Attracting the right employees
A study of successful employer branding

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Abstract

Employer branding is an area of growing importance and attention. Though the concept of attracting and recruiting employees is by no means a new one, the idea of the employer brand implies a more conscious opinion of companies as employers by potential employees and as a result a more considered approach by companies themselves.

One such anonymous company has noticed increased difficulties in attracting students with the right competence. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to analyze how the attract stage of employer branding could be improved and formulate suggestions for improvement. The analysis is performed with three different focuses: formulating an employer branding strategy, organizing a structure to implement this strategy and communication of the desired image and brand values.

Results show that the company is lacking in many areas and have potential for improvement in several key areas. The general analysis is that focus in employer branding is moving towards a more active dialogue with the target group where transparency and relations are emphasized. The company could improve their employer branding management by defining on a more specific target group, prioritize the opinion of this group over the general student population and use local brands more in the communication.
Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all those that have helped us complete this study. All of our respondents have in interviews willingly shared their experience and opinions which has given us valuable insight into the dynamic and multifaceted field of employer branding. Meeting with individuals from similar companies has painted a picture of how employer branding is practiced in reality, while individuals from outside the industrial corporate world have helped approach the issue from new angles.

Our tutor Henrik Blomgren has skillfully guided us in the work behind this study and has been a constant source of inspiration and motivation. We would also thank our fellow students for valuable and useful feedback during this process.

Our supervisors at company X have, apart from making this thesis at all possible, ensured high quality in the work by being both committed to the work as well as expecting us to deliver value. Last but not least we owe thanks to the staff at company X whom we have not directly used as sources in the study, for making this project highly enjoyable and going to work in the morning an easy task.
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1 Introduction

In this chapter we will discuss the background and purpose of this study. The background will depict the context in which this study is taking place out and lay out the foundation for the questions posed in a later stage. Lastly, the purpose is intended to introduce the reader to the specific reasons to why this study is carried out.

1.1 Background

From today until the year 2025, there will be in total 1,600,000 individuals retiring from work in Sweden. This is almost 250,000 more resignations due to age than the last 15 years (Gustavsson et al, 2010). For the first time in modern times the number of resignations due to age will exceed the number of people entering the labor market.

A similar phenomenon is reflected in the number of engineers that are graduating. In a report published by The Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers (2009) it is predicted that the demand for engineers will remain steady but the number of graduating engineers will decrease (Dahlberg, 2009). Particularly the number of university engineers and qualified graduates from upper secondary engineering courses will decrease significantly.

From this development follows an increasingly competitive labor market, where companies will have to be aware of how they are perceived as employers in order to attract the right people. One of the companies noticing this growing competition is Company X, thusly named to preserve anonymity in this report. Based on their own experience, it is becoming more difficult to attract the desired group of students and young professionals. In order to address this development Company X recently increased efforts within this area. The strategy under development deals with the management and implementation of what is called employer branding, an increasingly important area to most companies today.

In short the employer brand signifies an organization’s image as an employer, while employer branding denotes the activities aimed at influencing the opinion of this brand. The basic idea was to combine traditional branding principles with human resource management, although in recent years employer branding as an independent concept within the broad field of marketing and
brand management has grown more distinctive. It is now a vital part of many firms’ efforts to remain competitive (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Mark Gray (2009) defines employer branding as follows:

“Employer branding is an emerging discipline with its roots in classical marketing and brand management principles. It aims to position an image of a company as “a great place to work”. The idea is first to develop an emotional link with the best talent, and then offer prospective candidates tangible benefits based on evidence. The promise and fulfillment of an employer brand enables the attraction, motivation and retention of appropriate talent for the business to continue delivering on the corporate brand promise.”

- Gray (2009)

1.2 Purpose

This thesis is carried out at the request of a large Swedish company, wishing to remain anonymous and therefore called Company X. The basis of the thesis is a study of the current employer branding management of the company, in particular the attraction of students with desired skill set.

Based on this study the ultimate purpose of the thesis is to investigate how the brand of the company as an employer could be communicated more attractively, thus positioning the brand as desired. In order to reach this goal, an analysis of the situation will identify the core issues after which possible solutions to these will be investigated. Ultimately, a number of detailed proposals aiming to improve the current situation will be developed under each section.
2 Literature review

In this chapter we will discuss the most important concepts and models that are relevant to our study. We will present theories both from traditional branding field as well as more recent employer branding research. We will touch upon subjects such as branding, employer value proposition and strategic communication.

As the term employer branding quite recently was conceptualized the overall research material dealing directly with employer branding is somewhat limited. There is however a vast amount of research material addressing corporate and product branding that will be applicable on employer branding with only slight reinterpretation. Therefore the chapter begins with a short revisit to branding and ends with a closer look on employer branding.

2.1 Branding essentials

Branding denotes the work of building and positioning brands, which are a set of associations linked to a company, product or symbol (Kellogg, 2005). Many researchers claim that the brand is one of a company’s most valuable assets and branding is therefore a key competitive advantage (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). A main goal of branding activities is to differentiate the brand from competing brands, in order to be seen as the preferred choice in the clutter of information and brands.

A brand is ultimately the perception of a product, service or company. The advantage this perception brings is usually described with the term brand equity, equity being the experienced “value” added as compared to a similar product without the brand. It is important to keep in mind that the perception can differ from what the company wants to, or even what they think they, convey. If this happened, the brand would be misaligned (Heding, T et al, 2009).
“Perceptions, of course, matter most—how people perceive something matters far more than the absolute truth. The question generally isn’t which product or service is best; the question is which product or service people think is best.”

- Kellogg (2005)

Brands and branding has played a large role in the corporate world for a long time and virtually all companies know that a strong corporate or product brand is necessary in order to be competitive in today’s market. Kapferer (2004) claims that brands are:

- **An intangible asset in parity with other patents and databases**
- **A conditional asset that is able to create value over a long time when it is used in conjunction with a product or service. Without products or services to carry the brand, there is no brand**
- **Without value if there are no promised benefits with the brand**

### 2.1.1 Brand identity

An important concept within branding is brand identity, which can be described as how an organization wants to be identified and perceived on the market. The emphasis is on wants, since the brand identity is the desired message coming from the company. Kapferer (2004) argues that the identity is on the sender’s side with the purpose to specify the brand’s meaning, aim and self-image. By engaging in branding and marketing strategies and activities the company develops its brand identity. The brand identity must not be confused with the brand image of the organization.
2.1.2 Brand image

According to the American Marketing Association, the perception of a brand rests in the minds of the individual. The brand image is a reflection, though sometimes inaccurate, of the brand identity. It is what people believe about a brand; their thoughts, feelings and expectations. If the brand identity comes from the sender’s side, the brand image is on the receiver’s side. It is the way the receiver decodes all the signals emanating from the sender.

Figure 2 illustrates Kapferer’s view of the connection between the brand identity and the brand image. He clearly believes, and emphasizes in his texts, that the brand image is affected by the competition on the market. And in today’s information-rich society, the competition and “noise” is constantly increasing for almost every organization.

Traditionally, the main focus of companies branding efforts have been directed towards either the product or company brand. However, over the last decade branding efforts directed towards the area of human resource management has increased in what is today described as employer branding (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The following section will take a closer look at this field.
2.2 What is employer branding?

“Employer brand” was proposed in the early 1990’s as a term to represent the image of an employer in the minds of potential employees. Today the term has come to have a somewhat wider meaning and more extensive research has been made in the field. Sullivan (2004) defines employer branding as a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perception of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders.

Early research illustrates the positive effects of a deliberate and well-planned approach to the issue and shows how organizations have found that effective employer branding helps employees internalize company values, supports employee retention and provides a competitive advantage, particularly when dealing with highly skilled employees in a knowledge-based economy (Conference Board 2001, Ewing et al. 2002).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that brand equity, in terms of employer branding, propels potential applicants to apply to the firms as well as increase the current employee productivity.

