



Strengthening Employer Brand in an Expert Organization

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The objective of this master's thesis is to make a thorough plan for the case company to strengthen their employer brand as well as sustain it in the longer run. The plan includes detailed information about tools, actions, and teams in charge. The purpose of this master's thesis is to start the developing work for a stronger employer brand for the case company. The plan is made as easy to follow and as low effort as possible, as the case company struggles with resources.

The case company is operating in the platform economy field and wishes not to be mentioned by name. The company has been running since 2015 and it has around 90 employees. The case company has its headquarters in Finland but is also operating in few other countries in Europe and around the world.

The theoretical framework consists of platform economy, employer branding, company culture and leadership. Employer branding framework is divided into basic information of the concept, why it is important, employee engagement, measuring employer brand, tools, employer branding return of investment and employer value proposition.

Information about the case company's current employer brand was collected with a survey. The survey was sent to current employees as well as employees who resigned in 2021. The research approaches used are quantitative research as well as qualitative research. The research approach was chosen as it provides a wide enough information base to be able to plan for developing the company's employer brand.

The survey results indicate that the employer brand is currently at a decent level. The employees share the same values as the case company, and they are proud of where they work at. The biggest issues are with focus and clarity on what comes to company goals and daily tasks. According to the research, the employees are likely to participate in the employer branding work if they are given a path to follow and some guidelines.

Keywords: employer branding, company culture, leadership

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1 Introduction

As the competition for motivated and skilled employees is high, it is crucial for companies to have a good employer brand. Especially now the global COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more important to invest in the employer branding. To be able to recover from COVID-19 companies must have the most skilled and motivated employees possible and that's only possible with a strong employer brand. The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of employer branding, company culture and leadership. Thesis also contains research about a case company's employer brand and culture, leading to a plan on how to strengthen the employer brand from today's situation.

1.1 Background

The case company has been growing fast and the atmosphere has been quite busy. They have done much and have had a nice number of skilled applicants to open jobs, but nobody hasn't really had time to study the opportunities a strong and well-planned employer brand could have. Of course, it's also a both money and human resource matter and in this case the plan for better employer brand needs to be as low-maintenance and easy to adapt as possible.

1.2 Objective

The objective of this master's thesis is to make a thorough plan for the case company to strengthen their employer brand as well as sustain it. The plan includes detailed information about for example tools, actions, and teams in charge. Stronger employer brand will in the long run help the case company to have more skilled job applicants, more engaged employees, and better success in business.

1.3 Case company

The case company (later company X) is operating in the platform economy field. It has been running since 2015 and it has around 90 employees. Company X has its headquarters in Finland but is also operating in few other countries in Europe. Company X is operating in a field where there's a lot of competition of skilled and motivated work force which makes it crucial to have a good employer image and brand.

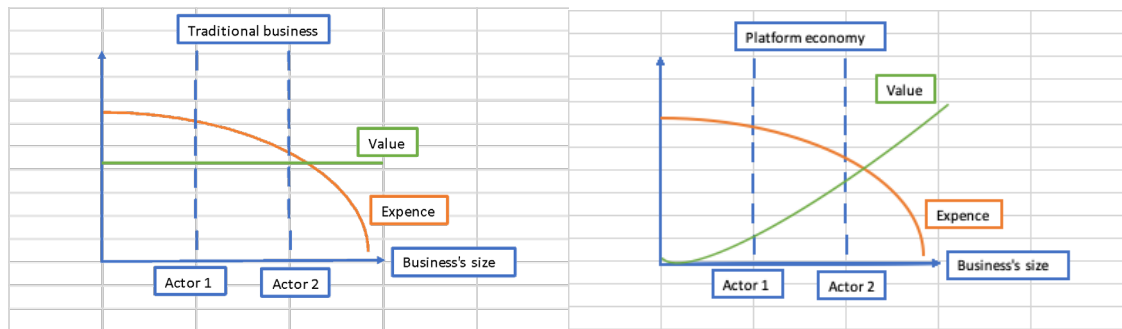
2 Platform economy

Platform economy is a rather new digital economy, which is utilizing online frameworks (Deloitte, 2018). The platform economy is disrupting the economy, businesses, labor markets and our daily lives (Deloitte, 2018). Well-known companies who are operating in the platform economy area are for example Uber, Airbnb, and Amazon (Deloitte, 2018). The platform economy field is huge as seven out of 10 most valuable companies globally are based on a platform business model (Watts, 2020). There's still room to grow as the mentioned big companies reach even further into new industries and the traditional businesses will learn, adapt, and combine the best of both worlds (Watts, 2020).

Platform economy is constantly growing and gaining more players in the field. With platform economy it is possible to accomplish new globally scalable digital product and service innovations over traditional industries (Finanssialalle). Platform economy serves the end users as directly as possible and wins with its speed compared to other competing structures (Finanssialalle). In order for platform economy to work well, there has been constructed some common boundary objects, which can be divided to cooperative resources and technical resources (Finanssialalle). Technical resources can be for example Application Programming Interfaces (API) and Software Development Kits (SDK) and they are used to secure data's mobility (Finanssialalle).

Within the platform economy there are relationships between three parties: the platform itself, the employee, and the customer (Deloitte, 2018). Platforms which are made for consumers are at the moment focusing mostly on streaming, ridesharing and ecommerce while business to business platforms may include for example software-as-a-service (Watts, 2020). In a traditional, linear, business model a company creates a product and sells it to a distributor who then sells it to a consumer and the value is often created by making the supply chain as efficient as possible (Hoyles, 2021). Online platforms on the other hand have the advantage of being able to create value by harnessing the network effects of the internet (Hoyles, 2021).

When an organization changes from traditional business model to platform economy they move from developing mostly internal aspects to developing and utilizing knowledge in the world outside their own business (Digirole, 2021). In platform economy, industries and sectors are seen as the same phenomenon's applications which can be used in integrated platforms (Digirole, 2021). In practice this means that different organizations bring for example their documents and/or data to the same platform or cloud. (Digirole, 2021). This helps the world to get rid of silos and helps to make moving data easier (Digirole, 2021).



