ways of working, and, perhaps most importantly, senior management’s vision for where the company needs to be in the future. If it is hard to get started, maybe ask the employees?

Rosethorn also gives a good example of how cultures vary when looking from a more global point of view: “The challenge in a global context is, of course, that what works in one culture could have the exact opposite effect in another culture. We were discussing this with a client who has recently moved to Asia. We were talking about recognition programmes and we both agreed that the European way of celebrating couldn’t be more different from that of our colleagues in Africa and Asia. In our eyes, their celebrations seem to be extremely colourful and ‘loud’, while European celebrations appear very formal and boring.”

What is the culture of the organization? How can it be used for employer branding and employer value proposition?

## **2.6 Culture of the organization**

Especially for startups, it's crucial to be aware that the culture of the company starts from day one. The company culture can take the EVP to another level if the company is ready to invest the resources needed to create a great culture.

According to a PWC survey (2019), candidates want more than a job; they want an employee experience that provides a sense of purpose and pride in their work and in their organization. Culture is so meaningful that 33% of C-suite-level candidates said they'd take a pay cut to work for a mission-driven company that aligns with their ideals.

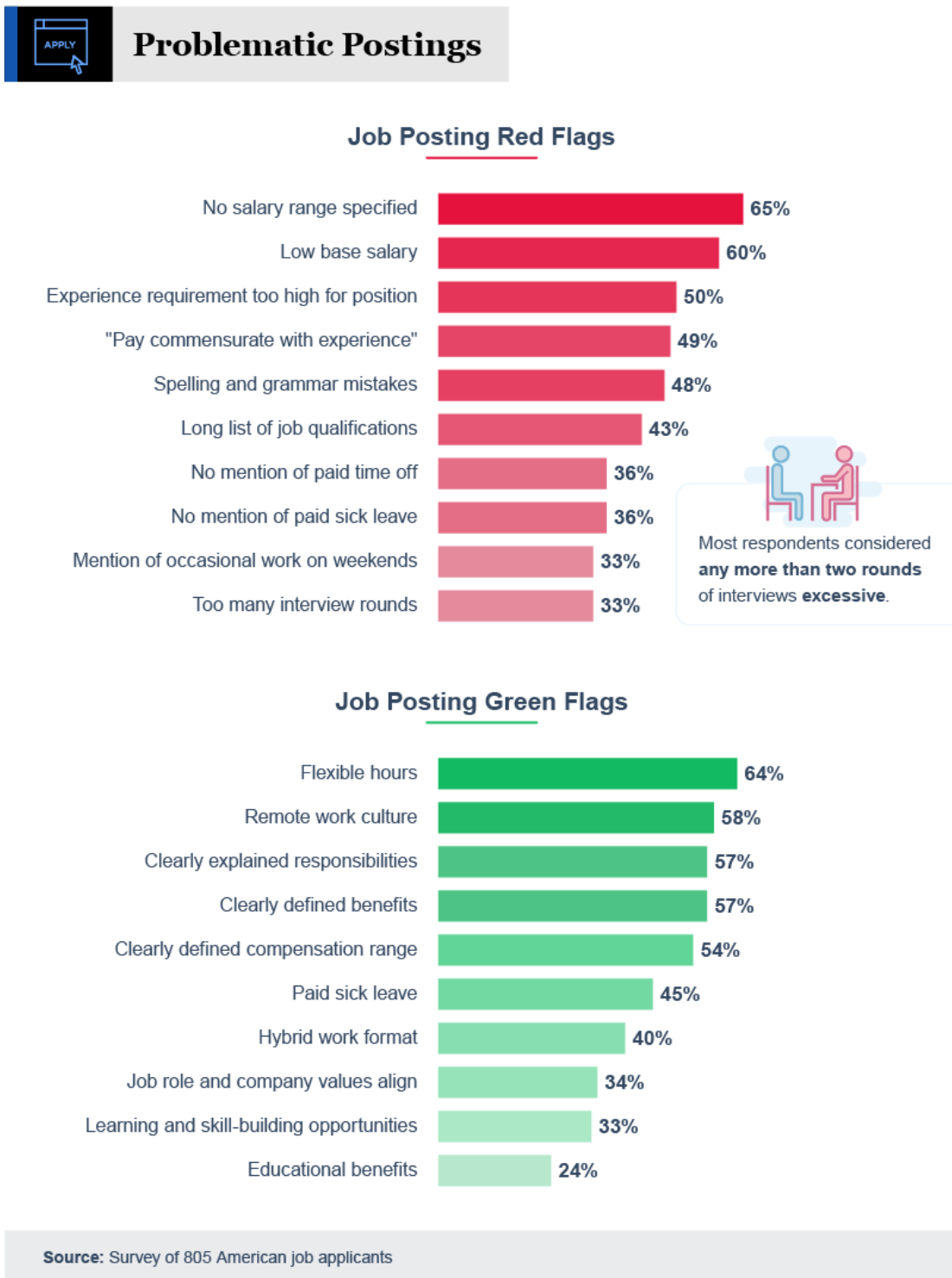
The challenge for recruiters? Communicating a clear and accurate sense of your culture to outsiders. Simply telling them about it isn't enough. Almost two-thirds of job seekers (63%) said they were more likely to apply for a role with a company if they had the opportunity to attend a social event to network with potential colleagues and learn about the organization. (PWC, 2019)

If you were asked to describe your company culture, could you do it? And should you care?

Every company has a culture, whether they know how to describe it or not. In fact, the founders of businesses are the most influential in shaping a company culture. Great companies have healthy cultures, which can contribute to profitability. If the culture shows any sign of being anything but positive, you could very likely trace the issues back to the top. (Carasco & Rothwell, 2020, p. 20)

## **2.7 Other job posting surveys**

To better understand the job search process, a team at Paychex surveyed 805 Americans who have looked for a job within the past year. Job seekers across the country shared their current standards for evaluating an open position and what constitutes a red flag for them today (Figure 3). Responses from applicants and employers were then compared for differences.



**Figure 3. Details that make a job posting appealing or not (Paychex)**



Figure 3 shows which details made a posting appealing—and which could put applicants off completely, according to results from a survey published by Paychex in June 2022 (Paychex, 2022). Interestingly, ads stipulating exclusively on-site work were a red flag, according to 30% of respondents. Conversely, 58% of respondents said that explicitly mentioning remote work culture was positive.

### **3 Research design**

The research model chosen for this thesis was to collect data from engineers in the IT field that could be potential applicants for a job posting.

The idea was to measure the opinions of the IT engineers to give answers to questions like:

- What are the most interesting benefits offered?
- Is the company able to present itself attractively?
- What kind of job postings are attractive?

As there would probably be IT engineers of different ages, with different life situations and experiences, there was also a need to collect demographic data such as:

- Age range
- Years of experience
- Family situation
- Current salary level
- Willingness to relocate for a job

By comparing, for instance, engineers 40 years and younger with engineers older than 40 years, there might be different views on what is important in a job posting. As some jobs require re-locating and some offer the possibility to work remotely, a question about the

interest to re-locate might show different results, for instance, depending on the life situation.

The study did not focus on how the potential applicants meet the requirements for the job postings, as this information is not needed to identify employer branding and recruitment process issues. The study did neither focus on the whole recruitment process until the right applicant had been found, which could show interesting results but is too large as a research scope to conduct for a master's degree thesis. The study will only focus on the initial phase of the recruitment process, getting the attention of the job seeker and presenting interesting content in job postings.