Figure 3: Employer branding framework (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004)
2.2.1 Image, identity and profile in employer branding

Parment and Dyhre (2009) describe how the traditional view of brand image and brand identity can be applied to the employer brand. They also add the brand profile to give the model an extra dimension. In their model identity is “who you really are”, while image is “what others perceive you as” and profile is “who you want to be”. The difference from traditional branding is the relationship between identity and profile. In traditional branding an organization could, and sometimes wants, to send a picture of the company that is glorified. In employer branding this is not desirable since a failed promise from a company to a new employee will most likely lead to an unmotivated employee that eventually leaves the company with an unfavorable view of the organization, acting as a negative ambassador.

![Diagram of Image, Identity, and Profile](image)

Figure 4: Identifying your EVP (Parment & Dyhre, 2009)

The intersection of the three circles in the model is described as the existing employer value proposition (EVP) that the organization delivers.

2.2.2 Employer value proposition

In traditional marketing the formulation of a Unique Selling Point (USP) is widely accepted as an essential part of the marketing process. The USP is a summary of an organization’s competitive advantages; why a buyer should choose that firm over others in the market. Within employer branding this concept has been remodeled to constitute the Employer Value Proposition (Parment & Dyhre, 2009). The EVP should communicate the reasons why current and future employees should choose to work for a certain organization, thus describing the competitive advantages of an employer.
The Economist (2006) argues that the reward for an effective management of the EVP is huge, increasing the pool of potential workers by twenty percent and the commitment of the current employees fourfold. They also describe negative aspects of poorly formulated EVPs, a main aspect of which being that when the company fails to deliver on their promise, the new employees will be less committed to their work once they are faced with the actual situation at work. Parment & Dyhre (2009) outlines the most important criteria of what a successful EVP should be:

- **True** – Today, company transparency has grown and inside information about most organizations is easily accessible on the web, shared by current employees.

- **Attractive** – The company as an employer has to have appeal for the target group, while vague messages interpreted as “corporate bullshit” have the opposite effect.

- **Different** – The organization has to stand out from its competitors on the labor market.

In order for the employer branding work to be effective and of desired result, it is important that the image, identity and profile converge as much as possible. In order to avoid delivering brand promises that will never be fulfilled it is important that the identity and profile is closely connected. A discrepancy too big would in the long run lead to an organization wanting to be something it is not. The most important match is probably the identity versus image match which should be more or less consistent. No matter how good you think your identity is, if others perceive you in another manner your own opinion would be of no value.

![Figure 5: Converging EVP](image)
2.2.4 The employer branding pyramid
In order for a company to be considered ideal in the mind of any future employee, first awareness of the company has to be built, after which interest can start to rise. The brand building process starts with the initial awareness phase, where potential employees recognize the existents of the company as an employer. Some companies with strong corporate or product brands do not have to put too much effort into this phase whilst others are practically unknown to most.

The second phase is where the company tries to catch the interest of the potential employees, and also be viewed as a possible employer amongst people with desired work skills and attributes. These two phases are often targeted through mass media communication, such as ads, corporate website and fair participation. The ideal employer position is often reached by creating personal relationship with the potential employees. There are numerous ways of doing so. One common way is arranging events at the company office, thus “owning” the event which both is cheaper and more flexible then going through third part arrangers.
2.2.3 The attract stage

The employer branding agency Coreworkers have created the employee lifecycle as a tool for each phase of an employee’s time at a company. Employer branding should be a presence in all phases of the employer lifecycle in order to fully maximize the potential of both current and future employees. However, for the sake of this study the attract stage will be examined more closely.

![Employee lifecycle diagram](image)

In the attract stage, the primary work of external employer branding takes place. It is the phase in which to build awareness of the company in the mind of potential employees. To achieve attraction, active communication is needed which has to be broad to build awareness and focused to find the right people.

2.2.5 Communication

Communication with a broad group of potential employees is of importance, both in order to improve the odds of attracting the right candidates as well as building brand awareness in the minds of a large audience for a long-term perspective (Parment & Dyhre, 2009). Eventually, the communication has to be narrowed in order to come into closer contact with those more interested in and better suited at working at the company. Finally once the target group has found the employer to be preferable the communication has to be on a more intimate level, even to the point of individual meetings.
This process is not static, while the communication from the company focuses more narrowly, so does the potential employee’s. As proposed in the figure the promise and expectations of the two parties align to each other to a certain extent. A person who might have been initially attracted by the broad communication but still unsure as to whether or not the employer is the right one, might change this perspective during the process and ultimately view the employer as ideal.

The figure below describes how the process of communication should be focused in order to attract the right people.
3 Problem discussion

More clearly defining the area of investigation, this section is based on a rudimentary analysis of the current situation and the main lessons learned from the literature review. Three areas of study are proposed: strategy, structure and communication. The chapter closes with narrowing the scope of study by defining a set of delimitations.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is to examine and improve how Company X manage their employer branding activities directed at an external audience, often referred to as the attract stage. The core problem identified by the company themselves is that the current perception of the employer brand amongst external parties is wrongly positioned and does not reflect the desired image and values defined in the EVP, employer value proposition.

"Unless structure follows strategy, inefficiency results"

- AD Chandler.

Based on reviews of the company's external communication, employer branding management and experiences drawn from the literature review, the proposition is that the overall work with external employer branding can be described in the following steps: formulating an employer branding strategy and organizing a structure to implement this strategy, all of which will ultimately result in communication of the desired image and brand values.

![Diagram: Strategy, structure & communication](image)
The first issue that will need to be looked at is the initial work with formulating the strategy, which includes identifying the target group, choosing communication channels and formulating the Employer Value Proposition (EVP).

In order for long-term success within any business area, a strategy needs to be formulated and carried out. Sullivan (2004) defines employer branding as “a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm”.

As a first step to examine the employer branding work within Company X there is a need to scrutinize the strategy in order to see if it is in alignment with company values and goals, leading to a closer look at the process behind:

**Formulating an employer branding strategy**

Holm (2002) connects strategy to two elements, decision-making and resources. A strategy that is not followed by decision-making will not be a strategy; it would be better described as top management small talk. And decisions that do not get the resources that are needed will never reach the goals that are set up for them. So the second problem area that will be examined is how the defined strategy is implemented and what structure surrounds this process.

While the newly formulated employer branding strategy contains elements that to some degree address the overall issue, this has not yet reached all the way down in the organization and is not fully implemented in day-to-day employer branding management. So the second research area will focused on:

**The structure in charge of implementing the strategy**
The difficulty for the company, as for most companies, is to project an image of the company to potential employees that is both accurate and attractive. Communicating the core values of the company, the work climate, career possibilities and so forth in order to attract suitable candidates for employment is the challenge posed. Currently this challenge is not overcome and the communication is inferior to what is needed in order to communicate the desired message to the target audience. No matter the brilliance of the strategy or the amount of people assigned to carry out its implementation, without ultimately communicating the message to the audience in a successful way all previous employer branding efforts will be of no value. The brand promise has to converge with the wishes of the students.

The third area of research is therefore on the subject of:

*Communicating the employer brand in a correct and attractive way*

### 3.1 Delimitations

Although research may well touch upon areas of engagement and retention of existing employees which are part of the employer branding scope, the focus of this report will mainly be to study attraction of prospective employees in the form of students. While the organization is active in several countries, focus will be on the employer branding activity taking place in Sweden.
4 Methodology

Describing the method by which the research in this thesis is conducted, this chapter is divided into sections for each field of study. Beginning with the general approach on how to best find solutions for the given problems, the fields outline different methods of investigation, with the specific approach and purpose of the investigation described for each area. The chapter then closes with a discussion of the validity and reliability in results obtained.

4.1 Approach

4.1.1 Qualitative method

Research in this study is made with a qualitative approach, for a number of reasons. Primarily it is done in order to give a profound understanding of a seemingly complex system, rather than to show quantitative patterns in data. A qualitative method of working also allows researchers to adapt their study according to new revelations or input.

