



EMPLOYER BRANDING: EXPLORING ITS ROLE AND BENEFITS IN RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

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Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tutkia työnantajabrändäystä konseptina ja miten se vaikuttaa rekrytointiin yrityksissä. Aihe on erittäin ajankohtainen, sillä kiinnostus työnantajabrändäystä kohtaan on nousussa varsinkin nykyään, kun kilpailu parhaista työntekijöistä on kovaa ja työvoimapula on jälleen kasvussa. Toimeksiantaja opinnäytetyölle on HAMK Gaming Academy.

Ensimmäinen osuus opinnäytetyötä tutkii olemassa olevaa tietokirjallisuutta ja siten muodostaa kokonaiskuvan aiheesta ennen tutkimusosiota. Opinnäytetyössä tutkitaan asioita kuten työnantajabrändin arvolupausta, henkilöstöhallinnon yhteyttä aiheeseen sekä keskeisiä elementtejä työnantajabrändissä. Kirjallisuuskatsauksessa tutkitaan myös työnantajabrändin mahdollistamia sisäisiä- sekä ulkoisia hyötyjä henkilöstöhallintoon liittyen.

Tutkimusvaiheessa syvennytään työnantajabrändiin sekä sen mahdollisuuksiin. Tutkimus on suoritettu hyödyntämällä kvalitatiivisia tutkimustapoja. Tutkimusta varten suoritettiin neljä haastattelua eri ammattilaisten kanssa. Jokainen haastateltava työskentelee joko hallinnollisissa ja/tai markkinointiin ja brändäykseen liittyvissä tehtävissä. Haastatteluiden tavoitteena oli kerätä kattavampaa tietoa työnantajabrändäyksestä ja sen yhteydestä rekrytointiin. Lopuksi haastatteluiden tuloksia verrattiin olemassa olevaan tietokirjallisuuteen, jonka jälkeen muodostettiin yhteenveto ja suositukset kehittämistä varten.

Opinnäytetyö löysi selviä yhteyksiä työnantajabrändin ja rekrytoinnin onnistumisen välillä. Suurimpana hyötynä mainittiin työhakemusten suurempi määrä sekä parempi laatu. Työnhakijat olivat myös paremmin soveltuvia avoimeen työtehtävään. Sisäisinä hyötyinä tutkimuksessa löydettiin parempi työntekijöiden pysyvyys sekä sitoutuminen. Kaikki haastateltavat olivat myös samaa mieltä siitä, että työnantajabrändi on jatkuvasti kehittyvä ja se vaatii paljon työstämistä, jotta maksimaalinen hyöty tavoitetaan.

Avainsanat Työnantajabrändi, brändäys, arvolupaus, henkilöstöhallinto.

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Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis was to study the concept of employer branding and how it effects the recruitment in an organization. Employer branding has been a topic of constant interest, especially in the modern society where the competition for the best talent is difficult. The commissioning company for this thesis is HAMK Gaming Academy.

The first part of the thesis reviews existing materials found from different sources to form a thorough understanding of the topic. Employer branding and concepts such as employer value proposition, brand image and brand identity were studied and analyzed. Based on available literature of employer branding, the internal and external benefits related to human resource management were studied and analyzed before reviewing the key elements of employer branding.

Empirical part of this thesis was conducted using qualitative data collection methods through a series of interviews. All the interviewees were professionals working with management or branding tasks. The goal for the interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of employer branding and how important it is regarding the recruitment process in an organization. The interview findings were then analyzed by comparing them to the information reviewed in the theoretical part of this thesis.

The literature review and empirical study results of this thesis found clear connections between employer branding and the success of recruitment campaigns. The quantity and quality of received applications was one of the most discussed benefits among the interviewees. Followed by increased employee retention and the efficiency of the recruitment process. All of the interviewees acknowledged the importance of constant development of employer branding and how it can affect the future of the organization.

Keywords Employer branding, employer value proposition, human resource management, brand identity

Pages 41 pages and appendices 2 pages

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1 Introduction

Branding is nothing new when it comes to business operations, but as society has become more digitalized, companies are able to reach more people faster and more efficiently than before. The digitalization of society has also opened a lot of new opportunities that have not been possible before such as accurate statistics and tools to utilize the newly gained data to one's advantage whether it's a company or a singular person. Before, the reputation of a company was earned through word of mouth, now it is done through social media, news outlets and through past or current employees. Companies can now use the tools provided by digitalization to build their brand image which they portray to the outside world in the hopes of attracting the most applicants and more importantly, the best talent.

As it has become harder to build a career around just one company and it is increasingly difficult to stay up to date with everything going on in the ever-changing world, applicants are forced to seek possibilities from other companies. Therefore, a lot of experienced workers and talents are seeking employment, and they have a freedom of choice between companies. This is where employer branding is introduced. Employer branding is all about attracting employees from the free market or sometimes even from other companies. The competition between companies is fierce and everyone wants the best possible employees available for themselves. Employer brands can serve as the differentiation between two companies and the employee then decides which one supports their needs and values better. The commissioning company for this thesis is HAMK Gaming Academy.

1.1 Research Question

The working culture of the modern society is constantly changing, and the general ruleset of employment is vastly different than before, the adaptation skills of employers and employees has become more relevant than ever before. The competition for the best talents on the market is tough and therefore companies have resorted to improving their image and perception to applicants and job seekers. The author decided to further research how employer branding affects the recruitment in a company. Therefore, the research question for this thesis is "How does employer branding affect recruitment in a company?" The research question is studied through the common theories related to the topic and after that qualitative research methods will be applied through interviews. The information gained from the theoretical part and interviews will be then used to form a comparison between the findings.

The findings are then used to write a conclusion and finally give suggestions to the commissioning company.

1.2 Background

With the invention of different social media platforms and smart devices becoming the new normal in society, the possibilities for self-expression have never been better. Everyone, whether it's a person or a company can bring out the best out of themselves for the public to see with only a few swipes and clicks. This has led to a situation where the typical ruleset of employment and job seeking has changed, directly affecting the business operations of every company. Creating a strong brand for a company has become more important than ever before. A successful brand runs deep in the core of every business as it touches every part of the company. Marketing strategies rely heavily on the brand image the company has built for itself, partnerships are more beneficial, and the company even attracts more high-profile job applicants as the brand is recognized among a wider spectrum of people. Successful branding can often also reach international recognition, and this can lead to foreign job seekers offering their skillsets and knowledge to the company. With foreign employees, the company can also get a better perspective of the international markets if they ever want to expand their operations abroad. These benefits are obviously very useful for every company around if they plan to grow and maintain a healthy future for the company. However, companies are not the only ones putting in a lot of effort into building a brand. Job applicants have also caught on with the current trend. Applicants are creating personal brands that supports their expertise and skillsets. These personal brands are meant to provide a leverage for the applicant and to differentiate themselves from the competition, therefore providing a better chance of being hired to the company.

Students have come to learn the effects of successful employer branding. Summers are often spent working to earn money for the upcoming semester and to gain valuable experience, but finding success in the application process can become very difficult. The most popular employers among students have very strong employer brands which in return attract student applicants from all over Finland and even internationally. This has created a situation where the competition is so tough that it is hard for new applicants to even get a job at the given company. Another benefit for those who manage to get hired by a bigger company is the experience they gain. As most application processes include sending out a resume, the past employers name or brand in this case, has a huge impact on how future employers perceive the applicant. Meaning that if the applicant has a history of working in a

bigger and better-known company with a strong employer brand, they are probably more acknowledged in the application process rather than someone who might not have the same experience. The situation only gets worse when employers hire the same student again for the upcoming summers and new applicants won't find any success.

The objective of the thesis is to reach a comprehensive understanding of employer branding and how it is beneficial for human resource operations such as recruitment in a company. The thesis will handle a variety of topics related to employer branding such as popularity among applicants, effects of branding in the HR operations of the company and how has the successful brand been built.

1.3 Motivation for research

The author has had a constant interest in marketing and entrepreneurship and as the topic is modern and high in demand, the topic seemed like the right course of action. The author has also participated in personal brand creation through hobbies and general interest. The topic can also provide some valuable knowledge for the upcoming recruitment attempts to start building the career of the author. The current global situation among labor shortages and worsening economic situation created more interest towards this topic. The author also considers this topic as important to research as the number of theses is limited and the amount that linked employer branding with recruitment was even smaller.

2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter analyzes the most relevant theories and information related to the research question of this thesis. Starting with the very basic definitions used in the research and then followed by more advanced definitions created by authors who have researched the topic before and then comparing them to each other to see what the differences between them are. This information is then used to create an overall picture of what the definitions mean. Followed by the definitions, the research will look closer into the related theories and apply them to the research. Finally, the thesis will present some benefits, advantages and/or disadvantages related to employer branding.

2.1 European situation in HR

Before discussing employer branding as a concept, it is relevant to understand what the overall situation is like regarding Human Resource Management (HRM) on a more global scale. This chapter provides some basis for the current situation and discusses why employer branding is a topic of interest for many currently.

Europe is experiencing labor shortages on a large scale and the problem persists on multiple levels. Occupations that require a high level of skills and knowledge are having problems finding suitable employees to fill open positions. The same struggle applies to occupations that require a lower skill level. These issues are mostly caused by the huge number of employees who retire and the sudden creation of new occupations. The most affected sectors included occupations related to healthcare, information and technology (ICT) and construction. The shortage of workforce is also present in occupations related to mathematics, engineering, and science which struggle to find employees specialized enough for the positions. A contributing factor for the worsening situation among healthcare professionals is often related to difficulties in the Human Resource departments, such as struggles in finding new employees. A part of the reason is also related to most of the sectors experiencing labor shortages not being gender balanced. This means that the occupations are often dominated by either men or women. It is estimated that approximately 86% of occupations with labor shortages are gender dominated. The situation is set to only get worse as the working age population is only expected to decline until the year 2030. (European Commission, 2023) The chart below shows the unemployment rates in the Euro Area (countries that use euro as their currency) and the whole European Union.