### **3.1 Method**

The approach for the research methodology relates to the different decisions needed to be made according to the research onion, presented by Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130) in the book "Research Methods for Business Students".

The research design is based on a mono-method, quantitative methodology that uses a survey strategy to collect data through an e-mail questionnaire. The purpose of the research is to conduct an explanatory study that will result in an action-oriented solution for organizations. A collection of standardized data will be used to analyze the opinions of the potential applicants for job postings. The time horizon will be cross-sectional, as the primary data collection occurs at a single point in time (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 66).

As there is sufficiently detailed and rich data to allow the exploration of the phenomenon and identify and explain themes and patterns in potential applicant behavior, an abductive approach was chosen for the research. An abductive approach "moves back and forth", in effect combining deduction (theory to data) and induction (data to theory). Abduction begins with the observation of a 'surprising fact'; it then works out a plausible theory of how this could have occurred. Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework, and test this through

subsequent data collection. The explanations are integrated into an overall conceptual framework building up a theory of what benefits the applicants might be interested in. In the same study, a question is asked about what might be missing in the framework, which opens up the possibility of making new conclusions on what matters and possibly doing new studies with updated frameworks to get more results. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 155–156)

Given the research questions and objectives, an explanatory study was the most appropriate for this case. Explanatory study refers to research that examines what is happening and then clarifies understanding of the problem. The emphasis of explanatory research is to study a situation or a problem in order to explain the relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 188).

### **3.2 Survey as the research strategy**

A survey was chosen as the research strategy as it allows the collection of large amounts of data from a substantial population and is low-cost. The survey strategy allows to collect data that can be analyzed quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistics. In addition, data collected using a survey strategy can be used to suggest possible reasons for particular relationships between variables and to produce models of these relationships. Using a survey strategy should give more control over the research process, and when probability sampling is used, it is possible to generate findings that are statistically representative of the whole population at a lower cost than collecting the data for the whole population. (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 194)

Data collected using a survey strategy is unlikely to be as wide-ranging as those collected by other research strategies. For example, there is a limit to the number of questions that any questionnaire can contain if the goodwill of the respondent is not to be presumed on too much.

The idea of the survey was to give examples of the content presented in IT-related job postings on social media and rate the interest. For this quantitative research, a mono-

method approach was selected for the data collection. A quantitative research design may use a single data collection technique, such as a questionnaire and corresponding quantitative analytical procedure. This is known as a mono-method quantitative study (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 178).

Quantitative research can be referred to as hypothesis-testing research, which means that the research starts with statements of theory from which research hypotheses are formed. Second, an experimental design is established, and the variables concerned (the dependent variables) are tested while controlling for the effects of selected independent variables. The subjects are selected at random in order to reduce error and to cancel bias. (Jha, 2008)

Quantitative data needs to be processed and converted into information in order to be useful for most people. Quantitative analysis techniques, such as statistics, charts, and graphs, enable us to explore, present, describe, and study trends and relationships regarding the data. Data for quantitative analysis can be divided into two distinct groups: categorical and numerical. Categorical data indicates data in which the values cannot be measured numerically but have to be classified into sets (categories) according to the characteristics that describe the variable concerned in rank order (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 567)

### **3.3 Survey design**

The survey was based on two parts, one to rate the benefits of the job offered in the job postings and one to collect demographic data. The first part of the survey was constructed after 18 job postings had been analyzed. The job postings mostly appeared as ads and posts on social media but also other internet sites. The different categories for the questions and all questions in the first part of the survey were based on the analyzed ads.

#### **3.3.1 Job postings analysis**

Job postings aimed at IT engineers were collected during the winter of 2022 from social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Many of the job

postings contained similar benefits to the applicants, and a total of 18 ads were stored and analyzed to create a material bank for designing the survey. The reason why not more than 18 ads were analyzed was that no new benefits were found in the last ones analyzed.

The kind of benefits that were found in the job postings is listed in Table 2.

<b>Benefits (free or subsidized)</b>
Dental care
Extended occupational healthcare
Phone
Exercise and culture benefits
Work literature and magazines
Cars and bikes for private use
Insurances (travel, free time, life)
Sauna
Cottage at a ski resort
Snacks and refreshments
Activities for leisure time
Massage and/or yoga
Lunch
Breakfast
Sponsored free-time projects (tech or other)
Excursion trips
Tax-deductible housing compensation
Credit card
<b>Pay</b>
Bonus system
Retirement fund
Ownership in company
Provision pay, shared risk with the company
<b>Job role and development</b>
Can impact which project to work on
Can impact which technology to work on
Will be part of a team of experts
Paid learning, training, or education
Flexible working hours
<b>Location</b>

Remote
Several offices to choose from
<b>Other</b>
Recruitment process explained

**Table 2. Benefits presented in 18 examined job postings on social media, categorized into thematic categories.**

For the survey, the benefits were separated into five categories, where an additional category was added regarding interest in making the world a better place to live in. The last category was mainly added because of the thesis author's interest in finding out if things that can have a positive impact on the world could make a difference. The categorization was mainly done to let the respondent focus on one theme at a time when filling out the survey.

The five categories for surveying interests in benefits were chosen to be:

- What else than SALARY can make you interested in applying for a job?
- Would these free HEALTH(Y) benefits make you more interested in applying for a job?
- Would these free LEISURE TIME benefits make you more interested in applying for a job?
- What offerings regarding your JOB ROLE and LOCATION would make you more interested in applying for a job?
- If the job can have a POSITIVE IMPACT on any of the following issues, would it affect your interest to apply?

Added to these categories, which made up the first part of the survey, a second part was created where demographic questions were asked. These questions, where the applicant

was presented with Likert scale-type alternatives and some other type of selectable response alternatives, were:

- Age range
- Years of experience
- Life situation (family, kids, etc)
- Where do you live
- Interest in relocating for a job
- Current salary level
- Mother tongue

An open question about additional thoughts regarding job postings was also presented in the second part of the survey.

The whole questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

### **3.3.2 Likert scale**

The categories were made on the basis of the questions to make it easier for the respondent to focus on one theme at a time when filling out the survey. The questions were constructed to be easy to answer, as an example by offering the respondents to provide answers as ratings such as “Give this example of an offered benefit a grade from 1 to 4, where 1 is not interesting and 4 is very interesting”. This type of scale is called a Likert scale.

The widely used Likert scales were developed by the American sociologist Rensis Likert (1903– 1981). A distinction must be made first between a Likert scale and a Likert item. The Likert scale is the sum of responses on several Likert items, whereas a Likert item is a statement that the respondent is asked to evaluate according to (subjective or objective) criteria— usually, five levels of agreement or disagreement with the statement, where 1 =

strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. (Dimitrov, 2011)

Sometimes it might be more reasonable to use four-level Likert items by omitting the middle (neutral) category. This method is referred to as forced choice because the middle option of neither agree nor disagree is omitted, for example, to avoid the so-called central tendency bias that occurs when the respondents tend to avoid the extreme categories. (Dimitrov, 2011)

There is one exception regarding quantitative research data in the survey, though, which is the last question. This is an open-ended question that asks the respondent, "Do you have ideas or advice for employers on how to improve job postings" as it is also interesting to know if the respondent thinks there is content missing in job postings that would be of interest. This question falls under the qualitative research method as the answer is provided as text by the respondent.

Qualitative research studies participants' meanings and the relationships between them, using a variety of data collection techniques and analytical procedures to develop a conceptual framework and theoretical contribution. Among the characteristics of qualitative research is that method(s) used to collect data are unstructured or semi-structured, and collection results in non-standardized data generally requiring classification into categories. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 179–180).