Source: alustatalous.fi

As platform economy is a growing business field and it has so different aspects when comparing to traditional businesses, it requires some changes in education as well. One estimation is that in the next 15 years one-third of workforce is probably replaced by computer-controlled equipment (Hytönen and Kovalainen, 2019, p. 78). Another fact is that people will most likely work in jobs that do not even exist yet (Hytönen and Kovalainen, 2019, p. 78). As the technology is developing fast creating for example platform economy companies and business ideas, it's a real challenge for education to keep up with the change (Hytönen and Kovalainen, 2019, p. 78). In some areas the employees' technological knowhow is becoming so important that there is a group of "new experts" whose skills can be developed within companies only through the application of technology (Hytönen and Kovalainen, 2019, p. 79). As study units, like universities, can be a bit slow in their movements what comes to new areas of studies, one option is to form new forms of cooperation between educational institutions and companies (Hytönen and Kovalainen, 2019, p. 79).

3 Employer branding

In this chapter we are going to go through employer branding as a whole: what it means to begin with, what parts does it include and why it's important. We are also going to take a look at the tools that can be used when working with employer branding as well as employer branding return on investment (later ROI) and employer value proposition (later EVP).

It is easy to mix employer branding with recruitment marketing. Some might even think they are the same thing. The terms are very close to each other, and you might not be able to talk about the other without the other, but they indeed stand for different things (Rec right, 2021). Employer branding defines and positions what and who the company is when recruitment marketing is about communicating it (Rec right, 2021). Employer brand defines the company's reputation as an employer (Fraser Dove, 2019).

3.1 What is employer branding

Like all companies have their company brand, they also have an employer brand whether they have put thought and work into it or not. A good employer brand does not only help the company to acquire the best employees but also helps in keeping them (Personio, 2021). Employer brand includes for example employer value proposition, company's logo and design elements, such as color palette and fonts as well as photography styles (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017).

Happy employees are in the center when developing and executing an employer brand. The actual employees of a company are far more reliable and authentic than for example advertising campaigns (Personio, 2021). There are many possibilities how a company produce content with their employees, for example with surveys, images, and videos. One option is to publish employee testimonials in their website and/or social media. When choosing the right ambassadors to be the company's face, the company most likely wants to choose the ones who identify particularly strongly with the company (Personio, 2021). Today's job seekers are smart, and they know if a company is disingenuous with the employer brand (Chignell, 2018). When highlighting the best parts of companies and working there, it needs to be about sharing the truth, not by polishing the situation (Chignell, 2018).

Even though companies can control most of what becomes to their employer brand there are things that are at least harder to control if not impossible. These harder to control areas include for example media, friends and family, and word-of-mouth (Slater, 2017).

Employer brand must be aligned with the company's strategies, such as business strategy, HR and talent strategy and marketing strategy (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017). When well aligned with all these strategies, employer brand is for example supporting the kind of talent capabilities required for the organization to function effectively and maintaining a general sense of brand integrity (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017).

In the case company HR is responsible for employer branding. It basically means that they need to make sure everyone's on the same page and responsibilities are clear as they of course aren't the ones making all the work. To be successful, HR needs the support of the other organization and a wide range of different stakeholders.

There are few principles that companies and/or managers can do in order to strengthen the employer brand. It's important to notice that behavior of the managers as well as the employees should be in line with the company's values and goals (Eriksson T., Näppä A. & Robertson J., Crafting, 2022). One of the principles that Eriksson, Näppä, Robertson and Crafting suggested in their article called *Crafting a paying-it-forward mindset in business*:

Five principles for a competitive employer branding advantage is “You need to believe in it and start doing it!”, which means that getting things started and then continued in a positive manner is the key to the success. At the same time, it emphasizes the value of managers leading with their example (Eriksson T., Näppä A. & Robertson J., *Crafting*, 2022). Other principles the authors suggested in the article include for example the urge to set expectations and rules of and engagement, and that one should recognize and reward the behavior (Eriksson T., Näppä A. & Robertson J., *Crafting*, 2022).

3.2 Why is it important

A positive employer brand is the key to the success in recruiting new employees. It not only helps the company to get the best candidates but it also for example helps to get a higher recruitment marketing ROI (Personio, 2021).

Once a company has succeeded in hiring an inspired and talented employee, the next challenge is to retain them. The work is begun already in the recruitment process and the HR or recruitment department of each company has a great responsibility in the matter. It's not enough when you find a talented candidate, but they also need to have realistic expectations for the company and the work. One way to find out if the candidate is indeed suitable for the company is to compare the candidate's expectations with the company's EVP (Personio, 2021). Highly motivated and happy employees also feel proud to be part of the team and the company and in the best case they could also become brand ambassadors (Rec right, 2021).

According to sociologists Timothy Butler and James Waldrop, there are three primary factors determining employee satisfaction: skills, moral values, and interests. When an employee feels they are skilled for the job, they are more likely to also feel satisfied. At the same time the company's moral values and the employees' moral values must align in order to raise satisfaction. Similar interests come into the picture when comparing the employees' daily tasks with their own interests: the more they overlap the better. (Personio, 2021).

A study by Rybaczewska, Sparks and Sulkowski states that actually a good employer image or employer brand also has an affect on consumer behavior (Rybaczewska M., Sparks L., Sulkowski L. 2022). This mind game brings up new interesting interfaces for example between marketing and HR, which have used to focused on different perspectives of the business (Rybaczewska M., Sparks L., Sulkowski L. 2022). The research states that “combining human resources aspects of company's image (employer image) and the core interests of retail and service marketing (consumers' decision making) can contribute to differentiation amongst competitors in the market and play a role as a significant factor during the purchase decision process (Rybaczewska M., Sparks L., Sulkowski L. 2022).

3.3 Employee engagement

In short employee engagement stands for the emotional commitment an employee feels towards an organization (Kruse, 2012). When an employee is well engaged with their company it means they actually care about their work as well as the company itself and they aren't just working for the money (Kruse, 2012). Engaged employees are also willing to walk the extra mile when needed, for example work overtime without asking if needed (Kruse, 2012). If an employee isn't engaged, they don't feel really connected with their job and company and tend to do only the minimum (SHRM, 2017). A disengaged employee is usually for example pessimistic, has a negative attitude, focuses on monetary worth and is self-centered while a engaged employee is optimistic, team-oriented, solution-oriented and shows passion for learning (SHRM, 2017).