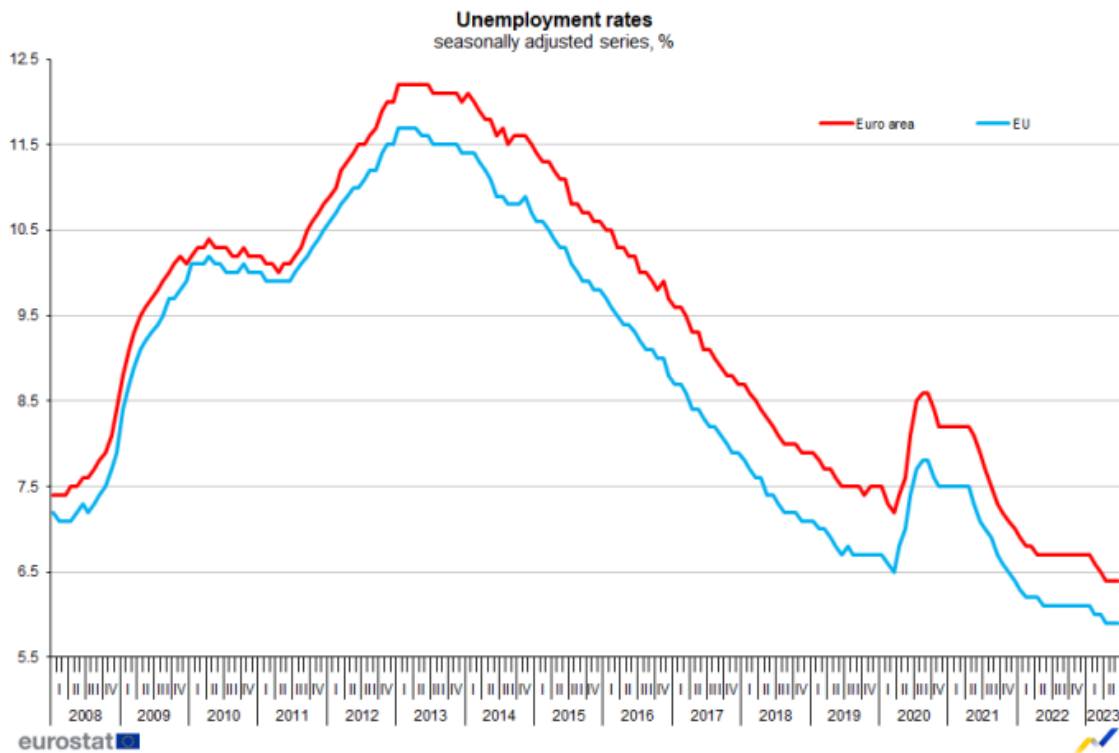


Figure 1 Unemployment rates in the European Union. (European Commission, 2023)

The labor shortages have provided better grounds for companies to build their employer brands and find ways to attract new employees into their organization.

2.2 Definition of branding

The American Marketing Association defines branding as a way to distinguish one's products or services from similar ones in the market. This could be done through multiple different aspects such as logos, designs or even terms. (AMA, 2013) The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has a set of standards, according to which a brand is an intangible asset that has a purpose of creating certain associations and images among the customers and other stakeholders. Brand is an experience and perception of high-quality products or services. These in return create benefits and value to the brand by introducing price premiums, increasing customer loyalty and lowered production costs. Ever since branding as concept was developed, branding has been a fundamental aspect in every step of the process while developing new products or services but also in improving the key operations of the company. (International Organization for Standardization, 2020)

Every time a customer interacts with a company, whether its through purchases or services, it creates an association to that one specific brand or business. This is called brand image. It is formed by all of the different interactions gathered by the customer which creates a larger association to for example, quality of products. Brand image could be explained shortly as the overall impression. It is the essence of the company. Even little factors such as customer service or business cards play a huge role in creating that impression. A properly created brand image creates benefits such as credibility and loyalty. When the customer gains more and more positive associations, the better they will recognize the brand. (Thimothy, 2017)

Brand identity is the summary of how the brand is identifiable. Factors such as vision, presentation and culture are a part of how consistent the brand identity is. Brand identity is built with different elements regarding the visuality of the brand, these elements include logos, designs, products and the overall actions of the brand. Branding strategies are often used to convey the identity of the brand to the public. All of the elements mentioned earlier play a part in what kind of associations the customer creates which then create the overall brand image, that is why it is important for the brand to consider every aspect of their identity very closely. (Mindrut et al., 2015)

2.3 What is employer branding?

Nowadays it is normal for employers to highlight benefits (whether psychological or financial) in their recruiting advertisements. Often, it seems like companies are competing to see who has the most benefits offered and who has the best working environment out of the competition. This is employer branding, and it is meant to attract the possible applicant to said company rather than to seek possibilities from elsewhere. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argued that a brand is among one of the most valuable and precious assets any company can have in their portfolio. This has led into a situation where brand management has become one of the key activities of every business. Even though most branding efforts are pointed towards, for example product development, branding is also a viable tool to be used in the field of human resource management. Applying the principles of branding in human resource management is called employer branding. (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004)

The definition of employer branding has been changing over the years but one of the first recorded relevant definitions were presented by Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow in 1996 in a book called *Journal of Brand Management*. They defined employer brand as a bundle of benefits encompassing functional, emotional and monetary perks provided by the employer. Ambler and Barrow (1996) first found the link between employees in the company and the

products/services they offer. This is depicted in a simple cycle of effects where a good thing usually introduces another good thing. (Figure 1)

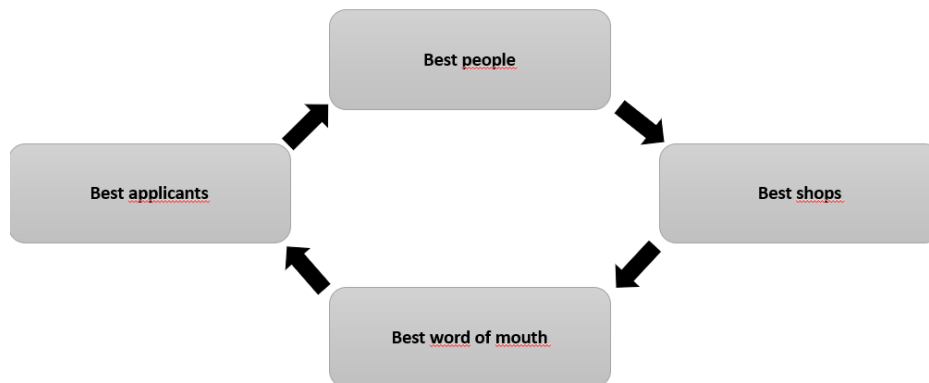


Figure 2 Cycle of actions (Ambler and Barrow, 1996)

It was Ambler and Barrow (1996) who first presented that employer branding is related to three concepts of corporate culture and identity, internal marketing, and corporate reputation. (Ambler & Barrow, 1996)

Another definition was brought up by Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo in 2004. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), defined employer branding as creating an identifiable employer identity that is used to distinguish an organization from the other competition (p. 502).

Using these two definitions the consensus of employer branding is related to creating a unique and distinguishable identity which can include psychological, economical, or functional benefits for the employees. This identity is then used to compete against other companies on the market.

Backhaus (2016) in a study called revisiting employer branding mentioned that the early interest towards employer branding existed mostly among the human resource professionals with a variety of articles discussing how marketing principles would be possible to apply effectively to human resource management. After the research done by Backhaus and Tikoo in 2004, the popularity of employer branding as a research topic has increased substantially. Google Scholar has now more than 24,000 articles related to employer branding. The amount of regular Google search results also has exploded in the last two decades. In 2004, Google provided just 3000 results, but today the same search yields 3 million results. This only goes to show that employer branding is a topic of interest for many professionals. (Backhaus, 2016)

2.4 Employer value proposition (EVP)

Value proposition is a concept used to measure value or benefits brought to the customer by purchasing or having a certain product or service over the competition (return of investment) (Camlek, 2011)

Employer value proposition is used to convey the value or benefits provided to the employee by the chosen employer. Employer value proposition is also a part of the framework for the branding operations at a company. (SHRM, 2021)

For an employer to be attractive for a possible future employee, the employer must have a value proposition that is compelling for the employee. This way the organization can convey the offerings and benefits in return for the skills and capabilities of the employee. (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005) Employer value proposition (EVP) is thought by Ulrich & Brockbank (2005) to have seven different elements attached to it. These elements include the following “vision, opportunity, incentive, impact, community, communication and experimentation”. The employer value proposition is then used for external marketing, helping the company become the chosen employer by employee in its own field, attracting better talent into the company. (p. 83) Bryan Adams (2022) argues that employer value proposition is the give and get of the relationship between the employer and employee. EVP is generally used to constitute the goals and expectations related to performance and/or behavior of the organization and then in return rewarding the employees for meeting the set expectations. These rewards often include one or more of the following: monetary compensation, opportunities for career development, better work-life balance, a better sense of belonging or anything else the employees see as a gain. (Adams, 2022)

As previously mentioned, Ambler and Barrow argued that the value propositions of employer brands mainly included benefits which are either psychological, functional or economical. This theory was taken further in research done by Amir Dabirian, Jan Kietzmann and Hoda Diba. The research used data found from crowdsourced employer branding sites to figure out what employees had said about their employer whether it is a good place to work or not. The study showed that employees had mostly considered 7 different employer branding value propositions. (Amir Dabirian et al., 2017) The elements will be depicted in figure 2 on page 9 to support this research as the author deemed the information relevant to the topic.








SEVEN EMPLOYER BRANDING VALUE PROPOSITIONS						
SOCIAL VALUE	INTEREST VALUE	APPLICATION VALUE	DEVELOPMENT VALUE	ECONOMIC VALUE	MANAGEMENT VALUE	WORK/LIFE BALANCE
						
Is this a fun place to work with talented people and a great organizational culture?	Is this an interesting place to work, with challenging but achievable goals?	Is the work meaningful and does it invite the application of knowledge and skills?	Are there opportunities for employees to grow and advance professionally?	Is work rewarded appropriately through salaries, benefits and perks?	Are managers good, honest leaders who inspire, trust, protect, enable and respect employees?	Are work arrangements flexible enough to achieve success on and off the job?