### **3.3.3 Salary strategy**

One might think that the obvious (and maybe first) question would be to ask how important the salary is for the applicant. There are reasons why this question was left out. Firstly, none of the collected job postings included anything about the salary, and it was not part of the content of any of the ads. The postings only included optional salary-related benefits, such as bonus system, provision pay, ownership option, and so on. Secondly, money matters until it doesn't. Of course, we all want to work for a company with great leaders and in a position that will challenge us and develop us. But if we can't pay our bills,



none of that matters. It doesn't matter that you have ping pong tables and hot yoga on Wednesday nights if your employees can't figure out how to pay the rent. (Sackett, 2018)

### **3.4 Data**

The data was collected with the survey that was sent out via e-mail to several hundred recipients. Two worker's unions for engineers in the IT field were contacted regarding a sample registry. These unions were Driftingenjörsförbundet i Finland (DIFF) and Tekniska föreningen i Finland (TfiF), which together have over 300 members working in the IT field. As the unions are directed to Swedish-speaking Finns, it can be assumed that almost everyone is Swedish-speaking and a separate question was added regarding the language of the respondents to get this confirmed. A link to the survey was sent via their e-mail systems to over 300 members working in the IT field, and they could fill out the survey anonymously. This means that I did not get the list of the recipient's e-mails, and they will remain anonymous, as it was not necessary for the study to collect any contact info from the recipients or anything that would identify who they were.

The survey was planned to be possible to fill out in about 2-4 minutes to avoid the situation where a recipient will not answer because it would require too much of their time.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness of the study**

Cronbach's alpha indicates the consistency of a multiple-item scale and is typically used together with Likert-type items. It is widely used in social science literature because it delivers a measure of reliability, which can be obtained from just one testing session and during the study. The received alpha should be above 0.70 in order to guarantee the reliability of the scale. (Leech et al., 2008, pp. 46–50)

There are also methods available to verify the reliability and validity of the data. A simple method using descriptive statistics involving mean and standard deviation can be applied in questionnaire surveys. By focusing on the reliability and validity assessment, items should have roughly equivalent means and standard deviations within a Likert scale with

the rule of thumb of 2:1 (ratio of the maximum standard deviation to the minimum standard deviation). (Rahman Othman et al., 2011)

## 4 Empirical data and the findings

The thesis data (N=64) was collected in May 2022 with a web-based questionnaire sent as a link via direct e-mail. All the respondents were reported to be working in the IT field.

### 4.1 Cronbach's Alpha

In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.89, obtained on all responses, which is acceptable. The result from calculating Cronbach's Alpha in PSPP can be seen in Table 1 below.

#### RELIABILITY

```

/VARIABLES= Climate_change Sustainability Equality_for_all Helping_the_disabled
Helping_the_elderly Bonus_system Provision_pay Ownership_option Retirement_fund
Tax_deductible_housing_compensation Extended_occupational_health_care Dental_care
Exercise_vouchers Massage_yoga_or_similar Snacks_and_refreshments Breakfast Lunch
Cars_for_private_use Bikes_for_private_use Cottage_at_skiresort Excursion_trips
Excercise_and_culture_vouchers Life_insurance Travel_insurance Sauna
Sponsored_work_related_side_project Literature_and_magazines Possibility_to_work_remotely
Flexible_working_hours Coaching_from_experts Career_path_advice
Can_impact_which_project_to_work_on Can_impact_which_tech_to_work_with
Several_office_locations_to_choose_from
/MODEL=ALPHA.

```

Scale: ANY

Case Processing Summary

Cases	N	Percent
Valid	60	93,80 %
Excluded	4	6,30 %
Total	64	100,00 %

Reliability Statistics

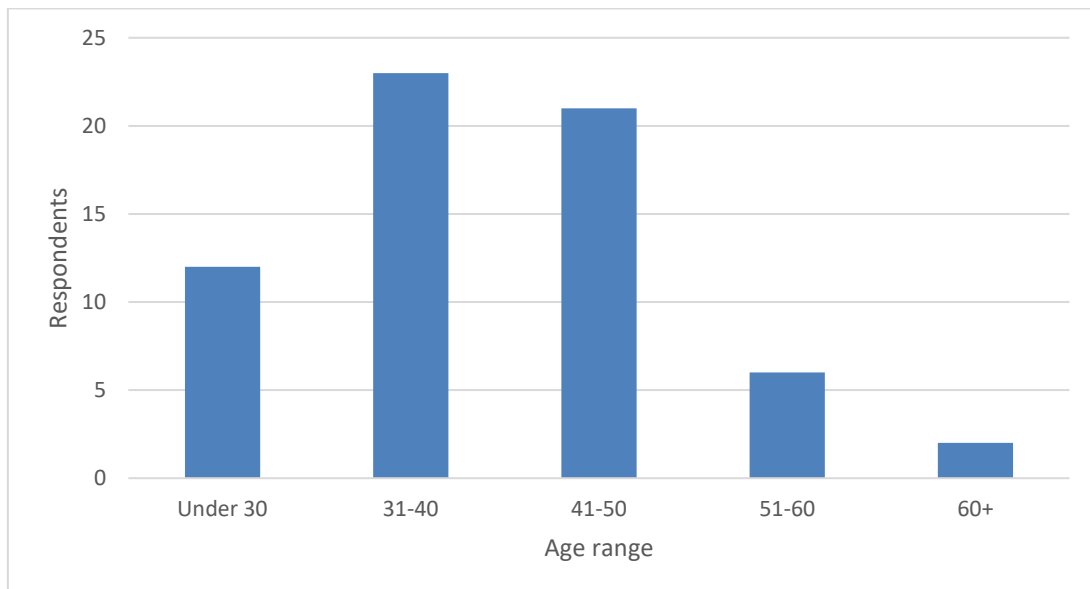
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0,89	34

**Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient calculation on the survey data from the PSPP statistics software.**

## 4.2 Collection of the primary data

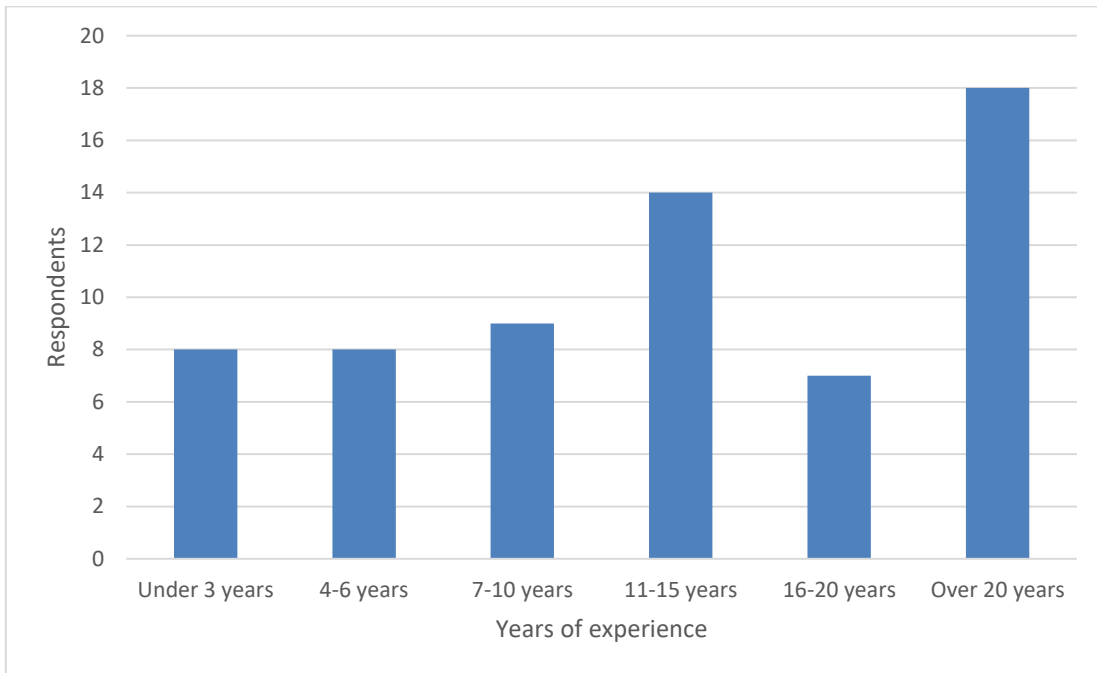
The survey received 64 responses, where almost all were Swedish-speaking. Some respondents did not reveal their mother tongue.