Another reason is the nature of employer branding management in companies is the variation by which this is practiced in companies today. While it could be argued that companies have taken steps to attract the right employees for decades, the conscious and comprehensive approach to this issue that employer branding requires has not yet advanced to the same level in all companies. Some companies are in the early stages of even recognizing the issue, while others have been developing their strategies and methods for years. Studying a large amount of companies would only risk extracting data that does not give any useful information. Given this reasoning a qualitative method aimed at finding “best practice” employer branding from a deeper study of a few carefully selected cases will give more solid results.
4.2 Benchmarking

A vital part of the thesis will be to benchmark the employer branding of Company X against other companies engaging in similar practices. When benchmarking, three companies of similar size have been chosen to be studied in-depth. These will be studied according to the same process of strategy, structure and communication although it will most likely not be possible to gain the same insight as with the commissioning company. The small number is chosen in order to more easily focus the investigation and the choice of companies is based on similarities in size and global nature of their organizations. The companies will be known as:

- Company A
- Company B
- Company C

Also, and perhaps most importantly, they engage in an active employer branding management that judging by ratings explained later on and opinions from people with insight into the matter has been successful over a relatively long period of time. Apart from this in-depth benchmarking, several other companies will also be observed at different instances depending on the nature of their activity.

4.3 Interviews

Interviews will take place both internally and externally, with slightly different purpose and structure for each kind. Overall, the purpose is to gain qualitative information from individuals with experience from the field of employer branding. Below follows the structure and specific purpose for both types of interview.
4.3.1 Internal interviews

Interviews conducted within the organization itself aim to clarify the current structure surrounding employer branding in the company, get an idea of how the strategy from above is actually implemented and identify problems in this process. Interviews are performed with the following individuals:

- Responsible for employer branding at a global level
- Responsible for employer branding at a national level
- Employees engaged in employer branding
- Trainees

Trainees are interesting for a slightly different purpose than those with roles more closely attached to the employer branding management, since trainees have relatively recent experience from being exposed to this branding themselves. They most likely have a clear view of what expectations they had when being attracted and recruited and how these expectations have been met.

4.3.2 External interviews

Externally the idea is partly to benchmark against the organizations chosen for this purpose but also to extract advice and experience from experts within the field. These experts are found in the academic world of marketing and branding but also in the industry surrounding employer branding. This industry is a blend of companies creating overall rating lists of popular employers, offering employer branding advice directly to companies and distributing printed media with related topics which act as communication channels for advertising companies. Also consulted are students with experience from organizing career fairs. Interviews are conducted with the following types of individuals:

- Heads of employer branding at other organizations
- Marketing bureaus specializing in employer branding
- Researchers or academics in the field of marketing
- Students organizing employer branding events and fairs
4.3.3 List of respondents

The complete list of respondents with whom longer interviews have been performed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company X</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Global EB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company X</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>National EB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company X</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Head of Community Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company X</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Employee at student fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company X</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>HR representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company X</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Trainee 1/ Employee at student fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company X</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Trainee 2/ Employee at student fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company X</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Trainee 3/ Employee at student fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company A</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Head of employer branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company B</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Head of employer branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company C</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Head of employer branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universum</td>
<td>Karin Almcrantz</td>
<td>Global director of media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coreworkers</td>
<td>Elin Arnell</td>
<td>Project leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova</td>
<td>Marcus Warn</td>
<td>Senior consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTH</td>
<td>Henrik Ugglia</td>
<td>Expert on branding and</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARMADA</td>
<td>Moa Mossberg</td>
<td>Project leader</td>
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<td>Student fair</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Member of project group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student fair</td>
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<td>Member of project group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student fair</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Member of project group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Interview respondents
4.4 General research

When researching Company X, a substantial amount of information is available both in the form of internal documentation outlining the strategy as well as measurements and studies performed by external contractors that investigate the standing of the employer brand amongst the target audience. The review of this material serves to give a detailed picture of how the corporation works with their employer brand at a strategic level and how this is reflected at a lower level. Several of the documents concern both external and internal measurements regarding student attraction and employee satisfaction. Also studied are the following communication channels that are used for the purpose of employer branding:

- Printed advertising material
- Online presence
- Main website
- Social media
- General advertising
- Career fairs and events (see below)
- Employee testimonials

4.5 Career fairs

Every year there are a number of career fairs organized by students at different universities around Sweden. Company X will be participating in a majority of these, three of which will be taking place during the time span of this study. This is an opportunity to gain first-hand examples of how the employer branding is carried out in a real-life setting with students coming face-to-face with representatives of the company and not through indirect channels. The three companies selected for benchmarking are of particular interest, but behavior and activities of all present companies will be noted and if deemed interesting further examined.

4.5.1 Key observations

The main focus of these fairs is to study and observe similarities and discrepancies between Company X and the benchmarked companies, regarding how they behave at the fair, how they approach students, what material they bring, what preparations they make and so forth. Other companies present on the fair will also be studied but the main focus will be Company X, A, B and C.
4.5.2 Sample interviews

During fairs two types of students will be interviewed briefly. The first group is those students who just attended the fair and the second group is those who just attended Company X’s booth. The intention with the interviews is not to gain a broad quantitative collection of data but rather perform a focused case study with the following overall questions in mind for each group:

**Respondents visiting the fair**
- What attracts students to visit a specific company at the fair?
- What makes a student leave the company with a lasting, positive impression?

**Respondents visiting Company X’s booth**
- What is the overall impression of the booth?
- What message was conveyed?
- Impression of the company representatives?
- Suggestions for improvement?

No category of student is excluded from questioning but students closer to graduation and of those with the right field of study is of particular interest. As with the other interviews performed in the study, the full set of questions is available in the appendices.

4.6 Trustworthiness

In order to evaluate the trustworthiness of this report four criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) will be discussed. The four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. In addition to these the issue of respondent validity is also examined, which involves discussing the general findings with respondents to obtain their reactions and opinions (Collins and Hussey, 2009).

- **Credibility:**

All the respondents listed in section 4.3.3 were able to read and comment the report before it went to print. This removes the reliability that the interviewers misinterpreted the respondents during the interview. The respondents who were interviewed during student fairs however, they were not given that opportunity which implies that there might be a risk that the interviewers misinterpreted and contorted those answers.
Transferability:
This study focuses on the external employer branding work that is being done by Company X; the transferability criteria may therefore not be applicable to all types of scenarios. However the analysis may be applicable to companies in the same phase with their work surrounding employer branding as Company X.

Dependability
The method chapter in detail explains the research processes in order to increase the dependability.

Conformability
The questions asked the respondents are all attached to the appendices. All the notes from the interviews are available, but have been anonymized for respondent discretion. All the interviews were recorded.

Respondent validity
The authors discussed the general results from the study during several of the interviews in order to get the respondent’s opinion on the matter. The validity of the conclusions could be seen as strengthened as they often were shared among the respondents.

4.7 Method discussion

Employer branding, and branding in general, does not provide one “right way” or one general model that will be successful for all companies. The goal is to differentiate the brand from others and provide something unique, therefore a quantitative study with a vast amount of companies would have been more of a broad market analysis than desired targeted analysis. Benchmarking against companies that have similar organizational features and are perceived as attractive employers will be a much more beneficial method for Company X than if a quantitative analysis would be performed.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen primarily in order to have an open climate with the respondent and open up a discussion surrounding the topic. A lot of useful, and somewhat unexpected, information was revealed during side-track conversations that would probably not have been shared otherwise. One could argue that semi-structured interviews can however
influence the authors too much, with views and beliefs being transferred from the respondent and thus leading to a decreased objectivity.

In order to understand the current perception of Company X as an employer, research material from companies such as Universum and Nova has been examined. Although the number of respondents are vast and statistical reliability high, one could argue that the authors should have conducted similar research in order to get full insight in which questions were asked and how the study were conducted. However, as Company X views the research from these companies as valid and bases part of their strategy around this data, the authors will take the same standpoint. Sources will however always be closely examined to ensure validity.
5 Empirical findings

This chapter contains the results from the empirical study and is divided accordingly to the areas from the problem discussion: Strategy, structure and communication. Each section normally begins with findings from interviews with, and research concerning, Company X. Material from the benchmarking and external interviews are added where appropriate for comparison and to allow a comprehensive study of detailed issues. As several interviewed companies wish to remain anonymous, the use of reference will be scarce.