Figure 3 Elements of employer branding (Amir Dabirian et al., 2017)

Employees of the organization will no doubt have differences on what values they support and which ones they see more beneficial for themselves. The list of values employees hold can also be much longer in reality, but the core idea in employer branding is to have the possibility to create an outline of the common employment experience. Once the organization has identified their offerings to employees it will be shared with the work force. (Edwards, 2010)

2.5 Reasons for developing an employer brand

Companies don't start branding themselves for nothing; current global trends are one of the main reasons to why companies are seeking to build a brand around them. The environment companies must operate in, is constantly changing and evolving around them. These changes are almost always unpredictable, so the company is forced to adapt into the new situation. Employers who manage to adapt into the new surroundings, often find the possibility to gain a competitive advantage against their competitors. (Figurska & Matuska, 2013)

Another key reason for employer branding is assuring competitiveness in the long term. Employers are always seeking for the best employees on the market, and this is why talent management has gained significant importance. (Figurska & Matuska, 2013) Employers have also become increasingly aware that the strategy of taking their employees loyalty for

granted does not work anymore. The consensus has always heavily relied on creating a work environment that employees find satisfactory and after this people are willing to do the heavy lifting for the employer without too much demanding. Now, the situation is vastly different. The leading companies of today have become aware of the situation at hand; employees are no longer tied to one company. Their employees are free to seek opportunities from elsewhere, they have more possibilities to engage and join with companies that they find more in-line with their values and demands. Making sure that the best talent stays in the company and new talent finds the company attractive has forced companies to adapt into a more benefit-led type of leading instead of offering the bare minimum for their employees. (Mosley, n.d)

Companies have also realized the need to be transparent in their operations. With the new possibilities related to social medias and other online channels, sharing one's opinion has become easier than ever before and company related posts whether its negative or positive, can spread quickly. This information then, can be found by former or current employees and then they are able to verify the information. (Figurska & Matuska, 2013)

2.5.1 Benefits of developing an employer branding

A number of studies in the past years have been conducted about the benefits of employer branding by gaining the status of being the employer of choice. A literature review of the available studies found many benefits which could be divided into internal and external benefits. The found benefits included the following: Structuring and maintaining a favorable image among the customer base, decrease in turnover rates among employees, a stronger financial performance, a boost in returns for shareholders, higher returns among investments and increased profitability, improved customer satisfaction, creation of a positive brand identity and reputation, reduced costs, improved recruitment rates and engagement from employees, competitive advantage, higher quality and quantity of applicants, attracting and acquiring the right employees and overall satisfaction among the employees. (Ghadeer, 2016)

Irena Figurska and Ewa Matuska (2013) found in a study that developing a successful employer brand with well thought-out strategies and implementation the brand can yield several long-term benefits and results for the company. These benefits include elements such as gaining a competitive advantage over the rivalling companies, shareholder value increase, stronger culture and diversity in the workplace, the support for the organization and brand can experience a boost, the employees can provide more engagement to the

organization, and the company receives a better toolkit for handling public relations. (Figurska & Matuska, 2013)

2.5.2 Benefits related to human resource management (HRM)

Recruitment is perhaps one of the most important elements of human resource management (HRM), and the main goal for recruitment is to attract the best possible talent into the company effectively. The talent provided by the employees is the factor that makes the company operate in a productive manner. The efficiency of the recruitment becomes ever more important when the task requires very specialized skillset from the employee. This is where the employer value proposition becomes a necessity as it is used to portray the benefits provided by the employer, and which then attracts the right talent. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) explained the situation as the brand's uniqueness allows the company to acquire distinctive talent. Irena Figurska and Ewa Matuska (2013) divided the main benefits of employer branding related to human resource management into two different categories: internal benefits and external benefits. These two different categories will be presented with figures below to support the theory of this research.

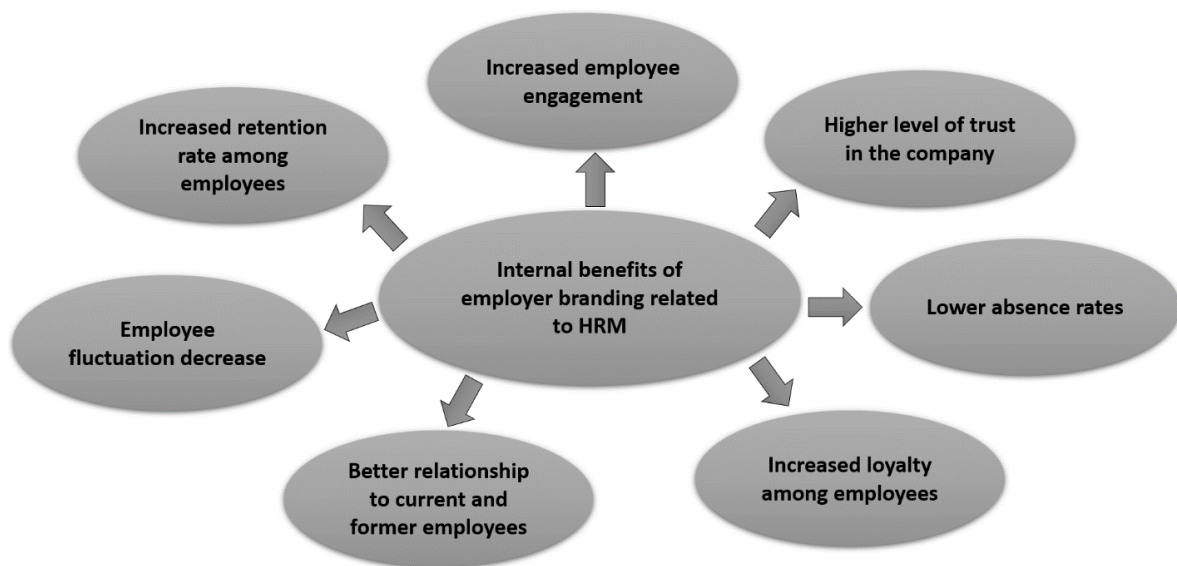


Figure 4 Internal benefits of EB related to HRM (Figurska & Matuska, 2013)

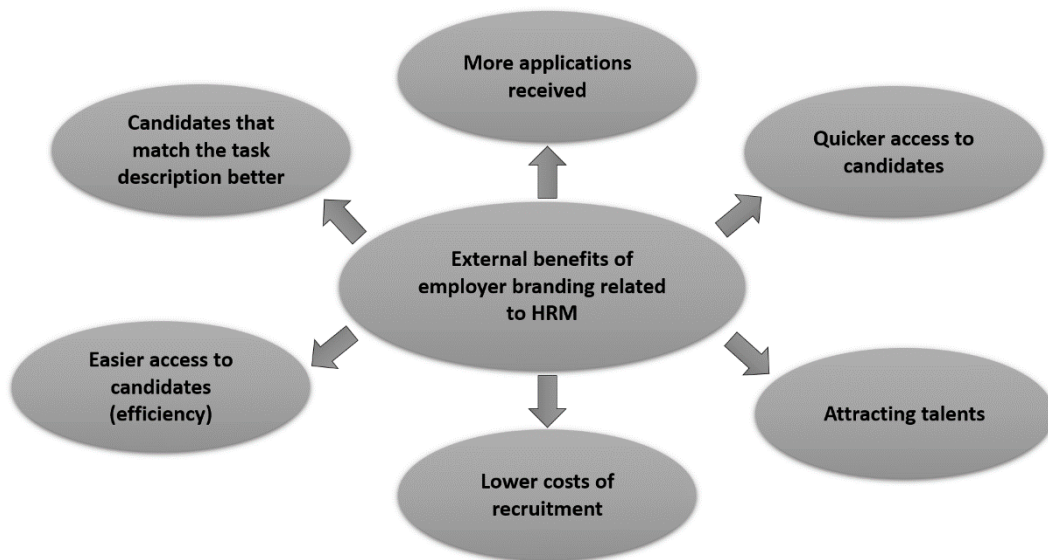


Figure 5 External benefits of EB related to HRM (Figurska & Matuska, 2013)

Based on the chart above it is clear that with a successful and efficient employer branding the company can gain significant goals to important factors related to retaining the best talent and offering a better environment for them to work. The benefits as seen are highly psychological but ever more critical to gaining the benefits for the organization.

The figure above shows well the direct benefits of employer branding related to human resource management such as recruitment and efficient operations. This figure portrays well the benefits related to the core question of the research.

2.6 How to create an employer brand

According to K. Backhaus and S. Tikoo (2004), employer branding is generally a process divided into three different steps.

Firstly, the company must assess their value proposition which is the framework for the employer brand. The overall value offered by the company is defined through information such as qualities of employees, culture inside of the organization, impressions and experiences of the product or service offered by the organization, benefits and values of the organization. Once the value proposition has been created, the employer subsequently starts the process of external marketing, advertising the value proposition to the targeted employee segments, human resource departments and third-party recruitment companies. The final step of the process is internal marketing among the organization. The goal of this step is to

develop the human resources of the company who will then in return start adhering to the set of values chosen by the company and then start pursuing the overall objectives set by the company itself. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004)

2.7 Elements of employer branding

As seen in Figure 2 an employer brand according to the study conducted by Amir Dabirian, Jan Kietzmann and Hoda Diba (2017) concludes of seven different elements. The different elements, whether they are psychologically, economically, or functionally useful to the employee, are important in building an employer brand as the elements together form the brand image which is then interpreted by the employee.