It's good to remember, that employee engagement and job satisfaction aren't the same things even though they are somewhat related (SHRM, 2017). If a person is satisfied with their job, it basically means they are personally happy, but if an employee is engaged it means they are actively working towards organizational goals (SHRM, 2017).

Engaged employees aren't good for just employer brand but they also lead to better business outcomes (Kruse, 2012). According to Kenexa research, companies with engaged employees have five times higher shareholder returns over five years (Kruse, 2012). Engaged employees are crucial for business' success and engaged employees lead to higher service quality which leads to higher customer satisfaction which leads to increased sales, higher profits, and higher stock price (Kruse, 2012).

Employee engagement can be strengthened in many ways. There are both organizational and managerial drivers which influence in employee engagement (SHRM, 2017). Organizational drivers are to do with for example trust in the leaders, belief that the organization will be successful in the future, and that the organization makes investments to make employees more successful (SHRM, 2017). Management drivers are to do with for example about employees enjoying a good relationship with their leaders, employees having authority to accomplish their job well, and employees having the freedom to make work decisions (SHRM, 2017). It's important to make sure that all talent acquisition and retention strategies are aligned with company's goals (Gleeson, 2017). This also means the right people need to be in the right position in the company (Gleeson, 2017). When the right people are in the right roles, the company needs to make sure they are also getting enough training and the employees are up for success (Gleeson, 2017). For employees to be engaged, they need to have a clear picture of how they are contributing to the company's mission and strategic objectives (Gleeson, 2017).

As everything in business world employer engagement can and should be measured. Employee engagement can be measured with for example regular surveys (SHRM, 2017). The survey should include questions which can be repeated in every survey, it should focus on behaviors and the length of the survey should be kept reasonable (SHRM, 2017). When a survey is conducted it's important that the employees also see that the results are taken into consideration and improvements are made. Managers should clearly communicate the results to their teams and create or present improvement ideas and action plans (SHRM, 2017).

3.4 Measuring employer brand

Working on employer brand is a big investment from any company and especially with big investments it's important to be able to track and measure the success. Employer branding can be tracked and measured with several different metrics. Even though already many companies are taking effort in strengthening their employer brand, not so many measure the effects (Sanders, 2016).

According to a LinkedIn report the quality of hire is the single most valuable key performance indicator what comes to recruitments (LinkedIn, 2016). Unfortunately, at the same time it's the most difficult one to measure and it contains many other metrics as well (LinkedIn, 2016). If we want to simplify a bit, it can be said that when you have a good employer brand the company will attract more qualified candidates (Fraser Dove, 2019). At the same time, it will improve the retention rates as well as the productivity of the workforce (Fraser Dove, 2019)

Job offer acceptance rate can be easily tracked. When done right strengthening the employer brand should increase the job offer acceptance rate (Fraser Dove, 2019). If the rate doesn't increase despite the work, you have done to strengthen the brand there might be several reasons why. Maybe the worst reason is that your employer brand has become over-hyped and over-branded which means it doesn't reflect with the truth (Fraser Dove, 2019). Other reasons might for example be bottlenecks in the hiring process (Fraser Dove, 2019), which are probably easier to fix than over-hyped employer brand.

Time-to-hire stands for the time between engaging the candidate and accepting the job offer (Howden, 2018). According to research by LinkedIn, a strong employer brand can increase time-to-hire by as much as 200% (LinkedIn, 2016). The increase comes mainly from the fact that you will be spending less money selling your company as a great place to work and more time qualifying good candidates (Fraser Dove, 2019).

Maybe the best indicator of how good the employer brand really is, is the employee referrals. According to Gina Belli from Payscale, employee referrals are the leading source of high quality and cost-effective hires (Belli, 2017). In practice this means the employees are happy to recommend the company to their networks and leave positive reviews on public job sites

like Glassdoor (Fraser Dove, 2019). This is closely related to employee engagement rate, yet another important metrics to track. As a minimum companies should at least get feedback and engage employees through regular surveys (Fraser Dove, 2019).

Other metrics companies might want to follow can be for example hiring manager satisfaction, new hire retention rate, win/lose ratio and awards won (Fraser Dove, 2019). Hiring managers are the ones bearing ultimate accountability for the new hires they will also be able to offer a good insight into the quality of hires (Fraser Dove, 2019). Win/lose ratio helps companies to benchmark their employer brand compared to their competitors and it measures how many applicants come from the competitors as well as how many does the company lose to the competitors (Fraser Dove, 2019). They also might want to take a look at cost per hire, number of applicants and retention rate (Juneja, 2013). Cost per hire measures the total amount of money invested divided by the number of the company's hires (SmartRecruiters, 2021). Retention rate, or percentage, is calculated by dividing the number of employees at the beginning of a period by the total number of employees at the end of a period (Miner, 2020).

3.5 Tools

There are many different tools and opportunities companies can utilize when planning and executing employer branding actions. They can choose the right ones for their needs from a wide range of tools, such as social media, employer surveys, ads, careers site and fairs, or employees. Especially now with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic electronic sources are more important than ever as most of career fairs have been postponed. It's also good to keep in mind that 94% of jobseekers search jobs on smartphones so all the materials published should be executed with the mindset of mobile first (Slater, 2017).

According to Ben Slater, social media is at the moment the most widely used channel in employer branding (Slater, 2017). At the same time 25% of all job seekers use social media as their primary tool for job searching and 7 out of 19 18-34-year-old report having found their previous job through social media (Slater, 2017). Social media is a great tool for both companies and job searchers as there's easy to interact with each other (Slater, 2017). Companies should not only rely on the well-established social media channels, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, but they should also take actions in the more recent ones (Slater, 2017). You should determine whether you want to have one company page on each social channel or would it be beneficial to establish a different career account on all or at least some channels.