5.1 Strategy

Company X is currently in the midst of establishing a strategy concerning the employer branding practices in the corporation. Although employer branding often incorporates the areas of recruiting, developing and retaining employees, the strategy is delimited to focus on the attract stage. The current draft outlines the organization surrounding employer branding, contains guidelines for activities and sets a series of goals and measurements, enabling those responsible to follow results of the employer branding.

A section of the strategy describes how the corporate brand is a foundation for the employer brand and the purpose of having a distinct concept for this. The mission, vision and shared values of the group serve as a starting point for the development of the EVP. This is aligned with the overall strategy and also based on interviews with employees from all sections of the corporation.

The strategy outlines a set of activities that can be conducted in order to increase the employer brand value. The activities, further discussed in chapter 5.3, are sorted according to what purpose they are intended for which are as follows:

- Building awareness
- Building consideration
- Building ideal employer
5.1.2 Goals and measurements

The strategy analyses the current standing of the company and also sets future target levels according to two different goal areas:

- Ranking of ideal employer
- Employer branding image

The first goal is based on the yearly ranking list ”Företagsbarometern” presented by the company Universum, measuring where students most wish to work and what they are attracted by when choosing employer. Ratings are in different categories depending on the field of study, those relevant for the company and used in the strategy are Business, Computer/IT and Engineering.

The second area deals with how the employer brand is perceived by students and measures to what degree students associate the brand with a number of factors that drive attraction such as international opportunities, internal career paths or company culture. Both measurements are based on surveys performed by Universum and include more extensive analysis for the background to these results, available in attached reports.

5.1.4 Strategy in comparison

5.1.4.1 Company A

Company A view their employer brand as very much a part of their corporate brand. The general approach is to market it the employer brand the same way as the corporate brand but fill it with different values than the product brand. The values that are marketed externally are always gathered internally.

In matters of resource, a lot has happened at the company during the past three years. Whereas work then was focused on career fairs and collaborations with Universum, sometimes including small projects with student magazines. After a renewed focus, to become an attractive employer, a new strategy was developed. A team was assembled, target groups where identified and an EVP formulated. This strategy is still valid, although constantly subject to revision and specification.
While the implementation of the strategy has in the past been very reliant on individuals, today the situation is different. Due to a decentralized organization where the different parts need to work in the same manner, large parts of the process are now documented and have a clear structure. More specifically, the strategy defines the target groups, contains the EVP and sets a target number of activities to perform at specified universities. It also has an activity plan that is updated yearly, outlining what activities to perform and guidelines for how to do this.

Company A does not currently aim for any specific goals, but simply tries to be more attractive each year. This is considered a disadvantage, making it harder to motivate use of resources and create commitment within the organization, which is why goals are under discussion and will be set in the future. A rating planned to be used is the CareerIndex, developed by Careerbook. The index is built by surveys on what employees value at their employer and what new graduates are interested in. The index will be a basis for assessment of the EVP, determining how well the desired message is communicated.

5.1.4.1 Company B

The strategy of company B is built according to a forecast of the need for competence the coming five years although the strategy is set for three years. In the strategy a communication and activity plan, that is updated yearly, is included. While having a similar combination of goals as the other companies, company B goes so far as to set a specific minimum level on the overall ranking that they should exceed in all their markets. In addition to these overall goals, they also have a number of more detailed measurements. Usually when having a specific campaign in which case they monitor change in number of applications, hit rate of different channels and number of visitors to the career website.

5.1.4.1 Company C

For company C, a key feature of the strategy is that employer branding does not turn into an isolated bubble within the organization but instead functions as a vital part of the corporate strategy. As the company acts in an industry that will have very different conditions in the future the corporate brand is currently being redefined to a certain degree. It is important that the employer brand with its EVP follows this development to ensure the employer branding management strives for the same goals as the rest of the organization and empowers the corporation to meet future challenges. To have the employer branding strategy and core values
well established within the organization will increase internal support and make management easier.

The EVP has been developed with internal surveys and representatives from different business units to anchor it within the entire organization. The value proposition will function as a general umbrella with core values from which elements can be selected and adapted to appeal more to a specific target group. The message can then be new and differentiated but will still be recognizable as coming from company C.

Employer branding in company C has two general focus areas. One more the long term, where the target group consists of younger generations in school, pre-university. Here the aim is not to increase interest in Company C as such, but rather to increase interest in the field of engineering, often working with other large organizations to achieve this. The short term focus area, the more prioritized of the two, is students, new graduates and young professionals. With some favored universities, the aim is to position the company as employer of choice.

With goals they also make use of Universum's general ratings as well as more specified surveys regarding image. Like others interviewed the representative from Company C points out the difficulty in measuring success in employer branding, which is why they’re working to find alternative measurements. One method under evaluation is with the help of external service suppliers measure statistics of web traffic on job ads, for example how many views a certain ads get that result in an application. Another method is to have surveys with new employees, analyzing how well expectations are met after working a while at the company.

As described above all the benchmarked companies work with a similar set of goals as Company X where they use, or plan to use, both a general rating of ideal employer and specific assessment of associations to the employer brand. In interviews the respondents motivate this blend of ratings with the overall rating being a valuable number to show top management to justify the employer branding budget or to easily show current standing. At the same time the general consensus is that the rating doesn’t give useful insight concerning the branding activities. As pointed out by Arnell (2010), it is more a quantitative measure of external attraction than it gives any qualitative input, for example gaining or losing 5 steps on the ranking list can seldom be easily traced to the employer branding management but might as well be random chance or be caused by uncontrollable external factors.
However, the study of what values are associated with the employer brand more directly affects the employer branding management. Respondents put more significance into how well the EVP has been communicated. If a majority of students associate the brand with values that doesn’t agree fairly well with the desired value proposition then something has obviously gone wrong somewhere in the process which can then be analyzed and amended.

5.2 Structure

5.2.1 Internal organization

As shown in Karlsson’s research (2010) a majority of companies have a central function based on the corporate group level, usually organized under Human Resources. The individual in this role often works closely together with a corresponding at the national or local companies.

The internal structure managing employer branding in Company X is built as follows. At the top, a global head of employer branding is in charge of the corporate strategy. This person works under the human resources director. At a national level, there is a head of employer branding for each country. The Swedish national head is currently also heavily engaged in recruitment, dividing work capacity between these two areas. The global head defines the message that will be communicated and supplies advertising material, while the national head is responsible for the implementation in the country. Company X has also implemented an Employer Branding Network, connecting the national heads of employer branding in a network to exchange information, experience and possibly also work together.

Company A has three levels within employer branding: the global level where the person responsible acts as a link to the top management, reporting directly to both the director of communication and the director of human resources. Work is often focused on the career section of the corporate website and supporting the national sections by discussing ideas and producing tools and guidelines. At a national level, the head of employer branding is responsible for all the national companies and tries to convey a unified message directed at the target groups that the companies are in need of. This person also leads the employer branding team in which the local employer branding functions are represented, currently by 7 people although this might be subject for increase. Last of all there is the local level that is often represented by the HR-section at local companies. Usually works towards very specific target groups or schools. The team mentioned before works closely together to help in different efforts.
In company B, employer branding is organized within human resources but is separated from recruitment. A head of employer branding has the main responsibility but can request assistance from colleagues. In practical work the employer branding section often buys services both externally and internally, for example an external company that builds the booth for career fairs and an internal helpdesk to aid in handling of emails to the career website.

In company C employer branding for Sweden is managed within the HR function, under the section for staffing and competence development. This is further divided into functions: Attract, Recruit and Develop respectively. These are specialist functions which are complemented by a central HR function that handles administrative matters. In Sweden there are three individuals associated with employer branding full-time, working under the global head of employer branding that is in charge of overall strategy and the EVP.

The mere size of the company creates difficulties to internally spread the word of the work that the employer branding department are doing. One efficient way of spreading the word internally was to set up a blog that focused on the work that was carried out. They continuously write about events, fairs and other activities that are promoting the company as an employer. This has created a relative large group of followers that adds value to the company by contributing with critique, praise and suggestions for the future work.