First is the social value provided by the employer. This is how the employee sees the working atmosphere in the workplace, whether the company is a fun place to work in and what is the organizational culture like. Employees regard enjoyment highly in the workplace as enjoyment is an emotional asset when working. This atmosphere is partly created by the co-workers and whether they share the same values and if they are team oriented. The work should also provide interest value to the employee, meaning that the tasks should be challenging and innovative enough to not become boring while also keeping the goal of the tasks achievable for the employees. Moreover, employees find satisfaction when the tasks provide some application value. The employee wants to feel that the job is meaningful and welcoming to use their skills and knowledge to solve the task at hand. Career development can be seen as a reward for the hard work and dedication, which is why it is important for the employer to acknowledge the contributions by their employees and reward for them accordingly. Another reward sought by the employees is related to compensation. Economic value means that the compensation for working is fair and up to standards with what the employee sees their skills are worth. However, the attention was not only on the salary they gain, but also on the benefits provided by the employer. These benefits might include for example healthcare, job security or other monetary benefits. The sixth element is related to the management of the company. According to the study, employees mostly leave companies, not for the company itself, but if the experience with the management has been bad. The last factor which employees regard highly is the work/life balance. This means that employees wish that the arrangements at work would be flexible enough to support their personal lives at the same time. (Amir Dabirian et al., 2017) The balance between working and personal lives could be done through flexible working which means that the employee gets more control on where and when they work through for example changing the timing for

when they work through starting/ending times or alternate the hours the employee works during the day. Banked hours could also provide extra freedom and control over the hours they work. (Chung & Tanja, 2018)

In another study related to factors that build an employer brand conducted by Amita Prajapati and Naresh K. Patel mentioned 8 different elements including employment, which touches on the working conditions and characteristics if they are pleasant for the employee. Their study found that employment was ranked the highest among the seven other elements. The study also found that the best employers/organizations promote the development of skills and possibilities for training. The third element is related to performance management. Meaning that the organization needs to measure and develop their workforce constantly and then align them better with the current strategic goals set by the organization. According to Love and Singh (2011) the performance management of a company plays a huge role in finding human resource related success. (Prajapati & Patel, 2017)

The favored elements or traits of employer branding have significant disparities when comparing between different nationalities. (Figurska & Matuska, 2013) Randstad conducted a large global survey on employer branding to find out which elements were deemed to be the most important among employees. The survey was conducted within 18 countries and 150 employers. The survey gained a total of 142,169 answers. The respondents were given the question of “what are the top 5 most important factors to you when choosing to work for a specific company?” (Figurska & Matuska, 2013)

The global results of this survey can be seen in figure 6 on page 15.



Figure 6 Employer branding study (Randstad 2013, p. 13)

The chart provides a useful insight to what elements of employer branding the employees favor the most. As seen in the chart, employees favor having a competitive salary and benefits on top of job security. The following notable factors includes having a good atmosphere at work, work/life balance, career progression possibilities, financial health and interest towards the tasks the employee is assigned.

2.7.1 Work/life balance

The term work/life balance was first introduced in 1986 even though the first recorded efforts to find a balance between work and life was already in the 1930s. The concept was properly utilized among the public in 1980s when women with children needed support to find time for their families. The concept of work/life balance has been defined as a state when demands set for an individual at work and at personal life are equal. The overall meaning of work/life balance is hard to define, as it means different things to different groups of people. (Lockwood, 2003)

The work/life balance offered to employees has a great impact on the overall attitude the employees have towards their organization. The significance of work/life balance becomes clearer in occupations which require a higher skillset such as technical jobs but also in the management sector of the company as these are the employees that are critical and their

loyalty towards the company is a challenge. (Rani et al., 2010) However, the commitment from the employer to provide a work/life balance is affected by whether it provides a return for their investment (ROI). It has not been until recently that employers have realized the potential for providing a balance between work and life and how the quality of an employee's life affects the quality of their work. (Lockwood, 2003)

Employers must learn how to communicate their efforts to provide a balance between work and life to their employees. Only having a large variety of benefits does not yield the before mentioned return on investment if the communication is bad. Before initiating a program related to work/life balance, human resource management teams must consider whether the organization and especially its management sectors are ready to support work/life related benefits. It is also important for the management to fully understand how the initiative will impact their employees on wider scale and if the employees understand the programs and initiatives properly to fully utilize them to their needs. (Lockwood, 2003)

Supporting the balance between work and life for the employee has several studied benefits to the organization which directly affect the productivity and efficiency of a company. The first benefit is directly related to time savings. A study showed that approximately 17 hours of working time was saved on a yearly basis if the employees used some sort of consulting services related to everyday tasks such as parenting or education. The same study found that approximately 80% of this time would have gone towards employees working on their problems outside of work. Second benefit is related to the retention of the employees. The turnover of employees is a real problem for several companies and the related loss caused by when they decide to leave the company. Finding new talent and going through the recruitment process uses a lot of resources. Offering an opportunity to balance life and work helps retain the employees in the company. This also increases the productivity and motivation of employees in the organization. A study conducted by Benjamin Gottlieb, Kevin Kelloway and Elizabeth Barham showed that approximately 50% of women would reject a promotion if that meant that they have less time for personal lives. This number was approximately 45% for men. A successful implementation of work/life balance practices would also lower the absenteeism in an organization. Employees would require less sick leave and the overall costs of employer offered health care services would also decrease. (Lockwood, 2003)

2.7.2 Financial compensation and benefits

Another important factor which employees are looking for is financial compensation and what benefits the job offers. Usually, employees have a certain expectation related to salary or other benefits and these expectations are important to employee engagement. A study conducted by Mark Bussin and Hugo Mouton found that a better employer brand and how it is perceived by the employees has a correlation with the compensation expectations among the company. If the employer brand was better, the employees were more likely to work with a smaller salary and vice versa. (Bussin & Mouton, 2019)

2.7.3 Work environment

The working environment offered to employees has become an important element among employer branding. As seen in Figure 5, 54% of respondents chose working environment and atmosphere to be in their top 5 aspects when choosing an employer to work for. Studies have shown that the work environment has an impact on the attitudes of employees and that the work environment is one of the key drivers when employees are accepting a job. (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016)

2.7.4 Organizational culture

The culture of an organization is considered to be the driving force behind the operations as it includes all of the common rules, attitudes, customs and values. It also includes the expectations and experiences of the organization. These factors are then presented to the outside world through the organizations self-image and interactions. The organizational culture has a direct impact on the productivity of the organization. It also provides some common guidelines for the company such as quality of products, job safety and customer care. Researchers use organizational culture to define the values, beliefs, and experiences of a certain company. The culture inside of an organization is one of the main factors which are used to shape the overall image of the company which directly reflects to employer branding. Organizational culture can provide several useful benefits related to human resource management. These benefits include easier recruitment of higher-level employees with better skill sets, efficient recruitment, better and more cost-effective employee retention, creativity among employees and a better atmosphere to work in. (Szymańska & Zarządzania, 2014)

2.8 Case example: Google

Google has probably one of the most renowned employer brands there are and therefore it is a target company for many talents. The brand and the reputation of it are known everywhere internationally, but also the offered working environments for the employees and the reputation of their human resource department as the recruitment process at Google is nothing typical compared to other companies. Before, the more advanced recruitment methods required analyzing complex images or advertisements, but Google has resorted to heavily structured interviews and hypothetical case scenarios which are used to find the most suitable candidates with specific abilities sought by Google. These 4 abilities set by Google vary from knowledge to personality. (Nguyen Hoang Tien, 2022)

The first ability or trait Google uses to find the best candidates is thinking. Google wants to learn what their possible future employees think when faced with a problem. The ultimate goal is to find people with the skills to adapt into new situations and solve problems faced in everyday operations. The second ability is related to overall skills and knowledge. Google wants to know what skills and knowledge the applicant has but also if the applicant has the necessary passion and strength to tackle complex tasks. The third ability is more about the social aspects of the applicant. During the interview, the applicants are often working in a team, this is because Google wants to see if their applicants have the required skills to work with other people. The goal for the applicant is to solve problems through teamwork and connecting with other applicants rather than just tackling the problem alone. The last aspect sought by Google is the “googleyness” of a person. This means investigating the more humane aspects of the applicants such as their adaptation skills, their attitude and humbleness. (Nguyen Hoang Tien, 2022)

3 Methodology

The methodology chapter of this thesis introduces the research type and design of the research to the reader. Short introductions to different research methods will also be provided before discussing the actual data collection. A figure will present the framework for the research to provide the reader with an easier way to understand how the research builds up into the final conclusions. The final part of this chapter will handle and discuss the reliability of the answers and whether they are ethically correct.

3.1 Research method

The two most common research methods are quantitative and qualitative. These two methods, however, differ vastly from each other. Quantitative research examines the circumstances with numerical values which then form a picture of the possible outcome and assumes that the currently studied phenomenon overall could be measured. (Watson, 2015)

Qualitative method does not offer numerical values but is used to research the topic through images, videos, interviews, books etc. Quantitative research often requires a larger data base, in this case respondents, to be portray the situation accurately whereas qualitative research can use fewer sources of data, but they may require more analysis to reach more in-depth results. A quantitative method is suitable for finding patterns or for ranking phenomena into a certain order, but a qualitative method can provide more relevant information to topics related to for example social sciences.

Taken into account the surroundings of this research and what research method would provide more relevant data related to the topic, the qualitative research method is chosen. Qualitative research could offer a more in-depth information to support the research question. As employer branding and its effects on recruitment in a company is hard to analyze through sheer numerical data and patterns, the qualitative research method could provide more applicable and humane data for the research.

3.2 Research strategy

The strategy for the research was divided into four different steps. The author created a chart which illustrates the process of the research from the design phase to the final conclusion.