Careers site covers basically everything your candidates encounter on your website. Everything, including all the copy texts and jobs, reflects on the employer brand (Slater, 2017). On the specific career site, it's a good idea to provide credibility by publishing

employee stories, videos, and testimonials to show the candidates what your organization is like (Slater, 2017). The candidates should also easily and clearly see the open jobs and what the company is looking for at the moment (Slater, 2017). Only job postings don't do much alone so it might be a good idea to for example start a company blog or even a discussion forum (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017). Company blog can be a good way to show people what your company is really like: what values does the company have, who is working there and what are you achieving. Company blogs are not only great content, but they often also draw attention of search engines and earn higher-than-average search rankings (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017).

Employees can be the best marketing channel for the company. Companies can use their employees as brand ambassadors and encourage them to share content on their own channels (Slater, 2017). Employees can be encouraged to create content to their channels on their own: my day -like videos or pictures, sharing published company news and their own thoughts. Even though employees are critical, it's also crucial for the CEO and the entire senior leadership team to be involved and onboard (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017).

3.6 Employer branding ROI

It's practically impossible to talk about business and companies without talking about money. Like in many matters, in the end it's all about money in employer branding as well. According to research made by LinkedIn, companies with a weaker employer brand need to spend almost double cost per hire compared to companies with a strong employer brand (LinkedIn, 2012). It turns out in the LinkedIn's research that employee turnover can be reduced by 28% by investing in employer branding (LinkedIn, 2012). In another study by Careerarc came out that even 55% of job seekers can abandon applications after reading negative reviews about the company (Careerarc, 2017). Research by Randstad says 50% of candidates wouldn't work for a company with bad reputation even if they would be paid more (Randstad, 2018). After this it's safe to say that it's very smart and even crucial for companies to invest in their employer brand.

When calculating the employer branding ROI, you basically want to measure the value created minus the investment made (Sanders, 2016). There are different ways of calculating the numbers, but one of the most common ways for example in LinkedIn is to first identify the number of hires made and multiply this by the cost per hire (Sanders, 2016). Of course, there are many other ways, channels, and tools to be used so this isn't the whole truth.

According to David Sturt, making a wrong decision on hiring a new employee can cost up to 30% of the employee's first year salary (Sturt, 2016). The company can decrease the number of bad hires with a strong employer brand - when it's clear what kind of company it is, what can they offer and what values do they have, the quality of employee candidates increases.

When a company makes a good hire, they want to keep the person for many reasons. One reason is of course money as it's much more economical keeping the good employees than finding new ones (French). Retention report by Work Institute states that turnover costs as much as 33% of a worker's annual salary to replace (Sears, 2017).

3.7 Employer Value Proposition

Employer Value Proposition (later EVP) tells what the company has to offer for its employees. It indicates why should a job seeker submit their application to this company instead of the competitor - what is different in this company compared to the others. It can be said that EVP is equivalent to candidates' work portfolio (Personio, 2021).

When starting to develop your company's EVP you should first decide what you want to achieve, what priorities does the work have and what's the situation at the starting point (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017). You might want to start with an EVP workshop with the selected people from your company including people from for example HR, talent management and/or marketing and communications (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017). As a part of starting the works with EVP you might want to take a look at the competitors as well. As there is high competition of talented employees, you want to distinct your company from the competitors by creating a unique experience which can then be communicated outside (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017).

Not two EVPs are the same, but they should contain similar aspects. And effective EVP should contain at least compensation, work environment, corporate culture, career opportunities, job security, benchmarking, and company's strengths (Personio, 2021). A study from Towers Watson pointed out that employees are five times more likely to be highly engaged if the company has a good EVP (Saalamo, 2021)

EVP is not only meant to tell the job seeker about the company, but it also indicates what the company can expect from the employees. EVP should cover everything from workspaces and compensation to personal development programs and opportunities (Personio, 2021).

EVP should also tell in what ways can the company meet or even exceed the employees' needs. Employees needs can be divided into four categories: functional, emotional, self-development and social. Functional needs are basically tools, such as computers or phones or other concrete benefits such as salary or food vouchers. Emotional needs determine whether your employees feel engaged at work or not. Self-development needs are fulfilled if the company supports the employees' growth and professional development. In the social needs category, it's important to make the employee valued and appreciated. (Saalamo, 2021).

As EVP affects everyone in the company everyone should be involved in crystallizing and wording it. Even though it touches everyone, not everyone might correlate in a similar way to the same EVP. This means the company might want to make one loose EVP that suits for the whole company and then make more defined EVPs for different target groups. (Personio, 2021).

4 Company culture

As employer branding is basically telling everyone what your company is all about, company culture is in the core of the work. Employer brand needs to be the truth and not something the marketing department has come up with. Company culture is something companies should invest time and money. According to a study by CultureIQ, employees working in companies with strong culture rate their work environment, mission, and value orientation up to 20% higher than other companies (Culture IQ, 2017). A good company culture also affects on for example hiring, lower staff turnover, better work atmosphere and increased sales (Schloßbauer, 2021). According to another CultureIQ research, 88% of employees believe strong company culture is the key to business success (CultureIQ, 2018).

A good company culture is all about curiosity, teamwork, employee health and respect (Builtin). Diversity and inclusion are also crucial parts of company culture - a group of individuals with different kinds of backgrounds and stories need to feel accepted and safe while working (Builtin). Company culture is a set of shared values, attitudes, goals, and practices that tell people in and outside the company what the company is about (Builtin). Company culture is influenced by various elements, such as company's mission, values, attitudes, and benefits (Heinz, 2019). Elements which are included in company culture are for example inclusivity, passion, development and opportunities, transparency, and communication (Heinz, 2019).

Taking care of and developing company culture is more or less the HR's responsibility. This doesn't of course mean that HR would be the one actually doing everything on their own. HR team should get and coordinate the needed resources, keep an overview of the situation and actions as well as ensure the quality (Schloßbauer, 2021). In order to start to work with company culture, it's important to start with setting goals, defining the values and then anchoring them (Schloßbauer, 2021). If the company has a strong company culture, it's easier to maintain the team's happiness and therefore it also affects on employer brand and all other aspects of the business at the same time (Chignell, 2018).