As can be seen in Figure 4. The age range of the respondents, most of the respondents are between 31 and 50 years old.



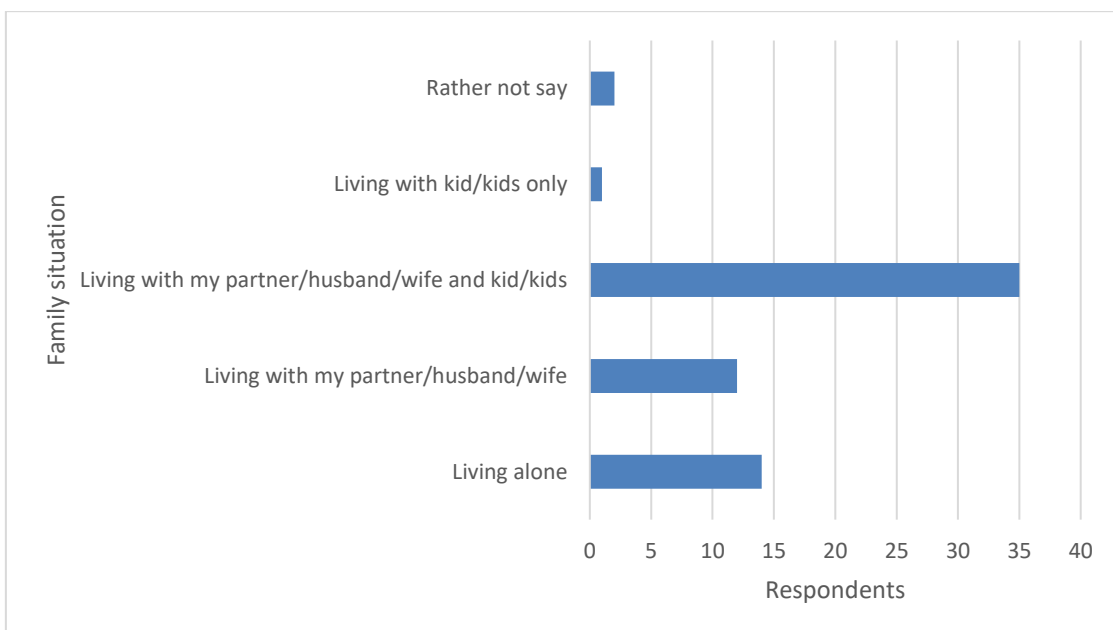
**Figure 4. The age range of the respondents**

The age range is also interesting to compare with the years of experience, which varies from under 3 years to over 20 years. This can be seen in Figure 5. Years of experience among the respondents.



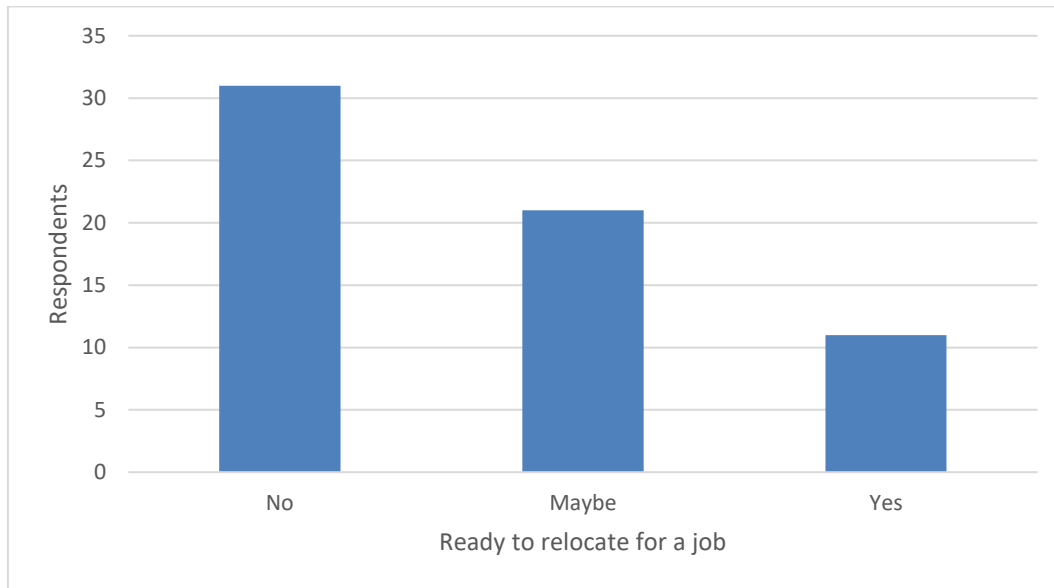
**Figure 5. Years of experience among the respondents**

As can be seen in Figure 6. Family situation of the respondents, over half of the respondents are living with a partner and children.



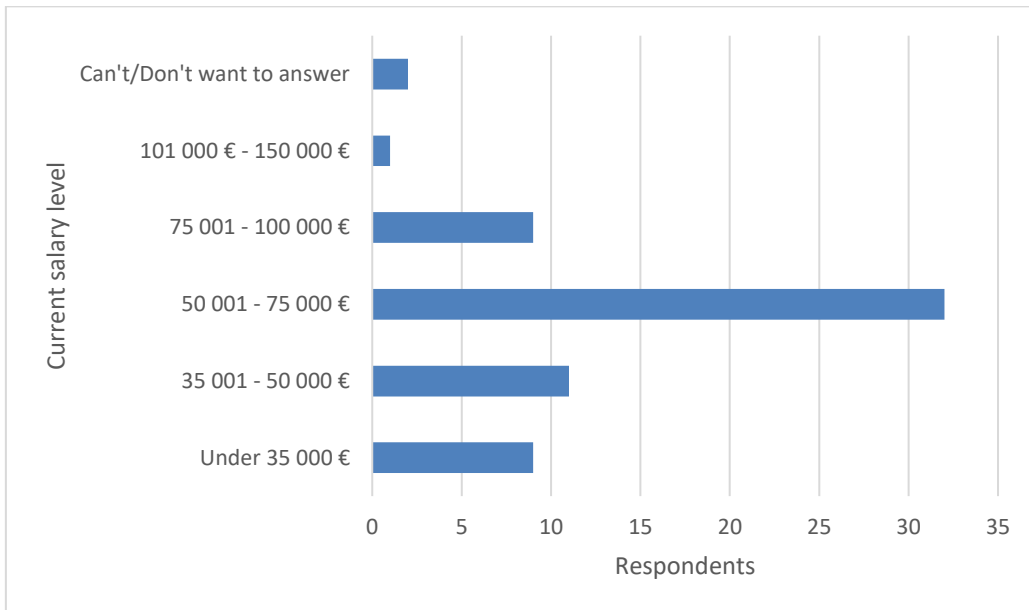
**Figure 6. Family situation of the respondents**

One question in the survey was regarding relocating, and whether the respondent was willing to move for an interesting job. The results can be seen in Figure 7. Respondent's willingness to relocate for a job.