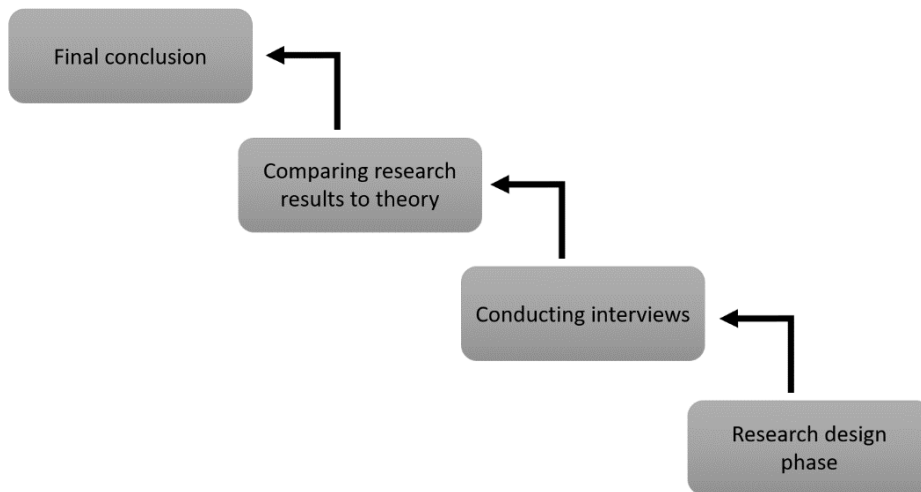


Figure 7 The phases of the research

The design phase is meant for planning and creating the framework for the research where the author creates the basis for the interviews and/or questionnaire. This plan will then be followed throughout the researching process to ensure the data collected is valid. The next step in the process is conducting the actual interviews with different companies or professionals from said companies. The research method as previously stated is qualitative. The research aims to at least include 3 different interviews in the process, but the amount may change. The third step of the process analyses the data gained from the interviews and then compares it to the theoretical part of the research. The final step is to provide final conclusions and use the gained information to provide suggestions for the commissioning company.

3.3 Data collection

This chapter of the research is meant to discuss how the author collected the data for the research and what are the different types of data collection.

Types of data

The two most common types of data are primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected by the researcher themselves. Primary data can be collected through for example interviews, surveys or experiments. Secondary data is collected or generated by other parties such as different institutions. Data used from reports, articles or books for example are considered as secondary data. (Wagh, 2022)

This research uses both types of data. The theoretical framework includes only secondary data, and the research part uses primary data collected through interviews and/or questionnaire.

After the data has been securely collected, whether it will be recordings, notes of interviews or even questionnaire results, it will be stored in a safe location which is not accessible by anyone else but the author themselves. Any data that is deemed sensitive will be deleted once this has been published. The interviewees will remain anonymous throughout the research. The interviewees will also not be described in any way.

3.4 The reliability and validity of the study

The validity of the study can be measured through whether the author managed to measure what they planned and intended to measure during the interviews and/or questionnaire. The conclusion must also correspond to the real world. (Sandstrom, 2018) The reliability of a study is measured through if the experiment could be reproduced with the exact same conditions and the results generated would still be the same. (Hill, 2017)

3.5 Interview policy and design

The interviews were conducted in the span of two weeks and in total of 5 interviewees attended on separate occasions. The interviewees work in different size organizations or companies, and they work in various sectors. The same interview and same questions were presented to all interviewees. As this thesis follows strict guidelines regarding data protection, all interviews were fully confidential and no exact information regarding the interviewee's occupation, name or employer are provided in this thesis. The interviews also did not include any questions that would touch on any type of confidential data regarding the employer of a specific interviewee.

3.6 Introduction of the interviewees

This chapter provides a brief introduction of the five chosen interviewees for this research. As previously mentioned, any data that might make a specific interviewee identifiable, will not be provided in any part of this study.

Interviewee A works with management tasks in a healthcare organization. The interviewee has amassed a great amount of experience in human resource management related tasks and provided valuable information regarding the HR part of this study. The interview was conducted on 11th of October 2023 using Microsoft Teams as the platform. Interviewee B works with design tasks at a teaching facility. The interviewee was chosen because they have gained experience vastly in different tasks related to business and design. The interview was conducted using Microsoft Teams on the 16th of October 2023. Interviewee C works with communications and marketing tasks at a healthcare organization. They were chosen because they provided important information regarding the communications and branding operations in a company. The interview was conducted on 17th of October. The interviewee preferred to answer the questions through email. Interviewee D works in management in an IT company. This interview, however, concluded of two interviewees which attended the same interview. The two interviewees wanted to provide a collective answer instead of two different answers. Hence, both will be referred as “Interviewee D”. Interviewee D was chosen due to their vast knowledge of different business operations such as management, branding, and HR. The last interview was conducted on 23rd of October 2023 using Microsoft Teams.

Referred interviewees	Size of the organization	Interview date
Interviewee A	Large	11.10.2023
Interviewee B	Medium-sized	16.10.2023
Interviewee C	Large	17.10.2023
Interviewee D	Small	23.10.2023

Figure 8 Interviewee introduction

The figure above shows the approximate of the size of the organizations the interviewees work in. The European Commission defines a small company to include less than 50 employees and/or turnover of less than 10 million euros annually. A medium-sized organization, however, consists of less than 250 employees and/or less than 50 million euros annually. (SME Definition, 2020) The approximate of a large organization is not based on any definition by the European Commission, but rather the own opinion from the author based purely on the staff headcount in the organization.

The interview included nine questions touching on different topics such as employer branding as a concept, employer culture and HR operations such as recruitment. Some questions required more in-depth answers while others were easier to answer. The author also asked the interviewees to grade between 1-5 the importance of different aspects related to employer branding as seen in figure 3. (Amir Dabirian et al., 2017) The questions were

categorized in three different categories. The interviews were conducted using two different platforms, Microsoft Teams and email questionnaire. Three out of four interviewees attended using Microsoft Teams and one interviewee rather answered the questions using the email questionnaire. The interviews lasted approximately 30 – 60 minutes each and during that time the interviewees had the opportunity to also provide their own personal opinions outside of the predetermined questions.

4 Results

This chapter of the thesis is used to first review the questions asked and then analyze them accordingly. The questions are analyzed and reviewed according to the order they were asked in. Each question will be analyzed independently.

4.1 Employer branding as a concept

The first category of the three, included questions regarding employer branding as a concept and how the interviewees perceive employer branding. The interviewees were asked to define employer branding and to list the most important parts of it in their own opinion.

4.1.1 Defining employer branding (Question 1)

This question was targeted to only study how the interviewees define employer branding and how they perceive it.

Interviewee A defined employer branding as the image that has been formed of the organization in the minds of people and to different stakeholders such as investors, customers, and talents. The image created could be negative or positive. The interviewee highlighted that the image delivered to the outside world by the current employees regarding for example their work tasks and development of the company play a huge role on forming an employer brand. Related to this topic, the interviewee also mentioned that regarding new employees the employer branding begins from the recruitment process.

Interviewee B defined employer branding as how the employer is being communicated outside of the workplace and how the image of the employer is being communicated to the outside world. In essence, how the reputation of the employer is being used through the word

of mouth. This answer coincides with the theory argued by Ambler and Barrow (1996) in figure 2 where one good thing usually leads to another through the word of mouth.

Interviewee C followed the same patterns as interviewee's A and B. According to interviewee C employer branding is the image of the company that is formed to jobseekers, to the staff of the organization and to different stakeholders.

Interviewee D provided the same answers as all previous interviewees. Interviewee D considers employer branding as the external reputation and image that is portrayed to future employees and to other companies. The interviewee emphasized the meaning of employer culture and its importance related to the overall employer brand which then determines the overall attractiveness of the company to different recruitment target groups. The interviewee mentioned that employer culture is built through different organizational elements such as management. When reflecting on the concept, the interviewee mentioned that they consider employer brand as a promise and image of their company. However, it cannot create a situation where the external brand is contradicting with the internal brand that is portrayed to the current employees.

By analyzing the answers provided by the interviewees, it is clear that the definition of employer branding remained closely the same across all of the interviewees. The interviewees all mentioned that an employer brand is the unique image of the organization that is formed to different stakeholders through external marketing. As mentioned before in chapter 2.3, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) also found that employer branding is a unique employer identity that distinguishes the organization from the other competition on the market.

4.1.2 The key factors of employer branding (Question 2)

Interviewee A found that the most important factors for employer branding were heavily related to external communication. The interviewee mentioned that how the organization presents itself in the public affects the employer brand, but also that the entire set of other means of external communication methods affect the brand in a positive or a negative way. The interviewee also mentioned that comfortable working environment and the flexibility of the job are important.

Interviewee B mentioned that the strategy of the company plays an important role regarding employer branding. This strategy is ultimately presented to the public and job applicants can decide whether or not the represented strategy is suitable for them.

Interviewee C highlighted the external and internal image of the organization and how they are presented to different stakeholders.

Interviewee D took a more employer cultural view to this question. The interviewee considered the most important factors to be heavily related to the possibilities offered to employees. These factors included development possibilities, financial benefits and compensation for the time and skills used by the employee, communication, sustainability and longevity and security of the job. The interviewee followed the question with a simple statement: “the goal for the company is not to create a workplace that is the best in the world, but rather best for the employee”.

The second question provided a mixture of answers from the four interviewees. Three interviewees considered the external image of company to be among the key elements of employer branding. Two of the four mentioned that the key elements are more related to the workplace and working environment in general. The two interviewees considered that the key elements were more related to the findings provided by Amir Dabirian et al., (2017) in their study related to employer branding and the seven main elements of it.

4.1.3 Personal preferences related to employer branding. (Question 3)

For this question, the author wanted to ask the interviewees about their preferences related to the different elements of employer branding mentioned in figure 3. (Amir Dabirian et al., 2017) The interviewees were asked to rank the importance of each element with a grade between 1-5 based on their personal preferences. One meaning not important and five meaning very important. This data was then formed into a chart presented in this chapter.

Interviewee A considers the visual presentation of the organization to be among the most important factor regarding their personal preferences. The visual presentation must be of a high quality and consistent to create an attractive image of the organization. Interviewee A also considers the reputation gained by the organization very important and how the organization is being communicated through the word of mouth. The interviewee mentioned that the values of the organization must also coincide with their own to create trust and commitment towards the organization. Of the seven different elements found by Amir

Dabirian et al., (2017), Interviewee A considered management value to be the most important followed closely by the social, and interest value by giving them all a grade five. This was then followed by development possibilities and application value. The economic value was not considered to be as important, but the interviewee mentioned that it is highly sensitive related to their personal life and at what stage they are at. At different times the economic value was more important, but at later times it was not so important anymore. Work/life balance was equally important to the economic value, but also very sensitive related to personal life and to the position in the organization.