Company culture can quite easily be misunderstood or mixed with other company's qualities or assets. Company culture is not the same thing as the company's core values (Builtin). Even

though the company values are of course part of the culture, they must be really put into action, or they are just works on a paper (Buitin). If the values aren't in correlation with the culture, they can even impact negatively to the company culture (Buitin). Neither are the company's perks and benefits exactly the same as the company culture and they most certainly cannot be used as a substitute for a strong company culture (Buitin).

A weak company culture can be indicated with several factors. Companies with weak company cultures might for example prioritize perks rather than see them as a byproduct of company culture (Heinz, 2019). The companies follow a "cultural fit" model when hiring new employees (Heinz, 2019). In the "cultural fit" hiring model the company only hires people who easily fit into the existing company culture even though another applicant might suit better when looking at their CV and background (Heinz, 2019).

4.1 Leadership

Leadership can be defined in as many ways as there are leaders. Leadership guru Jim Collins says, "Leadership is the art of getting people to do what must be done" (Kininmonth, 2021). Facebook executive and author Julie Zhuo says for one, "To get great outcomes from a group of people" (Kininmonth, 2021). According to Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, "leadership is inspiring and motivating a group of people to exert themselves to help achieve a common goal" (Kininmonth, 2021). Leadership plays a significant role in making positive employee experience and building a great company culture (Smarp, 2021).

Good leaders have common qualities, such as good communication skills, always telling the truth, acting like a manager and a leader at the same time, and remaining committed despite setbacks (Kininmonth, 2021). Effective leaders also take a diagnostic approach to situations, read social cues, and understand that it's a lifelong process to become exceptional (Kininmonth, 2021). Good leaders are also visionaries, good listeners, they lead by example, and are empowering (Kininmonth, 2021).

Especially the past two years with the COVID-19 have been momentous from leading point of view since the work life has been heavily agitated. Even though for example empathy and flexibility have always been important values they are now more important than ever (Bendaly, 2021). According to Nicole Bendaly from Forbes, today's leaders should pay attention specially to understanding and appreciating the effort, prioritizing team effectiveness, and leading on purpose (Bendaly, 2021). Today's leadership should serve followers rather than serving up to get results (Kininmonth, 2021).

The most effective teams today have leaders who are always aware of the context their employees are working in and acknowledge all the (extra) effort made (Bendaly, 2021). This pandemic time has thought leaders a valuable lesson: recognizing efforts made matters as

much as recognizing outcomes when talking about highly engaged and high-performing team (Bendaly, 2021). When employees feel understood and appreciated by their leaders, it builds trust - the main driver of employee engagement (Bendaly, 2021). According to research by ADP Research Institute, individual employees are 12 times more likely engaged when they trust their leader (Hayes; Chumney; Wright; Buckingham, 2018).

Leaders who tend to act only when the situation is already going in the wrong direction might have been in big problems with teamwork this year. Bad leadership and bad teamwork can lead to burnouts, overwhelming, and frustration which can then lead to significant disengagement and reduced productivity (Bendaly, 2021). Luckily, it's seldom too late to act and take corrective actions. Leaders should focus on the practices that are most essential to their team's ability to perform well (Bendaly, 2021). When corrective actions are needed, it's a good idea to start by focusing on building and maintaining trust and respect, making the most of team meetings, and becoming or remaining change compatible (Bendaly, 2021). According to Marcus Buckingham, people tend to follow leaders who for example connect them to a mission they believe in, who value the people for their strengths, challenges them to keep getting better, and gives them confidence in the future (Kininmonth, 2021).

Even though good leaders share similarities with each other, there's many different leadership styles. Democratic leadership style utilizes input from all the team members and the leader wants to hear each team members opinion before making final decisions (Masterclass, 2021). Democratic leadership style can boost group morale, job satisfaction, and engagement (Masterclass, 2021). Autocratic leadership style is the opposite: the leader makes decisions without talking with any of the team members (Masterclass, 2021). Even though it sounds a bit hard style, it can be useful when the leader needs to make quick decisions (Masterclass, 2021). Transformational leadership for one is about the leader's desire to improve upon or change for example the business (Masterclass, 2021). Key thing in transformational leadership style is the desire to empower the employees in order to reach the goal (Masterclass, 2021). Transformational leaders define and nurture company cultures by building a positive culture (CultureIQ, 2018). Transformational leadership style also tends to focus more on the big picture rather than the minutiae of management (Masterclass, 2021). Other leadership styles are for example charismatic leadership style, which relies on leader's charm and personality, and servant leadership where the leader places employee satisfaction above all else (Masterclass, 2021).

Leaders have a great responsibility in also retaining the highly skilled employees. People who are led by great leaders are more loyal to their employee and therefore have longer careers in same companies (Smarp, 2021). Research by GoRemotely shows that as many as 79% of employees quit their jobs due to a lack of appreciation from their leaders (Djurovic, 2020). When looking at that big percentage it would be a good idea for companies as well as

universities to take a close look on how they educate and make their leaders. According to research by GoRemotely, 63% of Millennials believe their leadership skills are not being fully developed (Djurovic, 2020). As Millennials will make up 75% of workforce in 2025 (Djurovic, 2020), this should be taken seriously rather sooner than later.

4.2 Feedback culture

It's important for employees to feel they are appreciated and heard. This is where a strong feedback culture comes into picture. In order to create a good feedback culture, companies need to start from trust. If there's no trust between workers and leaders, there won't be honest feedback forthcoming (Chignell, 2018). Research by Quantum workplace shows that feedback initiatives and highly engaged employees correlate with each other, and employee recognition also increases retention and productivity (Stange, 2020).

Giving feedback is a skill that can and should be practiced throughout the company and employee levels. There are many things that can go wrong when giving feedback, but they can be avoided when giving feedback is part of everyone's daily tasks and it's practiced often enough. For example, when giving feedback, the feedback should always be about actions and not about judging the individuals (Weitzel, 2019, p. 6). Another common mistake is to give too vague feedback which doesn't tell enough to the feedback receiver (Weitzel, 2019, p. 7). These kinds of vague feedbacks can be such as "you are a good colleague" or "I liked your presentation". The author of this thesis has often gotten negative feedback that has been sandwiched between positive feedbacks. This may seem a good idea, but actually what can easily happen is that the feedback receiver realizes what the feedback giver is doing, and they no longer hear the positive feedback and only concentrate on the negatives (Weitzel, 2019, p. 8).