5.2.2 External partners

5.2.2.1 Employer branding services

As mentioned under the strategic section Company X often collaborates with the company Universum Communications, part of which specializes in measuring the attractiveness of employer brands. Apart from the yearly ranking lists, which are published in several printed media and has a significant degree of external visibility, the company also performs more targeted surveys as ordered by the company. These often revolve around assessing what values are most associated with the employer brand.

The company also works with Nova Networks, a company similar to Universum but more focused on creating a network of talented students. Part of their service lies in investigating what values or attributes are wanted by students and experienced by young professionals, while also organizing events where young professionals are invited to meet the company.
The benchmarked companies use a similar setup of collaborations, as does a large amount of Swedish companies today. In many cases, recruitment is outsourced to external companies. Examples of other external partners or services directly used by the companies for employer branding or recruitment purposes are the online job portal Monster, career communities Careerboo and LinkedIn, recruitment and staffing consultants Manpower, Adecco and Poolia.

In Karlsson’s study (2010) the pattern is repeated. All of the responding companies regularly made use of external partners when working with employer branding, with Universum being one of the most featured in matters of information and surveys. Also highlighted is the importance of relationships with universities and colleges. Collaborations with these focused on establishing contacts where the required competence was available. All respondents were in a position where they had to prioritize between schools, with the largest engineering and business schools often being chosen.

To some extent companies also exchanged information and experience with other companies in similar industries engaged in employer branding. Arnell (2010) also reflects on this, how direct competition seems to be less serious in matters of the employer brand as compared to the corporate brand. This encourages collaboration “across borders” so to speak, as evident with Company C that often works with other organizations in one of their focus areas, to build interest for the industry among younger generations, as described in chapter 5.1.

5.2.2.2 Universities and student organizations

Company X is participating at several student fairs per year, the only planned events aimed specifically at universities and student organizations during this year. An activity plan was established during 2010 where the company listed which events they were attending. Target groups and prioritized universities were listed but they were very vague. There were two criteria that the company looked for within the target group but both are very general and most students are likely to identify themselves with these two criteria.

During one of the fairs that took place over two days, the company only attended the first day after having problem with allocating staff. There was also a view that the second day was not as rewarding as the first, even though there was no financial gain in only attending one day. The company had paid to be there both days but only attended one.
An interview with the student relations responsible for Company X in the 1990’s described a picture were the company put a lot of efforts into specialized events and a closer relationship with the universities and student unions. Working with universities and student organizations without any middle hand has several positive effects. It is often cheaper as students often are willing to do the job themselves; it enables a dialogue before the events were students have their say and helps out with ideas; the responsible from the company builds his/her brand and network which have positive effects in the future. It also allows the company to put efforts towards a smaller target groups, such as certain institutions on a certain university.

Companies A, B and C have all under the last 3-5 years made a point of actively working with different universities or student organizations. Often those responsible for the career fairs where they several times have acted as main sponsors or at the very least had a large presence at the fair. Being a main sponsor requires investing a larger amount of resources and time into the project, but has several benefits according to respondents: The main sponsors are not only more visible in the fairs communications channels such as printed catalogues, exhibition posters and online advertising but also have more influence in the work behind the fair and contribute with direct advice. Mossberg (2010), a former project manager of such a fair, points out that the sponsorship also helps establish a good relationship with the students organizing the fair which is valuable as the project groups exchange experience over the years.

The reverse is also in effect. Students with previous involvement in fairs describe how companies that one year are experienced as “troublesome” and display a lack of interest or commitment might retain this negative label the next year. This could have tangible effects on their participation on the fair, for example being provided with poor locations for the booth.

A number of other events than fairs, but aimed directly towards universities, are conducted by the companies. One of the most appreciated events, according to one company’s head of employer branding, is when a group of students gets to visit the company for a day. These meetings enable the company to more in-depth show products and the work life at the company. This is an easy and inexpensive way of building relationships and increases the chances of being seen as the ideal employer. The company also attends events and lunch presentations at the universities, partly because they at those occasions do not have to compete with other companies about the spotlight and partly because the event can be conformed to suit the audience. There should be a HR representative present at all fairs and events, in order to answer all questions related to job applications, thesis jobs and career paths.
Besides the fairs and events some of the companies try to be present at universities through other means, for example be shown on monitors in the students’ union, have their logo on food trays in the cafeteria or be involved in the inauguration of new students.

5.3 Communication

5.3.1 Communication channels

Surveys by Universum show the following pattern for how students choose to communicate. The blue bars represent how they desire to communicate and the orange bars how they actually do so. The three channels used to the highest percentage are: Career fairs, company websites and articles available online and in printed media. These are also the channels which this study focuses on, the last one widened to incorporate online presence in general.

![Chart 1: Communication channels (Universum, 2010)](image)
In the strategy of company X a set of activities are outlined and sorted according to what purpose they are intended for, which are as follows:

- **Building awareness**
  Mass-communication to a wide target audience, intended to draw attention to the employer. It contains descriptions of activities such as recruitment advertising, presence in media, online activities and social media. Also provides a database with images for use with employer branding activities.

- **Building consideration**
  Activities intended to form a relationship to the potential employee, currently focused on career fairs.

- **Building ideal employer**
  This is the final stage of activities that will make the company the preferred employer. This stage includes the trainee and young professional program and thesis and internship opportunities.

Company A has an activity plan that is updated yearly, outlining what activities to perform and guidelines for how to do this. The representative gives lunch presentations as an example of a useful event, where the company faces no competition for the student’s attention and has the possibility to talk for a long time.

The head of employer branding at Company B describe how the activity plan is modeled to have a balance between how different activities contribute to the employer brand. To build awareness they use marketing and mass communication, to build interest they use fairs. To be considered “ideal employer” more unique events, company presentations and field trips are necessary. They also try to involve individual meetings such as mentorships, summer jobs and internships to build a direct relationship with the student.

Company C is moving from one-way communication to more interactive forms of media, for example traditional editorial advertising is virtually nonexistent today. Instead more focus is on social media and digital networks such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook. Likewise, as an alternative to holding presentations for students at career fairs the company hosts interactive
events which they themselves own. There, they avoid showing what they can offer as an employer and instead show what they do as a company.

Interactive media is considered to provide quantity and a form of quality, the media itself being an attraction. However, the representative from the company warns that in the case of social media, one should realize the amount of time and effort required in the management of this. Marketing the Twitter account, updating the blog or responding to queries on the Facebook account all requires its fair share of resources. This is one reason why they often enlist individuals in the organization that already are active in a certain arena and have built a base of followers to spread messages of employer branding. Not only does it reach a larger audience, it also makes the message more credible. Credibility is very valuable when communicating employer branding but large organizations by necessity have to be more general in their communication at times, which can be interpreted as vague corporate messages without value. As expressed by a representative from Company C:

"Students don’t want corporate bullshit, but the problem is our organization sometimes has to spread a lot of corporate bullshit"

5.3.1.1 Employee testimonials

A phenomenon that has grown more common during later years is the use of employees as storytellers, where individuals working at a company share their experiences from working life to a larger audience. The method is used frequently by several of the benchmarked companies, often in the form of video blogs by trainees or new recruits. The message is more easily perceived as true and accurate, while students and young professionals today tend to put more value into information that is communicated by their peers. A recent survey shows that 75 % of the students interviewed follow employee testimonials from new graduates (Almcrantz, 2010).
5.3.2 Online presence

5.3.2.1 Career website

“The corporate website is the most strategic tool for employer branding so it’s surprising that so many companies give only the most basic information on their website”

“Our research shows that virtually everybody goes to the corporate website before deciding whether to apply so it is no longer good enough to just have a list of open positions. The website is where the company needs to demonstrate why it’s a great place to work.”

Eric Sylvers (2010)
Lundquist Online Awards

The main website of Company X offers information about job openings, values, career development and possibilities for students and graduates, similarly to how most companies present these possibilities. However, there is a large discrepancy between the international website and the one presented to the Swedish audience. Where the international one has more extensive info in general, contains employee testimonials and is more attractively presented while the Swedish version is lacking in these areas. The communication to prospective employees in Sweden is brief, explaining with a few bullet points qualities wanted in the individual and what the company offers. Under the tab “students and graduates” there is some information regarding the trainee program.