**Figure 7. Respondent's willingness to relocate for a job**

The fifth question with interesting results was regarding salary level, which can have an effect on the interest in different kinds of benefits when looking for a new job. The results are shown in Figure 8. The respondent's salary level.



**Figure 8. The respondent's salary level**

### 4.3 Data analysis mean score

One of the most interesting results from the survey data is the popularity rate for each quantitative question. In other words, the benefit that is the most attractive, what is the second most attractive, and so on. This can be calculated by giving points to the answers in the Likert scale, for instance, No = 1, Maybe = 2, Probably = 3, and Yes = 4, and then adding all points per question and dividing them by the number of respondents. When these means are compared between all questions and sorted from highest to lowest, it gives a table as in Table 4. Answers from respondents ordered by the mean score for each question

BENEFIT	MEAN SCORE	STANDARD DEVIATION	CATEGORY
Flexible working hours	3,781	0,548	Job role & location
Possibility to work remotely	3,563	0,732	Job role & location
Can impact which project to work on	3,524	0,644	Job role & location
Can impact which tech to work with	3,469	0,734	Job role & location
Dental care	3,219	0,881	Health
Extended occupational healthcare	3,063	0,990	Health
Bonus system	2,938	0,924	Salary
Coaching from experts	2,938	0,774	Job role & location

Sustainability	2,813	1,022	Positive impact
Cars for private use	2,766	1,004	Leisure time
Climate change	2,688	1,052	Positive impact
Equality for all	2,672	0,837	Positive impact
Exercise vouchers	2,625	1,016	Health
Lunch	2,625	0,984	Health
Career path advice	2,609	0,789	Job role & location
Several office locations to choose from	2,609	0,953	Job role & location
Ownership option	2,603	0,925	Salary
Exercise and culture vouchers	2,587	0,944	Leisure time
Life insurance	2,516	1,008	Leisure time
Helping the disabled	2,500	0,976	Positive impact
Retirement fund	2,484	0,908	Salary
Bikes for private use	2,422	1,066	Leisure time
Helping the elderly	2,359	0,915	Positive impact
Travel insurance	2,333	1,016	Leisure time
Massage, yoga, or similar	2,281	1,061	Health
Tax-deductible housing compensation	2,250	0,959	Salary
Cottage at a ski resort	2,188	1,022	Leisure time
Sponsored work-related side project	2,188	1,067	Leisure time
Excursion trips	2,111	0,969	Leisure time
Breakfast	1,984	0,984	Health
Provision pay	1,906	0,868	Salary
Sauna	1,891	1,025	Leisure time
Literature and magazines	1,875	0,917	Leisure time
Snacks and refreshments	1,797	0,962	Health

**Table 4. Answers from respondents ordered by the mean score for each question**

As can be seen in Table 4, the flexible working hours and the possibility to work remotely got the highest score when comparing the answers from respondents ordered by mean rate from the Likert scale for each question. Third and fourth place went to the possibility to impact on which project and which tech to work on. All there top four questions in Table 4 were in the “Job role & Location” category of the survey.

In fifth and sixth place in Table 4 came health, which was dental care and extended occupational health care. Other Health-related questions, like massage, yoga, and exercise vouchers, were not of high interest.

The benefits that got the lowest score in Table 4 are free snacks and refreshments, and close to this benefit in the bottom row is free literature, magazines, and sauna.

By calculating the benefit score mean and comparing them, the result gives an indication for organizations that are about to create job postings, what might be the most interesting benefits for the applicant and what might not.

The column "Standard deviation" shows that it is within the rule of thumb, as the lowest result is 0.548 and the highest is 1.067, which gives a ratio of 1.95:1. The rule of thumb concept to test reliability and validity was stated in section 3.5.

#### **4.4 Demographic data analysis**

As the survey collected data showing the applicant's interest in job postings content and also demographic data, it is possible to compare the data regarding the interest in content with the demographic data. Not all 64 respondents gave useful data for every question, as there was an option to "Rather not say" on some questions about demographic data, such as life situation and current salary level. Luckily, the respondents that were not interested in giving all demographic data asked were no more than 2-3 persons out of 64.

##### **4.4.1 Comparing interest in benefits with age**

For instance, if we split the applicants in age, with one group being 40 years and younger (n=35) and the other group being over 40 years (n=29), we get two groups that are almost similar in size. Then we can compare the interest in content depending on age.

Utilizing independent samples t-test, it was found that questions showing a significant difference in results ( $p < 0.05$ ) depending on the age of the respondents were

- Can impact which tech to work with ( $t(49)=2.64$ ,  $p=0.011$ )
- Bikes for private use ( $t(61)=2.52$ ,  $p=0.014$ )
- Sponsored work-related side project ( $t(60)=2.30$ ,  $p=0.025$ )



- Breakfast ( $t(62)=2.28$ ,  $p=0.026$ )

In all four cases, the younger group was more interested in the offerings than the older group.

#### **4.4.2 Comparing interest in benefits with experience**

As the age and years of experience naturally correlate, there was also a significant difference regarding one question when comparing one group with 10 years or less experience ( $n=25$ ) and one group with more than 10 years of experience ( $n=39$ ). Utilizing independent samples t-test, it was found that questions showing a significant difference in results ( $p<0.05$ ) depending on the years of experience of the respondents was

- Sponsored work-related side project ( $t(49)=3.12$ ,  $p=0.003$ )

When comparing age, the younger group was more interested in the "Sponsored work-related side project," and when comparing experience, the group with less experience was more interested in the same topic.

#### **4.4.3 Comparing interest in benefits with the life situation**

Other interesting data to look at was to compare the interest in content depending on the life situation, by dividing the respondents into one group with kids ( $n=36$ ) and one without ( $n=26$ ) (two respondents chose the alternative "Rather not say"). Utilizing independent samples t-test, it was found that questions showing a significant difference in results ( $p<0.05$ ) depending on the life situation of the respondents were

- Tax-deductible housing compensation ( $t(50)=-2.62$ ,  $p=0.028$ )
- Several office locations to choose from ( $t(55)=-2.41$ ,  $p=0.020$ )
- Massage, yoga or similar ( $t(60)=2.10$ ,  $p=0.040$ )

The "Massage, yoga or similar" benefit was significantly more interesting for respondents with kids, and the other two questions where interest differed significantly between the

respondent, "Tax-deductible housing compensation" and "Several office locations to choose from", was for the group without kids.

#### **4.4.4 Comparing interest in benefits with a willingness to relocate**

The third demographic data comparison was made to compare the interest in content depending on the willingness to relocate, where we divided the respondents into a "no" group (n=31) and a "yes" group (n=32). Utilizing independent samples t-test, it was found that questions showing a significant difference in results ( $p < 0.05$ ) depending on the willingness to relocate were

- Helping the disabled ( $t(61) = -2.47$ ,  $p = 0.016$ )
- Helping the elderly ( $t(60) = -2.22$ ,  $p = 0.030$ )

Interestingly, the significant differences between the two groups are that the respondents willing to relocate were more interested in helping the elderly and the disabled than the ones that were not willing to relocate.