Feedback can be asked with various ways in for example team and company meetings, anonymous feedback surveys or one-on-one meetings with leaders (Chignell, 2018). As all employees are different and have different comfort levels with both giving and receiving feedback, it's important to find the ways for each employee (Ryba, 2021). It's also important to remember that giving and getting feedback is a skill which can and should be practiced. It might be a good idea to provide feedback training to support the feedback culture (Ryba, 2021). The training doesn't need to be a heavy all-day training for the whole company, but it can be done by for example sharing tips and tricks on daily basis or with company newsletters.

Asking feedback is one thing but then acting according comes next. Feedback should be taken as a gift and appreciated and used accordingly. If the feedback giver notices the feedback isn't appreciated, they might stop sharing their thoughts (Ryba, 2021). It's crucial to follow up on the suggestion and comments given as the employees need to see they are really heard.

And like in many things, consistency is the key in asking feedback as well (Chignell, 2018). When the company decides or changes something due to given feedback, it would be a good idea to let the feedback giver know (Ryba, 2021).

It's important to make giving and receiving feedback a part of the company culture and not seen as a separate part. It might take time, but when giving feedback comes a habit, it naturally becomes part of the company culture (Lynne Kurter, 2020). In order to create a strong feedback culture, the employees should be explained why, how, create a safe environment, act as an example, and choose the right tools (Lynne Kurter, 2020).

When talking about feedback, people often tend to think just criticism but that's just half of the feedback scene (Batista, 2013). The key is to find a balance between constructive and positive feedback. According to Ed Batista in Harvard business review, we for example too often use positive feedback to set the table for criticism (Batista, 2013). We should learn to give positive feedback and leave it there, not to use it only before constructive words (Batista, 2013). People also tend to think that positive feedback should be given when a person has succeeded extremely well in something big, but actually it would be good to say some positive words when we see any behavior we want to encourage, big or small (Batista, 2013).

5 Research

To create the best plan possible, it is crucial to find out the level the company is now. To get as much and as versatile information as possible it's necessary to reach the job seekers, current employees as well as employees who have already left the company. A lot of information was gathered also by observing the case company's public appearance - social media channels and website.

The research was made with three different focus groups: the job seekers who have been in an interview in the company, current employees, and employees who have already left the company. The job seekers and past employees are people who have either been in an interview or left the company in 2021. The questionnaire results were analyzed, and the survey groups were compared with each other to create a as full picture as possible of the current situation.

5.1 Methods

Research methods can be either qualitative or quantitative. The differentiation in short is that in qualitative method the data is gathered in words and in quantitative method the data is gathered in numbers (Scribbr, 2021). There is of course also a possibility to mix these

methods if that's the best option for the research. In this research there has been used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The mix was chosen as employer branding is a complex entirety and neither of the methods alone would have provided enough information. Pros with using qualitative research are for example flexibility and that it can be conducted with smaller samples (Scribbr, 2021). Cons with qualitative research are for example that it can't be analyzed statistically, and it might be difficult to standardize the research (Scribbr, 2021). Pros with quantitative research are for example that it can be used to systematically describe large collections of things, and it generates public knowledge (Scribbr, 2021). Cons with quantitative research are for example that it might require some training to analyze the data and it usually requires larger samples (Scribbr, 2021).

The data used in the research is both primary and secondary which means the data has been collected by the researcher as well as utilized data that has been collected by the case company. There are several methods of collecting primary data, such as observation, interviews, and questionnaires (Kothari, 2004, p. 96). Pros with primary data are for example that it usually is collected to answer a specific research question and the researcher has the control over the sampling and measurement methods (Scribbr, 2021). Cons include for example that it might be more expensive and time consuming. Pros with secondary data is for example that it open easier and faster access to data and the data can be collected with longer time spans (Scribbr, 2021). Cons include for example that there's no control over how data is generated, and it might take extra effort to make sure the data works for the analysis for the specific research (Scribbr, 2021).

This research was made by using anonymous questionnaires as well as material collected in job interviews. Pros with using questionnaire as the data collecting method are for example the low costs, it's free from bias of the interviewer or researcher, and that respondents can be reached conveniently ((Kothari, 2004, p. 100-101). The main cons with questionnaires are for example that there might easily be a low return rate of filled questionnaires, the control over the questionnaire is lost once it's sent, and this is likely the slowest data collection method (Kothari, 2004, p. 101). What comes to this specific thesis research, it's important to point out some challenges what comes to data collection and the questionnaire. As the group of people is rather small and homogeneous, there is a chance the results may be biased. Most of the respondents do work in the company which means they are more or less looking the questionnaire from the same perspective. In order to get a wider perspective, the questionnaire was sent to those who have already left from the company. Again here, the group of people is small, which means the answers need to be analyzed with that in mind. Also the fact that those employees have resigned means that they might be looking the company from rather critical point of view.

Questionnaires were sent to current employees and employees who have already left the company so far in 2021. The questionnaires were sent total to 118 people: 90 current employees and 28 resigned employees. You can find the questionnaire forms from the appendices section at the end of the thesis.

This research method was chosen as it provides wide enough information base to be able to plan the developing of the company's employer brand. It also gives the current and former employees a change to raise their voice and be able to make an impact. Another option would have been to for example have workshops with different focus groups with both employees and managers. This option would have raised more conversation and more insight, but it was not chosen as it would have required too many resources from the case company. Also, employees who have left the company would probably not want to use that much time and effort with their former employer, which would have meant that they would have gotten a survey in any case as their opinion is important as well.