The main feature that is present on Company A, B and C’s career website is the employer testimonials. This can both deliver an insight about the actual work that is being done as well as convey a certain feeling the company wants to spread. As an example, when there is employee testimonials with people from different cultures and countries it shows that the company is international.

The main eye-catcher and differential factor of the website of one of the benchmarked companies from many others’ is the involvement of social media. The company advises the viewer to follow the company on Facebook, YouTube and Careerbook where there is quite a lot of useful information. The company is even mentioned as one of the best companies today when it comes to social media by Halvarsson & Halvarsson, an authority in the field.

Another good feature is the separation of ordinary jobs against summer and thesis jobs that is present on two of the companies’ career website. This enables the student to easily see that the
company actually offers summer and thesis jobs. It can also serve as an encouragement for the student to come with their own ideas regarding thesis subjects.

A survey conducted for the Lundquist Employer Branding Online awards 2010 shows that three-fourths of all companies do not have any contact information for people with questions regarding career. None of the studied companies had the name and email address to a specific person which the reader could contact. The survey also shows that 75% of the users are requesting this information. Of the benchmarked companies, one had the personal contact information on their career website, and an interview with this person revealed that he/she uses an in-house service desk to answer questions and direct the person to the correct department, when it could be done. Otherwise the responsible person would have to answer the email.

Another part that shows transparency is the fact that one of the benchmarked companies lists their benefits, such as health and parental leave benefits.

**Career website information - Overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Available jobs</th>
<th>Thesis</th>
<th>Summer jobs</th>
<th>CV bank</th>
<th>Employee testimonials</th>
<th>Social media</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Secondary school</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Contact info to student responsible</th>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No**</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Can be found under available jobs but no separate information regarding thesis opportunities
**Not on the Swedish site, only the international site

Table 2: Career website information - Overview
5.3.2.2 Social media

"Due to its size, scope and scale potential social media have become appealing to businesses of all sizes across all industries around the world. Following a ‘wait and see’ period, companies are now seriously starting to use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube to connect and interact with current and potential employees. Successful use of social media has had a positive impact on employer brand equity for companies such as Starbucks, EMC, Sodexo, Cisco, Intuit, Coca-Cola, Zappos and Microsoft."

Brett Minchington (2010)

It’s time to get social

The presence within the social media sphere for Company X on a corporate group brand level is today very limited since most of the communication is done through the local national brands within the group. This is an active standpoint in order to not undermine the local brand activities. However, the locally branded social media channels should strive for increasing the connection to the group name.

On a group level there is a basic Facebook information page with no possibility for two way communication. A search for the company’s corporate group name and blog generates no matches that are found relevant. Meanwhile, if you search for the local brand name and blog the top five results are relevant.

In essence, the same result applies to a search for the company name and twitter. One of the top results seems to be the company, but no tweets have been made and the account appears inactive. Another result directs the viewer to a blog belonging to the group but with the local brand as the profile, i.e. color schematic, brand name and so on. The YouTube search for the company name results in 170 more or less relevant movie clips, the first being a video presentation of the company from 2009. There are regular posts of the work within the company as well as showing many of the exciting products. There is no official channel and uploads are done by random users.

The overall benchmark shows that all companies are present on the social media scene to different extents. One of the benchmarked companies includes links to their social media activities on the company website, thus validating it as a communication channel. It shows that the company includes it in the communication package and wants people to view their social
media presence. This company is also the most social media active of the studied companies. They have their own YouTube channel showing company videos from all over the world. This feature makes the company feel very international and transparent when it comes to letting their employees share their opinions. Other social media that are being used by the benchmarked companies include Twitter and Careerbook.

Social media - Overview

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Social media on career site</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>YouTube channel</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Careerbook</th>
<th>Blog</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company C</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only an information page, no updates or two-way communication

Table 3: Social media - Overview

Company A is the only company benchmarked that includes links to social media on the company website. The company has a very active Facebook page with updates from all around the globe, letting employees from all over the world tell their stories. Links to both Twitter and their YouTube channel shows that they are active in the social media scene. The company is active on Careerbook with several updates a month. They communicate both company news and available jobs. Upcoming events and company movie are also included.

Company B has a Facebook page for the Nordic region. The page is filled with useful information such as a presentation of trainees, past and upcoming events and various pictures from career days and events. The company post thesis jobs in the log and seem to be updating with on a regular basis. The page has not that many followers and it might be caused by the group name which is directly the company name.

There is an active Twitter account, both a Swedish and an international account. A search on YouTube results in a few videos including commercials and documentary material. The most popular is a song showing employees singing about the company and their products. The effect of the video is not easily obtained, it has gotten more dislikes than likes and it is almost impossible to predict how it has affected the company and employer brand.
Company C is somewhat active on the social media scene. They are active on twitter with an account that is regularly updated with over 6000 people following them. On Facebook there is no group that seems to be held by the company itself, some smaller groups are created by employees but no official page exists.

In a subsite to the main website, the company posts news and blogs about technical updates such as newly developed apps. It is a community for technical developers and the company, through this site, is active on many social media platforms such as twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Amplify SlideShare and Delicious. The site also has a forum where employees post entries.

5.3.3 Fairs

“For many organizations, it is a must to participate at career fairs, but before putting up a costly stand and sending employees over to campuses the aim and message why you attend must be clear and consistent.”

Parment & Dyhre (2009) Sustainable employer branding

During the conduction of this research, Company X attended three work fairs at three different Swedish universities. The showcase included 2 roll-ups, giveaways, employees including one HR representative, a competition, a computer with the company website. On one of the fairs there was material with information about the company. The conducted interviews with students attending the fair were fairly unanimous that the rolls ups were confusing and poorly designed. One student reflected:

“It was hard locating Company X; I looked for it but did not see that it was Company X due to the roll ups were the company name was on the bottom. I was also confused by all the mishmash of logotypes on one of the roll ups”

Another aspect that the interviews enlighten was that a majority of the respondents thought that the people in the booth were the most important factor. They should be open and welcoming and show an interest in the student. Several of the students wanted people from different departments as well as a HR representative to answer questions about thesis opportunities, summer job etc.

The giveaways offered at the studied fairs consisted of a basic assortment of pens but also a product related to the company’s area of business that was available to the winner of a quiz with
questions about the company. The desired effect is mainly to attract visitors to the display case where they will hopefully stay to take part of other information and talk with the staff present. The prize, on two out of three fairs, were however seen obsolete and not an attractive prize by both company representative and by students visiting the booth. One student claimed:

"The competition makes the company look very unprofessional. The prize is a joke and the questionnaires were poorly designed."

When staffing the fairs there was usually en email going out to potential candidates who then could show their interest in participating. The staffing was made with consideration to which fair that was attending. By trying to staff people with associations, such as attended the school or working in the same city, there was an easier connection to the students. A preparation email was sent out before the fair which included information about the specific fare and what preparations that were needed from the employee’s side.

However, some of the participants lacked for structure and motivation during the fairs. The enthusiasm was dampened by the booth which did not, in their opinion, represent the company fully out and did not convey the size, technical leadership or the international nature of the company. After participating at a fair, there is seldom any evaluation of the company’s performance internally. In addition, one former trainee that has participated at a fair several years remarks how feedback given seldom results in any changes. Other trainees point out how, when participating in fairs, they often experienced a lack of support from higher levels in the organization. If they had new ideas on activities they were, if not dismissed downright, left to their own devices to implement these ideas.

The overall view of the benchmarked companies is that the booths are representative of the company size and ambition. All the companies have solid back pieces giving it a consistent and professional look whatever is behind the booth. It also has a consistency in the communication, all the booths are easily recognized as the company’s since they are going in company colors and the company brand is well displayed. Overall the booths are fairly large in size and draws attention quickly.
The major findings in the interviews with the head of employer branding at Company A, B and C were the structure surrounding the fairs. All of the companies viewed the fairs as an important part in meeting students and the conduction had a more businesslike approach than Company X. The overall opinion was that the fairs were sales job were students have to be approached instead of viewing it as a sheer benefit for the students. All companies tried to staff based on which school they were attending. By choosing someone with the same education or a connection to the school it created an identifying factor amongst the students.