Interviewee B mentions that whenever they apply for a job, they first research about the strategy of the organization and what are the key values for the organization. If the values are in-line with the interviewee, they apply for the job. As for the different elements of employer branding mentioned in figure 3, the interviewee rated application value and development value with a grade five after mentioning that the job needs to provide challenges difficult enough to improve their skills as a professional. Interviewee B followed the same pattern as interviewee A and mentioned that the management value of a company plays a huge role on whether the job is pleasant for them. The management of the organization must work closely with their employees instead of distancing themselves from the workforce. Another element related to the management of the organization was to provide the necessary flexibility and balance between work and life.

Interviewee C mentioned that they appreciate the values and responsibility of a company, and the interviewee considers that a conflict of values will negatively affect the decision whether they would work for a chosen employer. The interviewee mentioned several other important elements they find appealing when analyzing an employer. These included elements such as responsibility, self-management, co-operation and strong networks between co-workers and management. The interviewee also mentioned the importance of work/life balance and financial benefits. These benefits, however, were not as important as long as the tasks given were interesting and challenging enough for the job to remain comfortable for the interviewee.

Interviewee D brought up multiple aspects of employer branding they think are important when looking for a new job or overall, on a personal level. One key aspect brought up was the management value provided by a job. The interviewee considered that having a close relationship with the management of a company is important rather than having multiple levels of management and/or bureaucracy. Other elements recognized during the interview included elements such as flexibility, development value, application value through different

tasks and social value through working as a team. Financial compensation and benefits were not so important for the interviewee; however, the compensation should be adequate to be in-line with the given responsibilities and with the required skills.

Interviewee	A	B	C	D
Social value	5	3	3	4
Interest value	5	4	4	5
Application value	5	5	4	3
Development value	4	5	3	4
Economic value	3	4	4	3
Management value	5	5	4	4
Work/life balance	4	5	5	5
1 = not important / 5 = very important				

Figure 9 Employer brand preferences

As previously mentioned, during each interview a short questionnaire was completed where the interviewee was asked to rank each of the seven employer branding elements recognized by Amir Dabirian et al., (2017) with a grade from one to five. One meaning not important and five meaning very important. This data was then collected and inserted into a table to support the question. As this question is totally based on the preferences of the interviewees, it is given that there are also much more aspects and elements different people might find more valuable than the ones used in this research. However, as this research was designed to be conducted with qualitative data, only the 7 before-mentioned elements were chosen for further analysis.

This question divided the answers given by the interviewees. When studying the personal preferences of the interviewees, one mentioned that the visual brand of the organization was among the most important factors while another mentioned that the strategy of the organization was playing a key part in whether they gain interest towards an organization. Two of the interviewees however found the company values to be among the most important factors. Mentioned values included factors such as sustainability, honesty, and trust. The questionnaire regarding the seven elements of employer branding provided useful information to gain an understanding of which elements the interviewees appreciate the most. (Dabirian et al., 2017) The highest rated elements included for example a good work/life balance which was however, highly dependent on current situation of life for two of the interviewees. Two interviewees mentioned that a good work/life balance has a positive effect on the results at work and this agrees with the findings of Rani et al., (2010). The

interviewees mentioned that it is important for the employer to provide understanding regarding one's personal life. Another highly rated element was functional management. These results, however, are not the same as found in the study regarding employer branding conducted by Randstad. The study found that the most appreciated elements were the salary and benefits, job security and good working atmosphere (Randstad, 2013). These results differ vastly from what the author of this research found.

4.2 Employer culture and metrics

The second category included four different questions regarding employer culture and the metrics of what defines a successful employer brand.

4.2.1 The effect of employer culture on employer branding (Question 4)

Interviewee A mentioned that in their experience, a well-created employer culture brings multiple benefits regarding employer branding. These benefits include factors such as providing development possibilities and great social value for the employees.

Interviewee B highlighted that companies should not focus on employer culture competitions such as Great Place To Work, but rather to find other means to communicate their culture to the potential employees and other stakeholders. With proper planning and marketing of their employer culture, the company can improve their reputation and therefore attract better quality applicants, but also the current employees can experience the improvement that has been made.

Interviewee C took a different approach to this question. The interviewee considers that employer culture includes the behavior of employees and management, and this is directly affected by the employer branding.

Interviewee D considered that the employer brand is a polished version of the employer culture which then visible to the public. The interviewee also mentioned that the culture is a part of building the reputation of the company and if it is a success, it will be spread to possible employees and other stakeholders through the word of mouth. The benefit of this can be for example better employee retention and loyalty while the current employees can honestly recommend their employer to others.

Three of the four agreed that the employer culture mostly consists of the social aspects and behaviors at the work, which then will be reflected to different stakeholders outside of the organization. If the culture is deemed good, employees are more likely to share it to outside stakeholders and the company gains heightened interest and possibly will attract more qualified employees.

4.2.2 Defining successful employer brand (Question 5)

Interviewee A presented a list of six different aspects that measures a successful employer brand. The first aspect is related to the success of the recruitment process in the company. If there are a satisfactory number of applications for a job opening, the recruitment process has provided some success already. The second measurement is the set of values the company represents and the validity of them. If the values are not applicable or contradict other values, the interviewee does not consider them valid. The third aspect is directly related to the set of elements found by Amir Dabirian et al., (2017) and it is the development value offered by an employer. For the interviewee this meant that they need to have enough possibilities for training and career advancement to consider applying for a job. The interviewee mentioned that even though development possibilities are sometimes mentioned on the job description, it should be something that becomes normalized. The fourth and fifth aspects were directly related to the work surroundings and social elements of the job. The employer culture and brand need to support and encourage building great surroundings for the employees to perform at their best. The last aspect considered to be important is equality in the workplace and that everyone gets treated equally, no matter the occupation and position in the company.

Interviewee B considered a successful employer brand as realistic and honest and therefore it is important for the brand to consider how they communicate to the outside world. The brand should remain open and transparent of itself. During the interview the interviewee highlighted that if a company is overly eager to promote their brand and culture, it becomes a force that can drive people away instead of attracting them as too aggressive marketing of the brand can make it look unprofessional or unrealistic.

Interviewee C answered this question simply and effectively. The success of an employer brand is determined for interviewee C as how attractive and wanted the employer is. If the company attracts many applicants and the general interest for the brand remains high, the brand is successful. According to the interviewee, the same applies to partnerships, a successful employer brand can attract a variety of partners.

Interviewee D focused on the same aspects as interviewee B for this question. For the employer brand to be considered successful, it must be honest, clear, and realistic. If the employer brand supports the strategy set by the organization, it means that the brand can be considered successful by the interviewee. The success of an employer brand was explained by the interviewee through a three-part system that includes the key aspects of employer branding. The system will be shown in a figure below to provide a visual way of understanding

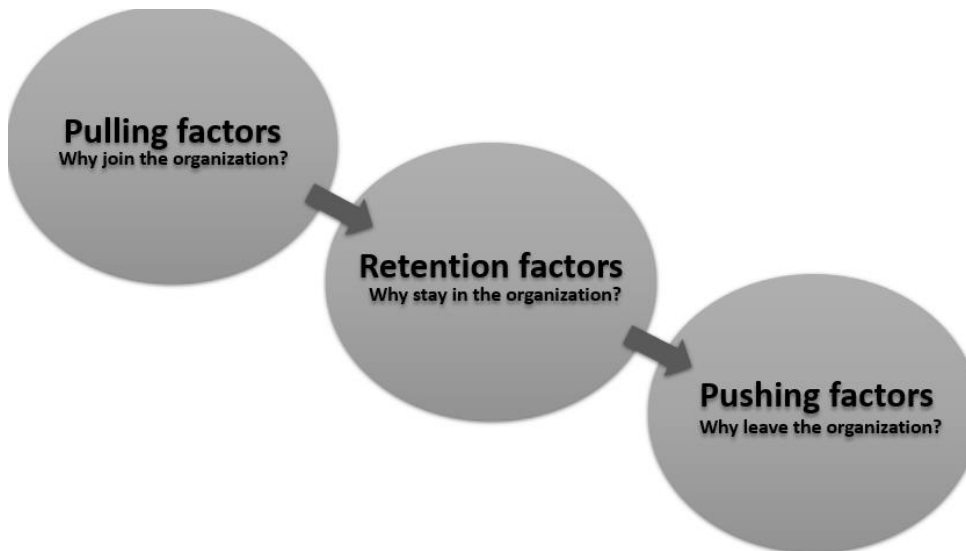


Figure 10 Success of an employer brand (Interviewee D)

The interviewee explained that the system includes three different factors. The first one being the pulling factors of an employer brand. This is what attracts employees to the organization whether it would be a good employer culture or any other benefit the employee considers valuable. The second part is the retention factors of the brand, meaning that why should the employees stay in the specific organization. The last part is the pushing factor of the brand. These are the aspects of why the employee should leave the organization. The interviewee mentioned that if the organization provides a valuable employer culture for the employees, it can become a strong retention factor, furthermore, it can also work as a pulling factor, attracting possible employees into the organization. However, if the employer culture is not in-line with the employer brand, it can become a pushing factor, driving employees away from the organization. According to the interviewee, if the pulling factor of the employer brand is greater than the retention factor and pushing factor of the competition, the brand will find success over the market.

For this question each one the interviewees took a different approach. Two of the interviewees mentioned that an employer brand is successful it must remain honest, clear

and most of all, realistic. One interviewee found that the success of an employer brand is directly related to the reputation of the organization and the performance regarding recruitment.

4.2.3 Measuring the success of an employer brand (Question 6)

The expectation for this question was to gain information on how the interviewees measure the overall success of an employer brand, either personally or through their work experience.