#### **4.4.5 Comparing interest in benefits with salary level**

Looking at the current salary level, it was not easy to split into two groups evenly as most of the respondents earned something between 50.001 and 75.000 euros, but a comparison was anyhow made between a group of respondents earning 50.000 euros or less (n=20) and a group earning more than 50.000 euro (n=42). Utilizing independent samples t-test, it was found that questions showing a significant difference in results ( $p < 0.05$ ) depending on the current salary level were

- Provision pay ( $t(53) = -3.31$ ,  $p = 0.002$ )
- Flexible working hours ( $t(32) = -2.12$ ,  $p = 0.042$ )

The respondents earning more than 50.000 euros per year were significantly more positive to "Provision pay" and "Flexible working hours" than the respondents with a lower salary.

#### **4.5 Additional information from the survey**

The survey made for the thesis presented the last question as an open question, where the surveyed IT workers could add additional information they thought was important in job postings. Out of the 64 respondents, 24 had added something in the comment field. Half of these comments were about the salary range, where the surveyed IT workers complained that the salary range was not available in the job posting.

The rest of the comments were various, for instance, hoping for:

- A smooth and fast application process
- Information about the daily work
- Information about the onboarding process
- A future vision for the team
- Honesty, to save everyone's time
- Team culture and working method
- To be clear on expectations
- To open up positions to first-year students without experience

The survey also had demographic questions about the mother tongue of the respondents and where they live. The mother tongue of the respondents was Swedish for 62 of them and Finnish for 2 of them. Regarding where the respondents live, an area in Southern Finland was left out by mistake and thus, several respondents left the question empty.

## **5 Discussion and conclusion**

The Literature review (section 2) gave the author a broader perspective on aspects and values that needs to align with a great job posting at an organization. Starting with appreciating the workforce, maybe as the most important asset of the organization, is a

good start. Secondly, it can be good to think about what talent is and how to organization can enable talent to grow to its full potential within the company.

To be able to act with precision while executing the talent acquisition process, a timeline is needed where defining the need is usually the first step. Then writing the ad, selecting the marketing channels, distributing, sourcing, and when contact with a candidate has been made, continuing all the way to onboarding if the candidate proves to be the best talent for the job. The (employer) brand of the organization, or the lack of it, can reveal things that change the applicant's mind. As earlier stated, recruiting is marketing.

All these steps are part of creating the employee value proposition (EVP) to attract the best talent possible. That is also the reason why aligning the results from potential candidate field studies to an EVP can be the most important process an organization can do.

Every organization is different in values, culture, goals, and vision. If a special talent is needed, the organization needs to have a clear view of all these aspects and be able to define them in order to be able to make the promises a strong EVP requires.

These are the aspects of talent acquisition that were found in the literature. How do they align with the findings when analyzing the data?

As with all things related to management, trust is key. The talent acquisition process needs to be managed, which would usually be done by the HR department if such is available at the organization. The more data available on the potential applicants, the higher the possibility of managing talent recruitment successfully, as the HR department (or equivalent) will have more insights into the candidate's interests, wishes, and behavior regarding job postings and related ads.

In this section, the results from the survey aligned with the theory available about the talent acquisition process and employer value proposition will be discussed. Some of the tools, recommendations, and workshop models found will also be presented as something that interested organizations can use to create better employer value propositions.

## 5.1 Key findings

The three objectives listed (in section 1.3) related to the research question (in section 1.2) need to be addressed in the research to be able to answer the question. (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 11)

### 5.1.1 Objective 1

*To empirically study what is interesting in a job posting for potential applicants with the goal of finding out if the Employer Value Proposition can be improved.*

The results from the survey clearly show what is more or less interesting for the potential applicants, referring to the mean score in Table 4. Now, this study has not examined the frequency of different benefits in job postings; it only collected all kinds of benefits. But with the results presented, an organization can analyze their own job postings and maybe improve them by comparing them to the results in this study. If differences are found between the opinions of the potential applicants and the job postings and related ads, the organization could look more into the current EVP to see if there are ways to improve it and maybe find ways to make it more aligned with the candidate's opinions and wishes.

As stated by several authors in section Employer value proposition (EVP) 2.4, honesty when designing the EVP is crucial for a successful outcome. Not only is it a key thing to find and hire a suitable candidate, but also to retain the talent and enable them to grow and prosper. This requires an EVP that reflects the actual situation in the organization.

There is no "one benefit that can improve all EVPs". The EVP has to be true, and every organization is unique and has its own "perks" to offer. But the recommendations, tools, and workshop models can be used by all organizations. Some recommendations on how to improve the EVP is listed under heading 5.3, based on findings in literature discussing EVP management.

### 5.1.2 Objective 2

*To create a survey based on a quantitative research method and send it by e-mail to a sample of the target group.*

As described in section 3.3, a survey was created based on the findings when analyzing job postings and related ads during a couple of months in 2022. It seemed like the categories of benefits in job posting ads were quite comprehensive, as the author did not find any new benefits listed in the last ads that were analyzed. This is also the reason why 18 ads and related job postings felt like a sufficient number to analyze before creating the survey.

The topics added to the survey regarding “positive impact” added a dimension to the collected data, and some of the topics proved to reach quite high in the mean score in Table 4. “Sustainability” was the topic that reached the 9<sup>th</sup> position out of 34 positions. Also, “climate change” and “equality for all” reached the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> positions, respectively. Can this be interpreted as something that the organizations distributing job postings and related ads are missing out on? An opportunity to stand out in the competition by adding content about “positive impact” in the EVP and job postings? There might be other categories of questions that could have been added to the survey, and that could have given interesting results. On the other hand, a long survey might scare off respondents.

Regarding the target group, the goal was to get at least 50 replies that could be used when analyzing the data. As the survey produced 64 answers where almost everyone answered every question, it was considered to be a good result.

When the answers about benefits were compared to the demographic data, there were some significant differences in attractiveness for some benefits depending on age, experience, life situation, willingness to relocate, and salary level. Some of these differences could possibly be a theme for further research.

### **5.1.3 Objective 3**

*To analyze the results from the survey and present the findings as recommendations when recruiting talent via job postings.*

The mean score of all benefits tells a lot and can hopefully be helpful, even if all imaginable benefits were not listed. Looking at the demographic data and finding significant differences when comparing age groups, life situations, experience, willingness to relocate, and salary level can be helpful to any organization but also to none, depending on what kind of talent is required. Additional information was collected from the survey as an open-ended question, and about one-fifth of the respondents wrote about the problem that the salary range was not mentioned in the job postings. That is why a separate section about salary strategy is to be found below.

Summarizing key findings, the author is pleased that the results from the survey could provide valuable data on the opinions of potential applicants to job postings in the IT field and also that a significant difference could be found between groups in the data. Some of the key findings were also tools, recommendations, and workshop models that could be found in the literature, which is addressed below in section 5.3. The summarized responses to the open-ended question in the survey, presented in section 4.5, can possibly also give some good guidance to organizations on what the potential candidate might value.

As stated in sections 4.1 and 4.3 respectively, the questionnaire data are within the ratios that Cronbach's alpha and the standard deviation allow within a Likert scale to be able to define it as reliable and valid. This makes it more justifiable to draw conclusions and make decisions based on the data and the results presented.

### **5.1.4 Salary strategy**

As can be seen in section 4.5, when the surveyed IT workers could express their additional comments on job postings content, they were mostly concerned about job postings with no information on salary range.

In the study “What Employees and Employers Are Seeking from the Job Market” by Paychex (2022) (see Figure 3), candidates were specifically concerned about salary details: 60% felt it was problematic if the base salary was too low, but even more candidates thought it was a problem if there was no salary range specified at all. And all surveyed agreed that “commission-based salary” was the No. 1 phrase that turned them off from a job listing.