In order to get the desired behavior of the fair participant one of the companies had a “training” session some weeks before the actual fair. The staff got a chance to familiarize themselves with the booth and the other people. It was also an important opportunity to give guidelines of how to behave in the booth. This company also had an internal network for newly employees to spread the company values, learn how a good ambassador behaves as well as create an opportunity to know other people within the organization.
All of the benchmarked companies prepared themselves before the fair opened with a gathering and a quick meeting regarding the day. The essence of the interviews was that fairs were an important tool to build awareness and interest in the company.

One of the companies had a differentiating feature in their booth. Without going into any details, that could jeopardize the anonymity of the company, it is a competition that is somewhat physical while testing the logic and stress capabilities of the student. The interview with staff at the fair revealed that it was an appreciated competition that drew a crowd. Although, one of the students interviewed could remember the competition but not the company and the benefit of the competition could then be questioned.
6 Results and analysis

This chapter contains analysis of the findings from the empirical study, which are also where applicable compared to theory from the literature review. The chapter is largely divided according to the proposed breakdown of the employer branding process. In each section, proposals for improvement are given.

In chapter 3, three areas of research were formulated: formulating an employer branding strategy, organizing a structure to implement this strategy and ultimately communication of the desired image and brand values. Below follows the analysis of the empirical results gathered that have value to this research.

6.1 Strategy

As a whole the strategy contains the vital parts identified by the current research surrounding employer branding, for example an EVP, and makes use of the company’s vision, mission, shared values and brand platform as a base for the employer branding concept.

When formulating the EVP, a large amount of internal interviews has been done to ensure that the promise to potential employees is based on what is actually experienced by current employees. This is one of the most important aspects when delivering a brand message: that the company as an employer can actually deliver on this promise. A false message would not only have damaged the employer brand in a longer perspective but it would also be costly in resources since it is difficult to retain dissatisfied employees resulting in a loss of invested time and money.

The major conclusion that was drawn from the empirical research is that Company X needs to define a specific and clear target group for the employer branding activities. Three concrete actions that are needed:
- **Decide what defines the group of prospective employees that is most likely to add the most value to Company X**

This definition should be developed with the corporate strategy in mind and have a horizon of at least 3-5 years. The definition of the group can incorporate both academic background and personal traits but should be relatively narrow; the example “skilled IT engineers” is not adequate. Rather, define what schools produce the most desirable graduates and what programs at these schools are most suitable.

- **Define the overall purpose of employer branding as becoming ideal employer in the minds of this group**

Having a defined target group also means prioritizing this group over others. In practice, this means basing the employer branding strategy and general message to communicate on what would elevate the employer brand in the minds of the target group and not in the mind of an average student.

- **Collaborate more closely with a fewer number of schools and organizations, giving a stronger presence at fewer locations as opposed to a weak presence in many locations**

Focusing resources to a smaller number of events and locations would enable creating more impact at these events that would most likely create a spill-over effect at other schools, given that the selected schools are among the biggest and most reputable. Also, closer collaborations would help build better relationships with the student organizations. It is important to realize that these collaborations require a commitment over time and is not just a matter of paying more money but rather maintaining an active dialogue. These collaborations are often a cost effective way of working, instead of using a third part for arranging events and activities.

One major benefit with having narrowed down the target group is the measurement aspect; do the desired students have an impression of the company that matches that of the EVP? If not, what can be done to correct this?
6.2 Structure

6.2.1 Internal organization

Compared to the companies selected for benchmarking the overall impression of the internal organization is similar. The companies have more or less the same approach with key individuals being responsible for the employer branding at different levels in the corporation, answering to the director of human resources (or equivalent) at the highest level. However, Company X has not put as much focus into employer branding as the benchmarked companies during the previous years and are in the midst of a changing organization structure.

6.2.2 External collaborations

External partners are often used for similar purposes and are more or less the same for all companies, perhaps due to a few organizations such as Universum and Nova currently dominating the market for employer branding services. Also similar is the use of related services such as the job search portal Monster or the rising trend of career communities such as Careerbook and LinkedIn.

The use of external consulting and services is positive for a number of reasons. Partly the collaborations often result in good advice, create productive events or simply attract large numbers of applicants but a primary factor is the importance of maintaining visibility in the communication channels that attract a large number of potential employees. For example the yearly ratings may not necessarily contribute with useful input to the employer branding management but is nevertheless a highly visible phenomenon that the company can ill afford to ignore. These ratings often include the company whether they wish it or not but in this case it is important to maintain a constructive relationship with the party responsible for the measurements.

The notable difference regarding external partners lies in the approach toward schools, where companies A, B and C have all had increased commitment at selected universities during the past few years. As shown, this has a number of positive effects. Committed companies with strong relationships to the group organizing a fair can more easily negotiate the best location for their display booth and will be prioritized to be featured in events taking place. As evident from related studies, this is in a way an effect of the need to choose
In conclusion, it is not necessarily a matter of always being the main sponsor or paying a lot of money but rather having a clear ambition and ongoing dialogue with the project groups.

6.2.3 Focusing the work

The above analysis leads to proposals that Company X can have use of. In the upcoming process the fundamental aspect is to focus work and activities towards the target group. The following actions should be taken.

- **Create clear and well-documented strategy and activity plans at a national level**
  In order to make employer branding less dependent on key individual responsible for the implementation, documentation and guidelines for the strategy and activities has to be very detailed. Making the management of employer branding less sensitive to who is actually implementing it will also help in communication a consistent message, making the employer brand more easily recognizable no matter what kind of activity or communication channel the prospective employee meets.

- **Evaluate and follow up activities**
  As general effects of employer branding is not always easily measureable, neither is specific activities. However, finding ways to measure results from activities on a smaller scale than yearly effects of the strategy on the employer brand in nationwide rankings would make it easier to evaluate what communication channels are the most effective. Examples of how to do this could be to measure the number of sent applications directly after events or campaigns, or perhaps even measure the number of applicants that are actually interesting. An effective way could be to simply ask students visiting the company at a fair or participating in other events what they thought or if their image of the employer brand has improved or not. An important aspect is also to listen to input from company staff participating in events. It could be argued that this is already done, however it seems that the input does not result in any actual change.

- **Create an internal network for ambassadors**
  A network for new employees that had regular meetings, say once every six months, could have dual benefits. Partly internal where the network would serve to more quickly immerse employees in company culture and facilitate networking, partly for the benefit of employer branding where the network would serve as an excellent environment in which to educate employees in how to be a good brand ambassador and discuss the employer branding strategy.
6.3 Communication

The communication section is divided into three important parts: “Form vs. content”, “Sending the wrong message” and “Transparency”. The last section summarizes the most important proposals for improvement.

6.3.1 Form vs. content

Overall, companies A, B and C have a higher degree of consistency in the presentation of their message in all aspects of their communication: online ads, print media and material for fairs. Students recognize who is sending the message and will more easily create a lasting impression from each consecutive meeting with the company. Not only does this recognition make it easier to build on already existing relationships and associations but a consistent way of communicating also make it easier to accept the message.

Create a clear, distinct and unified package for all aspects of communication, covering details such as fonts and colors in leaflet, video presentations and material for career fairs. The package should be based on, or part of, the organizations existing communication package and not be something separate for employer branding. This will help potential employees recognize both the sender and the message and ultimately help them create a relationship with the company. Enforcing this also means not using material diverging from the package.

The important factor in the meetings for students are seldom purely superficial gimmicks or glossy folders in monstrously large booths at the career fairs, however students do recognize which companies have put effort into their appearance. The external appearance attracts attention and most importantly reflects the level of ambition by the Company. A shoddy appearance will risk setting a negative tone for the dialogue.