Interviewee A measured the success as the interest received by the organization whether it is through applications for different occupations or through general interest from the public. Reputation through the word of mouth also played a role in measuring the success for the interviewee.

Interviewee B highlighted the same answers given in the previous question which were related to the honesty of the brand and what kind employer culture the brand represents. Another important factor was the relationship that is formed between the employer and employees. The employer should trust the employees of the organization and vice versa in order to be successful.

Interviewee C measures the success of an employer brand through their own interest regarding the organization. If the organization manages to be interesting and worth learning more about, it probably is worth applying for. The interviewee also mentioned some factors related to the management of the company including questionnaires regarding the wellbeing of an employee and the HR processes of the company. If the organization receives a large quantity of applications, it means that the interest towards the employer is high. The last factor was the success and interest gained through different platforms of communication and social medias. If the interest has peaked, the organization has succeeded with their branding efforts.

Interviewee D stated some of the same factors as interviewee C such as the quantity of applications received for job openings and the general interest received by the organization. The interviewee also mentioned the same internal wellbeing questionnaires as interviewee C to be a part of measuring the success of an employer brand.

Most interviewees found that the success of an employer brand is defined by the interest received by the organization. This interest could appear in multiple different ways, such as

increase in applications, increased traffic on social medias or websites and the general number of questions regarding the organization. These benefits are directly related to the set of external benefits found by Figurska & Matuska (2013) which can be seen in Figure 5. Other measurements of the success mentioned by the interviewees included the reputation of the organization and the relationship formed between the employees and the employer. The relationship between the employee and the employer was another key factor found by Figurska & Matuska in 2013 in their study related to the external and internal benefits of employer branding.

4.2.4 Employer branding experiences (Question 7)

This question aimed to find out what benefits or experiences the interviewees have gained from a successful employer brand on a more personal level. This question is the last question of the second category.

Interviewee A mentioned that a successful employer brand has offered a refreshing change, and it has opened the possibilities for endless development for an organization and for personal skills. A successful employer brand has also offered interesting new working possibilities and great experiences to be innovative.

Interviewee B stated that for them, a successful employer brand has affected the decisions whether to apply for a certain job opening or not. If the interviewee considered that the brand did not offer the possibilities they were seeking, they would not apply for a job, but if the employer brand was strong and well-maintained, the effect was the opposite and they applied. The interviewee highlighted that their experience of a certain organization has changed drastically after a complete employer brand refresh. The brand mirrors the quality of the work delivered by an organization according to the interviewee.

Interviewee C had the same experiences as interviewee B when it came to applying for a certain job opening due to a strong employer brand. However, the interviewee mentioned that the opinion can also change after the initial recruitment as the brand image that gets formed, is not the entire truth of the employer culture.

Interviewee D indicated that a successful employer brand has enabled the organization to find employees that are suitable for the employer culture in the workplace. The interviewee stated that an employer brand has helped with matching the right people with the right jobs, so the employees work efficiently and overall, the employees are satisfied. A successful

employer brand is constantly evolving, that is why the interviewee highlighted that even though the employer brand might change over a long period of time, the organization attempts to offer job security.

As this question was more related to personal experiences, it was hard to find a direct connection between the question and the theoretical part of this study. The expectation for this question was to gain answers whether an employer brand has had an effect on the work-related decision-making of the interviewees. Two of the four interviewees mentioned that the employer brand of the organization has affected the decision whether to apply to for a job or not. One interviewee answered that the employer brand provided the possibility for development of personal skills.

4.3 Employer branding and recruitment

The last category of the interviewee included questions related to employer branding and its effect on recruitment. The goal of these questions was to gain deeper understanding of the link between these two topics which then ties together the research part with the theoretical framework. This category included only two questions and they marked the ending of the interviewee process.

4.3.1 Employer brand's effect on recruitment (Question 8)

The first question for this category aimed to study the effects of employer branding on recruitment and how it affects the business operations in an organization. The expectation was to find examples of gained benefits and how could they be utilized.

Interviewee A explained that employer brand's effect on recruitment has been clear in the past and it continues to be remarkable every time the organization is hiring new employees. The overall interest towards specific job opportunities has increased and the quality of applicants has increased over time. The quantity of applications has also gained a significant increase due to a well-structured employer brand.

Interviewee B found that the connection between a well-structured employer brand and recruitment is very strong, especially in modern times as the competition for job openings is tougher. The interviewee highlighted that the importance of employer branding is even more prevalent in team recruitments where a team is looking for a very specific applicant. As a

team consists of different types of people, a good employer brand helps to find the perfect addition that is suitable not only for the job but also for the team.

Interviewee C provided an answer that follows closely with the answers from interviewees A and B. Interviewee C indicated that an employer brand assists with the success of a recruitment process. An employer with a successful employer brand usually finds more qualified and suitable candidates for a job opening all the while the recruitment process is more efficient if the recruitment campaign is directly targeted at a specific group. The other benefits can include for example better employee retention and better reputation that will be shared to possible employees through the word of mouth.

Interviewee D mentioned that a successful employer brand according to previous experiences so far has yielded more applicants towards different occupations and the quality of applicants has increased. The interviewee, however, considers that a smaller team is better for the organization the interviewee works in currently, rather than purely having the intentions of expanding the organization forever. This ensures that the organization and the employees in it are of higher quality and the working environment remains the best it can be. The interviewee explained that earlier experience showed that having a certain level of exclusivity with a strong employer brand has made the recruitment much easier and more efficient.

This question provided diverse answers which were as expected beforehand. The most notable benefit found was the quality of applicants had increased after implementing employer branding strategies. The following benefit mentioned was the quality of the applicant became significantly better, by being more suitable and talented for a specific job opening. The third important benefit was related to the efficiency of the recruitment process. The gained efficiency allowed the organization to target the recruitment campaign to a specific targeted group. Interviewee C also mentioned an increase in employee retention. All of the gained benefits mentioned are directly related to the findings of Figurska and Matuska (2013) in chapter 2.4.2. The study found that some of the main external benefits of employer branding included the higher quantity of applications, quicker access to suitable candidates (efficiency) and that the organization attracts more candidates that match the job description better. Figurska & Matuska (2013). The same study also found that the internal benefits of employer branding provided increased loyalty and retention among employees and overall higher levels of trust in the organization among many other benefits. (Figurska & Matuska, 2013)

4.3.2 Value of employer branding regarding the recruitment process (Question 9)

The goal for the final question of this study was to learn more about the overall value brought by employer branding. The question also served as a possibility for the interviewees to provide opinions and data that might not have been related to the earlier questions.

Interviewee A considers that an employer brand brings a lot of value into the recruitment process. For the employer the value can be perceived through more qualified and suitable applicants while the applicant can gain the possibility to develop their skillsets and be offered a job at a reputable company. It is very important to have a well-built recruitment process with transparency to both, the employer and more importantly, the employee. A recruitment process that is quick and flexible always creates a better image of the employing company. This included aspects such as how quickly the interviews take place, how the new employee is being contacted and how well the employer can personalize the message sent to the employee. Using generalized answering strategies often create a bad image of the employer.

The interviewee also mentioned that the introduction period of new employees plays a huge role on whether the employee perceives the company positively or negatively. Another interesting factor the interviewee considered was that if the organization provides a good working environment for students and trainees, it is highly possible that the same students and trainees will later apply to work for the same employer once they graduate. This way the organization receives motivated and possibly loyal employees.

Interviewee B stated that the benefit of an employer brand could be more prevalent in bigger organizations as the process of developing an employer brand is expensive and time consuming both of which smaller organizations might not have early on. The interviewee considered that for smaller companies, the better alternative might be to gain the reputation through customer feedback and word of mouth rather than investing a lot of resources into developing an employer brand. The employer brand, however, allows the organization to find employees who are a better fit for the company and it provides a lot of possibilities regarding development.

Interviewee C mentioned that they consider employer brand valuable because a reputable and popular employer finds the best employees faster and more efficiently than an employer without a well-built employer brand. Employer brand helps to target the recruitment to a certain audience. The interviewee also mentioned that the retention rate of employees can also improve if the values match between the employees and the employer. The interviewee

considered that the employer brand is something the employee can be proud of and then recommend the employer further and this can lead into more applications received per job opening. Another important factor mentioned was that a well-built employer brand can also endure more negative publicity when it is known that the topic of negativity is not something usual in the organization the brand represents.

Interviewee D considers employer branding to be crucial for the recruitment process as it is difficult to find motivated and talented employees without having a well-built employer brand. The interviewee stated that the only visible factor for external stakeholders is the employer brand, and it is what the applicant uses to consider whether the company is suitable for them or not. The brand is the triggering factor whether sending an application or not. The employer brand can also make the recruitment process more efficient and less time-consuming.

The answers for the last question were again heavily related to the quality of the applicants and to the efficiency of the recruitment process. The interviewees considered the employer brand to be among the most valuable assets the organization can have and which to utilize during the recruitment process. Three of the interviewees also mentioned that the employer brand is the only image external stakeholders have of the company and therefore it is important to have constant development of the brand.

4.4 Results overview

By analyzing the gathered data from the interviews, it is clear that employer branding is a highly significant aspect of the recruitment process, and it should be developed consistently in order to remain competitive. The key benefits found were related to the quantity and quality of the applications received during recruitment processes. The increased efficiency of the recruitment process was also considered to be one key benefit. Other mentioned benefits included better employee loyalty and retention. However, the study found that the importance of employer branding is highlighted in bigger companies with more resources to invest into the development of the employer brand.

Even though the interviewees were not working in the same field of business, the information gathered answered all the questions the author wanted to research in this thesis. As three of the four interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams, the possibility to gain comprehensive answers was noticeably easier than using an email questionnaire. The author considered all the interviewees to be a good fit for the interviewing process as they all had some experience related to either employer branding, communications, or human

resource management. Even though the study contained mostly qualitative data, a small amount of quantitative data was mixed in when researching the personal preferences of the interviewees. The data collection methods chosen were suitable for this study and they enabled the author to collect all the required data. Overall, the empirical study process was of satisfactory quality to the author. The results were as the author expected and the questions answered the questions set at the beginning.