Based on the responses, clearly, there is a need to do more regarding the information on the salary for a job. This was also apparent in the study done by Paychex, as the top position on “Job Posting Red Flags” was “No salary range specified” among the 805 respondents.

Salary and benefits almost always come first for job seekers. But according to a PWC survey (2019) among 10000 US respondents, three key aspects of workplace culture have become so desirable among candidates that they’re willing to trade part of their salary to get some of them: opportunities for training and development, inclusion and personal flexibility in when and where they work.

Job seekers are willing to trade an average of 11.7% of their salary for training and flexibility—and that figure rises to 12.4% among those who work in in-demand fields like technology, according to the PWC survey (2019).

An interesting approach from a software company in Finland that dares to differ is Sysart, which created the site *Koodarinpalkka* (*Koodarin Palkka*, n.d.), where a potential applicant can calculate the salary to be expected based on willingness to work on provision or monthly salary, role in projects, years of experience with software development, own evaluation of knowledge, office selection (Helsinki or Oulu) and expected bonus range.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

This is a study measuring opinions, asking the potential applicants for their opinions. Another perspective on job postings would be to measure how they actually behave.



Mosley (2014, p. 94) states that once people have started work, they naturally tend to have less time and interest in completing surveys. While it's possible to run online surveys, they are more prone to sampling error since the people with time on their hands are not necessarily the people you most want to be hearing from.

This might be true (no evidence was presented with the statement), and there is no doubt that a survey might show something other than tracking the real behavior of an applicant. The results in this thesis are based on a survey, but another approach could be to study the real-life behavior of applicants, though it might require much more work than a survey.

Mosley (2014, p. 94) also states that "The other useful source of reputational information for mid-career professionals is to conduct a research exercise among whoever within or outside the organization is having most conversations with potential candidates."

Another thing to consider when creating a questionnaire is to select the questions wisely. In this study, the Likert scale was chosen to collect quantitative. Maybe another scaling could give other and more accurate results, and maybe a qualitative study could show other aspects. Choosing how to group topics, maybe adding benefits not found in ads, and focusing more on salary-related issues, also could improve the result. And, last but not least, maybe there are other registers and ways to attract filling out a survey that would provide more replies from potential applicants.

Hopefully, someone finds the time and motivation to do a study on job postings with another approach, as the results would be interesting to compare with this study.

### **5.3 Recommendations to employers**

If we look at the results in Table 4. Answers from respondents ordered by the mean score for each question; how do they align with EVPs in IT organizations? Could something be improved to align to content that is most interesting to the applicants wanted? This is something for each organization to evaluate and analyze on its own.

To be able to evaluate and analyze the current situation, an EVP needs to be present and also updated and as complete as possible. If this is not the case, there are a few tools, recommendations, and workshop models available to help optimize the EVP.

### 5.3.1 Example questions to ask at workshops

It is quite clear that internal processes are to be designed, and resources need to be allocated to optimize the EVP, which can have a direct impact on the quality of the job posting and related ads. One way to get going is to arrange workshops.

Trost (2014) presents a method to generate content for an Employer Value Proposition (EVP), where questions to be discussed at a workshop with internal representatives from the key function can be as presented in Figure 9.

Content	Question
Strengths	<p>What do you particularly like about your job?</p> <p>What are the magic moments in your job which make it really worth working here?</p>
Preferences	<p>If you had to look around for a new job, what would you place particular emphasis on?</p> <p>What would be a positive reason for you to want to work at another company?</p> <p>To new employees: Why did you choose us?</p>
Competition	<p>If you weren't working here, where would you want to work?</p> <p>What do other companies offer that we don't?</p>

**Figure 9. Possible questions to be discussed at a workshop with internal representatives from the key function**

The example questions for a workshop in Figure 9 are related to the three basis EVP dimensions under heading The three basis EVP dimensions<sup>2.4.4</sup>, where an example is presented on how a company looking for a specific talent can design and evaluate the EVP.

### 5.3.2 The strength-stretch challenge

The most effective EVPs combine credible “here and now” strengths solidly grounded in the current employment experience and more “future-focused” stretch aspirations underpinned by tangible leadership commitments and planned investment. Playing to current strengths builds credibility, which provides the essential underpinning to any brand. Playing to future aspirations builds brand vitality, which is also critical in maintaining a brand’s forward momentum and competitive edge. (Mosley, 2014, p. 134)

A useful way of approaching this exercise is to determine where the workshop participants think the list of potential EVP ingredients should be placed along the following strength–stretch spectrum (see Figure 10).

Currently Credible	Shared Aspiration	Wishful Thinking
<b>Authenticity</b>	<b>Forward Momentum</b>	<b>Overstretch</b>
<i>‘The way we do things round here’</i>	<i>‘The company at its best’</i>	<i>‘Out of touch with reality’</i>
(ALWAYS CONSISTENT)	(LESS CONSISTENT)	(SELDOM TRUE)

**Figure 10. Strength and stretch challenge**

The strength-stretch challenge provides a great opportunity to get the truth on the table, as it can be surprising how many potential attributes end up in the wishful-thinking black zone after this type of exercise.

Mosley (2014, p. 134) notes that the shared aspiration rating combines two dimensions: consistency and forward momentum. If you are describing the company at its best, then credibility is based on what your organization is capable of, but this can ultimately lead to frustration and disengagement unless it is also accompanied by a strong future commitment to delivering this positive experience more consistently around the whole organization.

According to Mosley, EVP development is like alchemy. You need hard data and evidence, but you also need some magic to transform these base materials into something that lifts the spirit and fires the imagination. The key components of a typical EVP, defining the core areas of employer brand consistency, are brand positioning, personality, and pillars. It is increasingly common to describe the pillars of the EVP in terms of both the 'give' and 'get' of the employment deal, not simply a unidirectional set of employee promises. The most effective EVPs include a healthy balance of current strengths and future aspirational stretch. For stretch claims to be credible, they need to be underpinned by clear and tangible leadership commitment and investment. (Mosley, 2014, p. 142)

### **5.3.3 EVP testing**

Talent Smoothie is a company in London, consulting in EVP and employer branding for 15 years. Talent Smoothie states that to be successful, the EVP must be credible, which is why it must always be tested. The purpose of testing is to ensure that all categories of employees and potential employees find it appealing. The testing also tells you which elements of the EVP need to be "turned up" or "turned down" to appeal to different groups.

Testing should take place with internal employees and external potential employees. The testing will reveal changes that need to be made to the EVP to appeal to the different audiences that it was tested with. Assuming that valid and rigorous data is used to create

the EVP, Talent Smoothie expects it to work for 90% of the target population. It should always be tested, though, as the 10% it needs to be adjusted could be a crucial part of the workforce. (Talent Smoothie, n.d.)

#### **5.3.4 Big Data and advanced analytics**

With social media or actually any big digital platform that is used by a lot of people and that also has some traffic regarding job postings or related ads, there is always some data to dig into that can give very valuable information on candidate behavior.

As Isson & Harriott (2016, p. 153) stated, with innovation in Big Data and advanced analytics, an organization can be more data-driven and can fully optimize recruitment tactics by implementing analytics and benchmarks into its job performance dashboard.