6.3.2 Sending the wrong message

The presence by Company X at career fairs gives an overall impression that is not consistent with the impression desired. The competition and its prize is a good example of this, a product chosen to be related to the industry, reflect the pioneering character of the company and also attract students. However, the product was in the view of visitors seen as an outdated and obsolete model, something that when associated to the brand of the company is in total opposition to the desired values of being "modern” and "technologically pioneering".
The analysis would be that rather than doing something halfway, don’t do it at all. The associations created by this giveaway is more likely to be negative than neutral and since the product is closely related to the company’s business these negative associations will spill over onto the brand itself. It would most likely have more impact if the most desirable and up-to-date model and brand of the product was offered but if there is absolutely no room in the allocated budget, the preferable solution would be to have no giveaway of this kind.

Nonetheless, the authors would in the example above like to argue for the use of a more suitable giveaway in the form of a more high-tech product in this segment. Highly desirable in the target audience, it would create the desired attraction to the display case and create positive associations, reinforcing the values the company wishes to communicate. As a suggestion the competition can encompass visitors to all the fairs that the company participates in and have a single winner for all of these, instead of one per occasion. The outcome for the winning student would of course be delayed but in this way, the cost for a more expensive giveaway can be distributed over all the fairs enabling this solution even if the budget has little margin.

6.3.3 Transparency

One vital conclusion from the research conducted is that employer’s needs to be more transparent then before as information spreads faster in today’s IT-driven world. In order to communicate what the company actually does, Company X needs to include practical examples more in the communication.

- *Give insight into employee’s everyday work*

Students today are more curious of what the actual working situation could be like than they are interested in hearing general and abstract messages of corporate values. With this in mind, providing channels where employees can talk about their experience at the company is highly effective. The channels can be in the form of video interviews, simple blogs or similar. Employees should preferably be relatively young and new to the company as a message conveyed by someone a student can relate to as a peer is more convincing.
- **Use local brands more in the communication**

Company X has a strategy of communicating solely with the corporate brand in matters of employer branding. This is most likely a solid decision, since Company X as a corporate brand is still relatively new to most students. However, the use of more familiar national sub-brands should not be avoided entirely as these could serve to give concrete examples of what Company X actually does. Also, students in general are clever enough to understand the distinction between the employer Company X, as a group and its national subsidiaries.

- **Make sure the desired message is conveyed in all aspects of the communication**

When communicating with students it is important to remember that the message is not only distributed by words in leaflets, on posters or by what representatives say. It is also distributed by how the representative acts, how the company presents itself and many other details. In the case of Company X, where the desired image to be communicated is that of a technically pioneering, high-end and international company, presence at fairs have generally been anonymous in comparison to companies of equal stature. Booths have been small and anonymous and giveaways have been relatively low-tech. The impression given to students is not in line with the desired values.
7 Conclusions

This chapter concludes the thesis by describing the implications from the final analysis, summarizing the suggestions for improvement and suggesting what areas could benefit from further research.

7.1 Problems, solutions and potential

As the organization is undergoing changes, so is the management of employer branding. This thesis has therefore been produced at a volatile point in time where areas of investigation might be changed during the course of the study. However, this change does not render the results useless but instead provide an advantageous environment where improvements can be easily implemented. With the changing conditions in mind the results have been produced with more focus on what should be done than what has been done.

7.2 General reflections

The below reflections are not necessarily directly applicable to the employer branding management in a concrete way but nevertheless are important to bear in mind.

7.2.1 Strategy

- Don’t decrease employer branding efforts when need for recruitment is low. The employer brand needs a long-term commitment and the company will benefit from being perceived as present even when business is not booming.

- Focus measurements towards the target groups. Do the desired students have an impression of the company that matches that of the EVP? If not, what can be done to correct this?

- Prioritize more. Not only a way to free up budget space, targeting efforts to a smaller number of communication channels, activities or events while rejecting others is in itself a way to define the employer brand more clearly.
7.2.2 Structure

- Make sure employer branding is not an isolated issue for a closed-off section within HR. The employer brand is very much a part of the corporate brand and needs to be reflected in the organization, both in terms of ambassadors spreading the message but also making use of available competence when implementing employer branding.

- Create a detailed plan for participation in fairs, including more extensive education for participants. This should at least include a clear work division, rules for behavior basic tips and tricks for how to approach students and appropriate behavior in booths.

- Measure performance at activities, for example by setting a target number of student contacts to make during a day of a fair and then counting the amount of gathered email-addresses. If the target number is not reached there would be reason to analyze if this is due to the company’s behavior (that can then be adjusted) or external factors.

7.2.3 Communication

- Make employee testimonials, in the form of video blogs, blogs or twitter, an integrated part of the work for trainees or participants in the professional program.

- Motivate participating staff at fairs! Support their ideas, make sure their feedback promptly has effect and allow their enthusiasm to shine through.

- Don’t do things “just because”. Participation in fairs or other events needs to be approached with ambition and effort; otherwise students will pick up on what they perceive as a business-as-usual approach.

- Create a clear, distinct and unified package for all aspects of communication, covering details such as fonts and colors in leaflet, video presentations and material for career fairs. The package should be based on, or part of, the organizations existing communication package and not be something separate for employer branding. This will help potential employees recognize both the sender and the message and ultimately help them create a relationship with the company. Enforcing this also means not using material diverging from the package.
7.3 Future research

A quantitative study to a large number of students with detailed profiles could complement the results, determining what suggestions would be most effective in what category of students. As is the suggestions are based upon a combination of best-practice benchmarking, small and focused surveys as well as large but general surveys concerning employee priorities.

The financial aspect has not been in focus and this could very well be a basis for further research, possibly investigating if there exists a direct correlation between expended resources and higher effect. Benchmarking budgets for employer branding to a large number of similar organizations would also be relevant to this field.

The relationship between the corporate, or consumer, brand and the employer brand could be more closely examined, in order to find both positive and negative effects with this association.
8 References


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9. Appendix 1: Interviews

All interviews were conducted in Swedish, but the questions asked have been translated into English for the readers' benefit. The interviews were semi-structured and an open climate was desired. The respondent was encouraged to speak freely and the question was mainly guidelines to ensure that all desired topics were discussed.

**Head of employer branding at company X and benchmarked companies**

- Describe shortly your background and current position.
- Describe your view on employer branding.
- How does your company work with employer branding from an organizational view. Decision making, organizational structure for example.
- How is the practical work being conducted? Who decides fair participants, how are these prepared etc.?
- What is your aim with your employer branding?
- Do you have any specific and measurable targets?
- How are the results being followed through?
- What do you think is the major challenge in your job?
- Which activities have gotten the most positive response?
- Your view on quality versus quantity when it comes to activities?
- Do you have any external partners for employer branding? Is so, is this an ongoing partnership?
- Which way do you see the employer branding work will go in the near future?

**Trainees at company X**

- Tell us briefly about your background.
- How did you come in connection/what was your relationship with Company X during your study period? Through which communication channels did you see the company?
- What was your perception of Company X as an employer before starting your job?
- How did you get information regarding Company X as an employer?
- Describe the recruitment process. Did you feel that you got sufficient information regarding your future job from Company X?
- Does Company X deliver on their brand promise as an employer?
- Can you think of any positive aspects of Company X that were not conveyed to you during your study time and while engaged in the recruitment process?
Fair participants from company X

- Tell us shortly about your background.
- Explain your current employment and your career within Company X.
- At which fair did you participate and have you ever participated before?
- How were you approached as a possible fair participant?
- Did you get any kind of training or education before the fair?
- Do you wish that more education and training were conducted before the fair?
- Did you get any guidelines about what you should convey to the students? Company values, EVP and so on.
- Did you get any information regarding target group for Company X, which students were desirable for the company?
- What is your opinion about the roll ups?
- What is your opinion about the material and handouts?
- What is your opinion about the competition and prize?
- Do you think the booth represents Company X as an organization?
- How do you experience the perception of the booth from the students?
- Would you have liked to see any addition to the booth?
- What do the students usually ask about?

Students visiting the fairs

- Your education and year?
- Did you plan on going to the booth of Company X before the fair? If not, why did you visit the booth?
- What was your view of Company X as an employer before the fair?
- Has this view changed at all because of the fair?
- What was your impression of Company X booth? What message did they convey?
- What did you think of the:
  - Material
  - Roll-ups
  - Competition
  - People
- What do you view as most important in a booth?
- Most positive aspect of the booth?
- Most negative aspect of the booth?