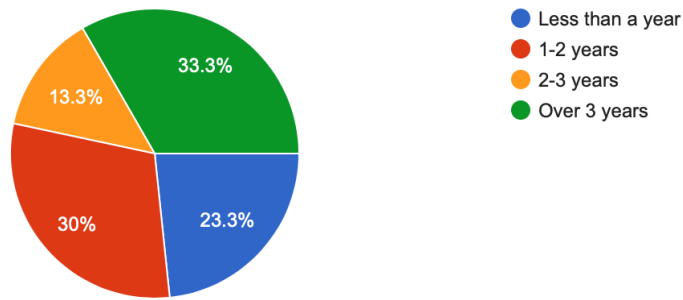
In this research the questions asked were chosen in order to give the research wide enough information base of the employees' current view on the company and the company's employer brand. The questions were talked through with the company representatives and it was made sure the questions answered also to the company's questions. With the answers gotten from these questions it is possible to know the pain points and find the areas that need development. It's also possible to find the areas where the company has succeeded well. As the form of the questions is important and the more answers were gotten the better, the questions were presented in as easy-to-answer form as possible.

5.2 Survey results

The respondents were given a week time to answer the survey. In total it resulted 36 answers: 30 from current employees and 6 from resigned employees. The results and the survey can be seen reliable, and they can be generalized as the total number of survey forms sent is 118. The response percentage is 42,5%.

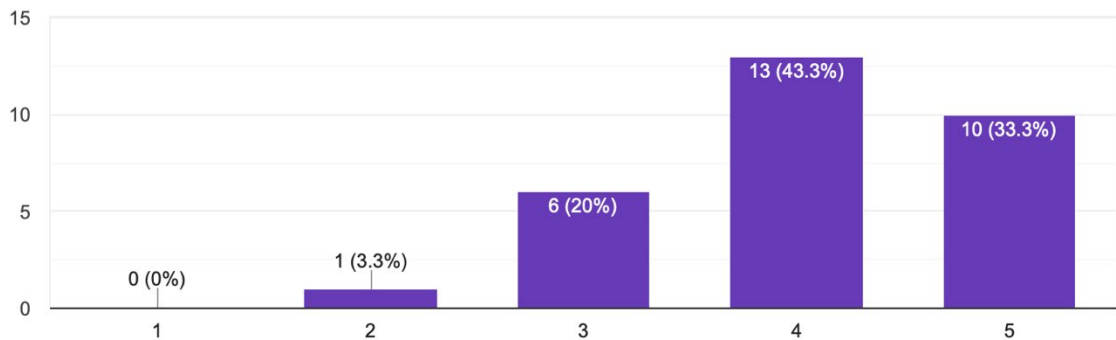
5.2.1 Survey for employees

Employees who answered are 70% employees and 30% managers and 67% of them work at the headquarters and 33% in offices in other countries. The time they have worked with the case company is divided quite evenly as seen below.



Q: I have worked at Company X for

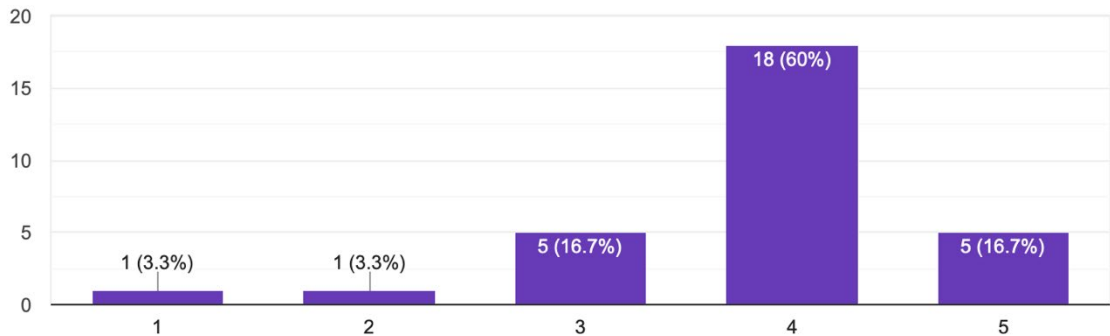
The employees seem very content as almost all respondents chose values 4-5, where the range is from 1 to 5 and where 1 is “it’s not my cup of tea” and 5 “yes, definitely”. Of course, it’s important to remember that the employees who are less content might also be more indifferent and therefore those answers might be lacking. In the answers there is some correlation between years with the company and how content the employees are: the employees who have worked longer with the company seem to also be more satisfied.



Q: I enjoy working at Company X

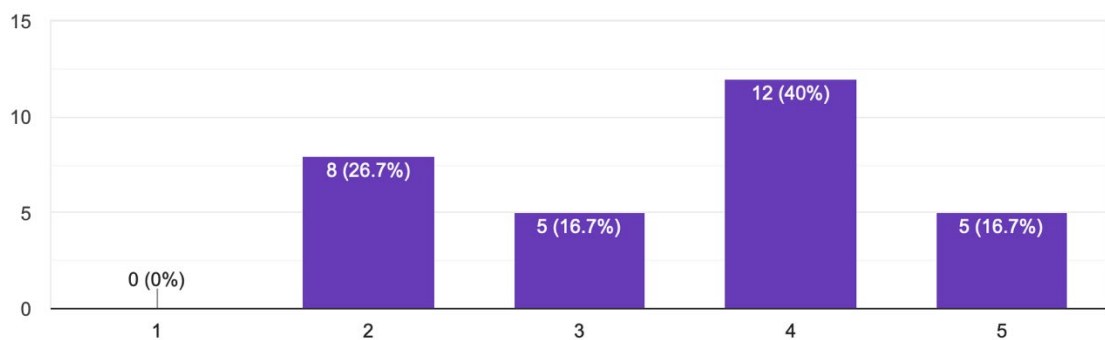
The case company is working in a field where there are strong values throughout the scene and can be said that the whole business is based on values which are meaningful in societal level. In this case the employees mostly seem to share the same personal values with the company values which is good as it’s easier to believe in the company when the values are

similar. In this question 1 is for “no” and 5 for “yes, definitely”.