4.5 Limitations of the research

Due to the scope of this thesis, it is impossible to build a comprehensive image of the topic that would apply to all companies from different fields of business, however, this thesis provides valuable information to build the general foundation for the term employer branding. Therefore, in the future, a study more focused on a specific field of business, for example information technology (IT), could provide a better understanding of the effects of employer branding related to the IT sector or any other field chosen for the research. Some researchers have already used a narrow scope and focused on one field of business, but undoubtedly there are a lot of areas that are still open for research. Once the areas become researched, companies can start improving their brands for the better which in return provides benefits for both, the company, and its employees.

The timeline of this study also did not allow deep enough research to form an advanced understanding of the topic. In the future, however, employer branding as a topic hopefully will be researched further as the topic has experienced heightened interest in the past years, especially in the current situation where shortages of trained employees and unemployment are a problem on a global level. Therefore, the study conducted is highly related to the current world situation regarding the financial standings of companies and to the labor shortages experienced worldwide.

5 Recommendations

Employer branding strategies could be utilized more by different companies and the possibilities of it are too often overlooked. Based on the theoretical part and results gained from the study conducted, this chapter provides some recommendations regarding employer branding and how a company could effectively utilize the brand.

Employer branding plays a huge role in every company and the effect of it regarding recruitment is undoubtedly significant. Therefore, finding ways to properly utilize employer branding in the business operations and especially recruitment is highly recommended by the author. It is important for the organization to identify the areas of where they could improve the employer branding efforts.

When considering the recruitment in a company, the improvements can be done gradually, starting with smaller elements, and moving on to bigger and more resource intensive methods. As interviewee A mentioned in chapter 4.3.2, even the efficiency and flexibility of the recruitment process plays a major role in how the organization is perceived by possible future employees. The first points of contact and how the applicant is being treated during the recruitment process are aspects that create a more positive image of the employing company. Another great starting point is providing possibilities for the employees to develop their skillsets and knowledge. This creates an environment where the employee can feel that the organization is dedicated to support the future endeavors of the employee and that the wish for development will be fulfilled.

The first steps towards creating an employer branding strategy includes defining the employer value proposition (EVP). The organization must research what are they offering to current employees and what could they offer for possible future employees to make the organization attractive. Employer brand value should be considered at the very beginning, but it becomes more important after the organization has the resources to support more intense changes. This agrees with what interviewee B mentioned in chapter 4.3.2. It is recommended that the organization utilizes the elements mentioned in figure 7 (Dabirian et al., 2017). The seven elements mentioned, provide a good understanding of what the employer branding consists of and how to develop each one, however, another good starting point can be found from figure 6 in a study conducted by Randstad (2013). The study was conducted on a global level, and it included a large pool of respondents, so it provides a good starting point for understanding what values employees find important. The study also provides more specific elements and values which can be focused on, instead of categorizing a large number of values into one bigger category.

Developing the employer brand should be a constant effort, but especially if the company struggles to find suitable employees and if the amount of application is unusually low. However, developing the employer brand even during success is recommended as the possibilities are almost limitless considering that as found during the empirical study, even employee retention and loyalty is highly connected to the success of the employer brand.

The author recommends analyzing the data received during recruitment processes, but also conducting questionnaires and interviews with current employees can offer great possibilities related to understanding how the employees perceive the employer and organization. This data can then further direct the developing efforts of the employer brand. Another recommended course of action includes gathering the data from social media accounts and cross-referencing it to the recruitment statistics. By developing a marketing plan for social media accounts, the interest towards the organization can increase, therefore, implementing the employer branding strategy into the marketing plan is important. Often popular organizations among employees have active social medias and receive a lot of interest through such channels. Employer branding as a whole is a joint task between different sectors of the organization, but mainly the HR, management and communications teams have the best chances of creating changes.

Once the framework has been built for the employer branding strategy, the author recommends the organization to constantly develop the strategy and remain innovative to find solutions that suit the current world situation and trends.

6 Conclusion

The concept of employer branding has been presented over the past decades, but Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow were the first ones to provide a definition for the phenomenon. Employer branding was defined as a bundle of benefits offered by the employer. These benefits were either functional, emotional, or monetary. (Ambler and Barrow, 1996) Another key definition was identified by Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo in 2004. They defined employer branding as the identifiable identity of that is used to distinguish an organization from the other competition. (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) The framework for any employer brand is defined with the employer value proposition which includes the offerings and benefits provided by the organization in return for the skills and knowledge of the employee. Employer value proposition is the key to defining the attractiveness of the organization which then used in external marketing to gain an advantage in the labor market. This advantage can yield better and more qualified applicants and, in some cases, a larger quantity of applicants. Employer branding has become a topic of heightened interest over the past years as the competition for the best employees has become tougher. A lot of researchers have found different elements that employees find important, and these values vary from development possibilities to management value and even to the work/life balance of the employees. Lastly, this thesis focused on studying the direct benefits of employer branding

and how it affects the human resource management, or more specifically, the recruitment in an organization. These benefits could be divided into two different categories which were internal and external benefits.

The empirical research of this thesis aspired to gain a deeper understanding of employer branding and its effect on recruitment. The research included nine questions and the questions were further divided into three different categories. The first category was dedicated to further define employer branding as a concept. The second category focused on employer culture and the success of the employer brand. Lastly, the third category studied the connections between employer branding and the recruitment in a company. The research consisted of four semi-structured interviews from professionals of different occupations.

The research question set for this thesis was “How does employer branding affect the recruitment in a company” and the results gained highlighted the importance of employer branding and how it could be effectively utilized to gain the most benefits when recruiting new talent into a company. Employer branding affects the recruitment only in a positive manner as there are not many mentionable downsides to creating an employer branding strategy besides the overall costs. The key effects of employer branding found during the empirical research were the increased quality and quantity of applications during the recruitment process. Other mentionable effects included better retention rate among employees and overall increase in the efficiency of the recruitment process. Overall, the effect is considerable, and a successful employer brand only makes the recruitment easier in a company. In the beginning of the research process, certain expectations were set related to the results of the study. The expectation was that the interviewees would mostly agree with the theoretical parts of this thesis. During question 3, the author studied the personal preferences of the interviewees and the results gained based on the ranking were just as the author expected. Also, the overall effects of employer branding studied in the later questions yielded the answers the author was hoping for. In retrospect, all of the set expectations were met, and the overall results of the research were as the author expected.

Based on the literature review and empirical research, the author provided a set of recommendations which a company can utilize to improve their employer brand. The provided recommendations can be utilized by all companies without any limitations to the size of the organization. The first recommendation is to examine and improve the efficiency and flexibility of the recruitment process. The process must remain easy for the applicant and possible future applicants to attract more talents into the organization. The second recommendation is to provide possibilities for the employees, for example development

opportunities. The evaluation of the employer value proposition is also important for the attractiveness of the organization. This means evaluating the offerings by the organization to the employees. The employee must feel that the benefits and compensation must be in-line with the requirement of the job. The development of the employer brand must be constant to remain competitive. The last recommendations provided were to gather and analyze data from different social media platforms and using that in a marketing plan, which employer brand is also a part of.

The competitiveness of the labor market is a mainstay phenomenon, that is why it is important for companies and organizations to put more resources into their employer branding efforts. This ensures that the company remains competitive, and they ultimately attract the best possible talent into their company. During the empirical research part, the interviewees highlighted the need for employers to provide more flexibility for their employees.

It is evident that employer branding is a topic of great possibilities, and it deserves to be studied further and in more comprehensive ways to find the full potential of it. The author considers this study to be success and satisfactory after evaluating the gained results and proving the used sources to be valid. In retrospect, the author considers that choosing the topic of employer branding and its effect on recruitment proved to be very interesting topic to study due to personal interest and the ever-changing world situation. It also offered the possibility to interview professionals from multiple different occupations and further gain more knowledge on how employer branding is perceived in different fields of business. The author considers that the theoretical framework was the most difficult section of this thesis to compile as the definitions and meaning of the employer branding concept are often based on the personal experiences and perceptions of different people. It is possible that employer branding is a topic that will never settle on one specific definition but rather it will probably expand, change, and improve over time as more and more researchers study the topic from multiple different points of view. Employer branding has the potential to provide a significant advantage to those companies willing to tackle the task of creating an employer branding strategy to use in their everyday operations.

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Appendix 1. Interview questions

Question 1: How would you define employer branding?

Question 2: What are the most important parts of employer branding?

Question 3: What are the most important parts of employer branding on a personal level?

Question 4: How does employer culture affect employer branding?

Question 5: How would you define a successful employer brand?

Question 6: How do you measure the success of an employer brand?

Question 7: What are the benefits of a successful employer brand according to your own experience?

Question 8: Have you noticed any connection between the employer brand of a company and the recruitment?

Question 9: How valuable is an employer brand when regarding the recruitment?

Appendix 2. Appendix heading**Data management plan****Management and storage of research data**

The research data consists of different literature found from credible sources and interview results gathered from the interviewees by the author. The data used from different sources will be referenced to accordingly, utilizing the guidelines provided by the study institution. The gathered data will be saved on a secured computer hard drive which only the author has access to. The backup files will be stored in Microsoft OneDrive offered by the study institution. The main thesis file was constantly stored in the same OneDrive location for the duration of writing this thesis. Only the author has the access to cloud locations of the files. The commissioning company and the author agreed to full data anonymity.

The gathered data will be deleted after one (1) year of the approval of the thesis.

Processing of personal data and sensitive data

The research does not include sensitive data or confidential data. During the interview process, the author highlighted that the interviewees should not include or mention any sensitive or confidential data and if such information was to occur, it would be removed entirely from the gathered results.

Ownership of thesis data

The data gathered from literature sources are owned by their rightful owners and authors. The results of this thesis are owned by the author and the commissioning company.

Further use of thesis data after the work is completed

The author does not plan to utilize the gathered information any further. The author stores the data securely for a year after the approval of the thesis after which the data will be deleted entirely from all platforms and locations.