When you post your job opening on a job board, your ultimate goal is to have a talented candidate apply for that job. Traditionally, the job board will provide you with three sets of metrics:

1. Number of candidates who viewed your job opening
2. Number of candidates who applied
3. The conversion rate of your job opening (the ratio between the number of views and the number of applications)

Analytics can help to figure out what job attributes would drive better performance among target job seekers. Powered by predictive analytics, Big Data analytics helps anticipate the performance of postings. You can also leverage analytics to anticipate job performance by location, occupation, duration on site, job title, and job level. Advanced analytics can help anticipate occupation levels, titles, and duration on site, giving you insights into how to best reach your target seekers — for instance, STEM job postings, which are difficult positions to fill. (Isson & Harriott, 2016, p. 155)

Advanced analytics helps business leaders better understand their target job applicants, such as when they are most actively applying, their motivations for looking for new opportunities, and what sources they use when they do so. This provides actionable insights that allow you to optimize sourcing strategies and tactics.

### **5.3.5 The perfect candidate**

Some advice picked up from literature during this thesis journey from Dagdeviren (2018, pp. 38–42): “Don’t look for a perfect candidate when hiring. There is none. If you think you have found a perfect fit, that is only because your mind is playing tricks on you. It is exaggerating the good while overseeing the bad to prove to you that your decision is a good one. To reach the best hiring decision, it is better to look at fewer but more important qualities rather than trying to measure each and every quality of the person. Remember, people are very complex, and it is easy to get lost in that complexity and focus on the wrong things while making the decision to hire or not.”

### **5.3.6 Trust is everything**

Sackett (2018, p. 10) also gives some good advice to conclude this section with: “Remembering that recruitment marketing and employment branding are all the rage in talent acquisition, but when boiled down, it all comes back to this transparency of message and getting candidates to trust your brand, your team, and the notion that their career will be better by working for your organization.”

## **5.4 Future research and ideas**

The data from the survey can be used for different kinds of research. When combining the demographic data with the questions regarding benefits, some significant differences were found between groups when studying the demographic data. The differences did not necessarily give answers; instead, they often initiated new questions. For instance, why did the respondents willing to relocate for a job seem to be more interested in helping the disabled and elderly?

Surveys or interviews researching why the respondents answered as they did could give a lot of interesting information but would require more research that could not be done within the scope of this research due to time and resource limitations.

Other studies that could give interesting insights would be to do a survey among organizations, maybe focusing on the IT industry, and how they now meet and possibly in the future could meet the wishes of the potential applicants regarding job posting content and benefits. Is there a mismatch between candidates and the current EVPs at the organizations? At least regarding the information on salary, there seem to be things that can be improved.

Keeping EVP improvement workshops at the organizations and recording data from these could also give insights into things that can be improved in the processes at the organizations.

An interesting aspect of the results is that the benefits that were not to be found in the job postings analyzed, but thrown into the survey because of the author's curiosity, triggered a high mean score when measuring attractiveness. This could definitely be an interesting perspective to study more, about how a job posting that can promise a role with a positive impact on society and planet Earth could attract talent to an organization. Adding elements to the survey that draws possibly unexpected attention also triggers the question if there are other elements that could give other interesting results from a survey about job postings.

There might also be tools, recommendations, and workshop models among organizations that were not represented in this study, possibly even invented by the organizations themselves out of need. Research on methods to improve EVPs could be another interesting study.

And as mentioned regarding Big Data and advanced analytics, researching data from platforms where job postings and related ads are displayed to potential applicants could be interesting research. This would of course require access to such data.

## 5.5 Conclusion

There are some results from the study that clearly shows what employers can improve:

- Provide information about the salary range
- Be open about remote work and flexible working hours

As the survey results showed that information on salary range was a big issue and that the most interesting benefits were remote work and flexible working hours, the author recommends organizations to at least evaluate the option to give information about this in the job posting and why not the related ad also. These are low-cost improvements to the EVP.

The possibility for the employee to have an impact on which technology and projects to work on depends on the job role and if there is room for improvement in flexibility at the organization. It can be a low-cost improvement but also impossible to achieve.

Extended health care and dental care are cost-related benefits, but from the results, it is possible to find these to be compelling compensations that can make an organization's job posting stand out among other job postings.

Continuing with topics that can have a "positive impact", if they are to be found, why not include them? This could be a product or service improving life for people or the current challenges with climate change. Some advice could be to at least think about it.

And last but not least, use the tools, recommendations, and workshop models available to improve the EVP. It is not possible to put forward "one benefit" as something that all organizations should put forward, but using methods to improve the EVP can make all the difference when searching for the best talent.



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## 7 Appendices

### Appendix 1. Questionnaire

#### Job postings - Why would I apply?

Your help is needed! Internet and especially social media are flooded with job postings to employees in the ITC field. In the hunt for talent, the ads offer everything from bonuses and remote working to bikes for private use, free dental care, yoga and coaching from experts. But what is really important for workers in the ITC field and how can the job postings reflect this?

The goal of this survey is to find out what is relevant in job postings in the ITC field, to give the companies an insight into what really matters when trying to find applicants and how they can improve communication. Your input is very important to reach this goal and, as a result, make the job postings better.

The responses are collected anonymously and no data regarding identity is demanded or stored. The survey is very short and takes approx 2-4 minutes to fill out. The results are presented in a master thesis at Novia University of Applied Sciences when the analysis is ready. Questions can be directed to [danain@edu.novia.fi](mailto:danain@edu.novia.fi).

Thank you for participating and helping out!

 [daniel.ainasoja@gmail.com](mailto:daniel.ainasoja@gmail.com) (not shared) [Switch account](#)



This is a one-page survey with two parts. The first part is to rate the benefits.

What else than SALARY can make you interested in applying for a job?

	No	Maybe	Probably	Oh yes
Bonus system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provision pay (shared risk with company)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ownership option	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Retirement fund	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tax-deductible housing compensation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would these free HEALTH(Y) benefits make you more interested in applying for a job?

	No	Maybe	Probably	Oh yes
Extended occupational health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dental care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exercise vouchers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Massage, yoga or similar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snacks and refreshments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Breakfast	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lunch	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would these free LEISURE TIME benefits make you more more interested in applying for a job?

	No	Maybe	Probably	Oh yes
Cars for private use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bikes for private use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cottage at skiresort	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excursion trips	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excercise and culture vouchers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Life insurance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travel insurance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sauna	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sponsored work-related side project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Literature and magazines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What offerings regarding your JOB ROLE and LOCATION would make you more interested in applying for a job?

	Nope	Maybe	Probably	Oh yes
Possibility to work remotely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexible working hours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coaching from experts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career path advice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Can impact which project to work on	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Can impact which tech to work with	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Several office locations to choose from	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If the job can have a POSITIVE IMPACT on any of the following issues, would it affect your interest to apply?

	No	Maybe	Probably	Oh yes
Climate change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sustainability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Equality for all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping the disabled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping the elderly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

That was part one, well done! In the second part, we need some demographic data



to be able to draw conclusions from the result.

Age range

- Under 30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 60+

Years of experience

- Under 3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- Over 20 years

Life situation

- Living alone
- Living with my partner/husband/wife
- Living with my partner/husband/wife and kid/kids
- Living with kid/kids only
- Rather not say
- Other:

Would you be ready to relocate for an interesting job?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Current salary level

- Under 35 000 €
- 35 001 - 50 000 €
- 50 001 - 75 000 €
- 75 001 - 100 000 €
- 101 000 € - 150 000 €
- 150 001 € or more
- Can't/Don't want to answer

Where do you live

 ▼

Mother tongue

- Swedish
- Finnish
- English
- Other:

Last but not least, do you have ideas or advice for employers on how to improve job postings?

Your answer