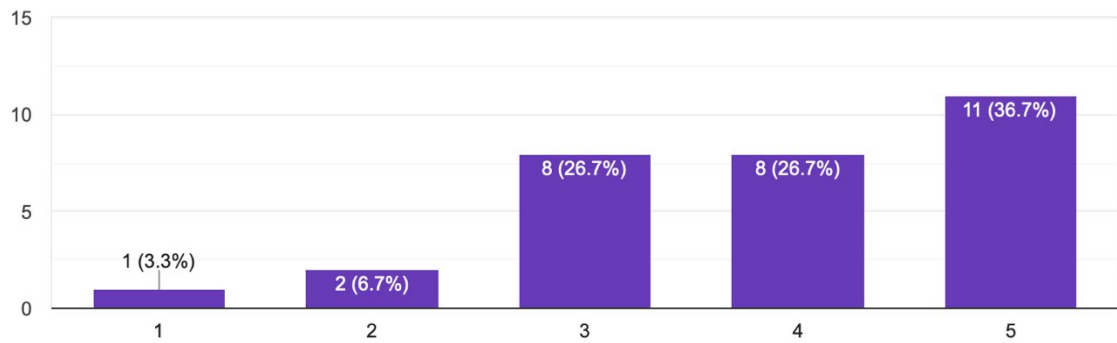
Q: Company values are aligned with mine

When it comes to employees' willingness to recommend Company X as an employer to their networks there is a bit more dispersion as seen in the chart below. There seems to be some correlation between the time the employee has worked with the case company and would they recommend it to others. The employees who have worked longer with the company are more willing to recommend the company to their networks. In this question 1 is for “no” and 5 is for “yes, definitely”.



Q: I would recommend this employer

The employees are quite proud where they work at and are proudly telling it to others as well. It's interesting to note, that the highest values are from employees who have worked the longest with the case company, and so are the lowest values as well. This might have something to do for example with their knowledge of the company's history and internal politics which they have witnessed for a rather long time. In this question 1 is for “I try to avoid telling” and 5 “absolutely yes”.



Q: I proudly tell others where I work at

The employees were asked to describe the case company's employer brand with three words. As employer brand as a term might not be clear to everyone, it was clarified in the survey. There were few words that occurred many times, such as international, ambitious, and sustainable.



Q: Describe the employer brand

The employees were asked what the case company's strengths as an employer are in their opinion. Flexibility was mentioned most frequently. Other many times mentioned words were for example the company's vision, internationality, and the company's mission. What was lacking from these answers was sustainability, which was frequently asked in the previous question.



Q: Company's strengths as an employer

The employees were asked what the company should develop in order to be a better place to work. The answers include a wide range of ideas from fresh fruits at the office to better leadership and clearer company focus and goals. Even though some of these ideas are easy to fix there is a wide range of issues that would need structural changes and a whole new mindset to be fixed. Many of these issues raised in the answers seem quite severe, but still the employees seem rather happy and proud of where they work at.



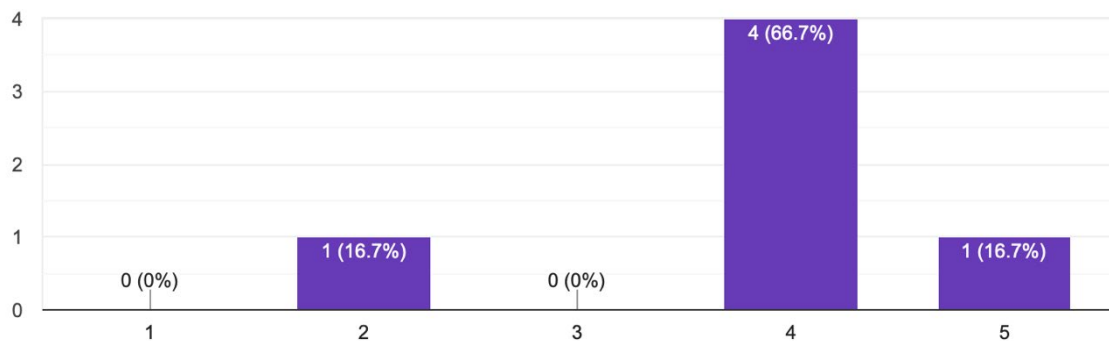
Q: What should the company develop

Lastly the employees were given a free word to add anything they would like to. Areas raised by the employees are for example clearer distinction of the case company's two brands, identification of the most critical team members and ensuring they want to stay, better visibility in tech-communities in order to be more attractive to job seekers and that the company should invest more in employee satisfaction.

5.2.2 Survey for employees who have left the company

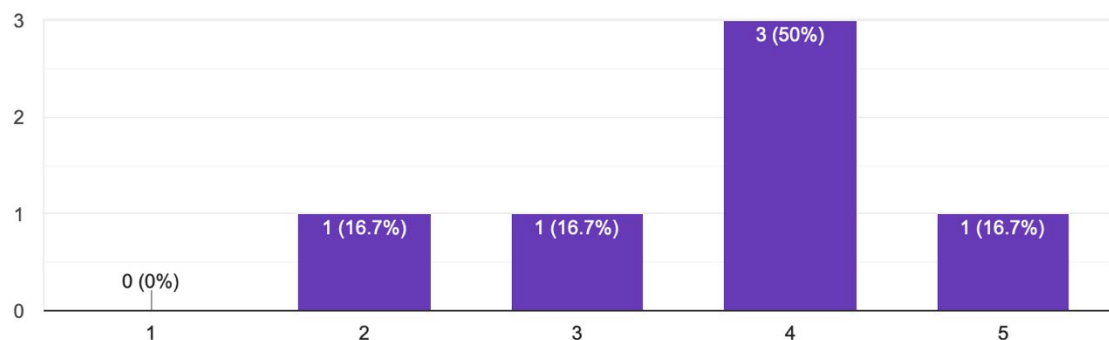
There were only six answers by the resigned employees so to ensure the anonymity the analyzed answers will not include the basic questions, such as how long they worked with the company or if they were employees or managers. The answers include input from both employees and managers as well as from all employment lengths.

The former employees who answered the survey are well satisfied with working with Company X, even though they have left. The smallest value was given by someone who worked with the company only less than a year. The range is from 1 to 5 and where 1 is “it’s not my cup of tea” and 5 “yes, definitely”.



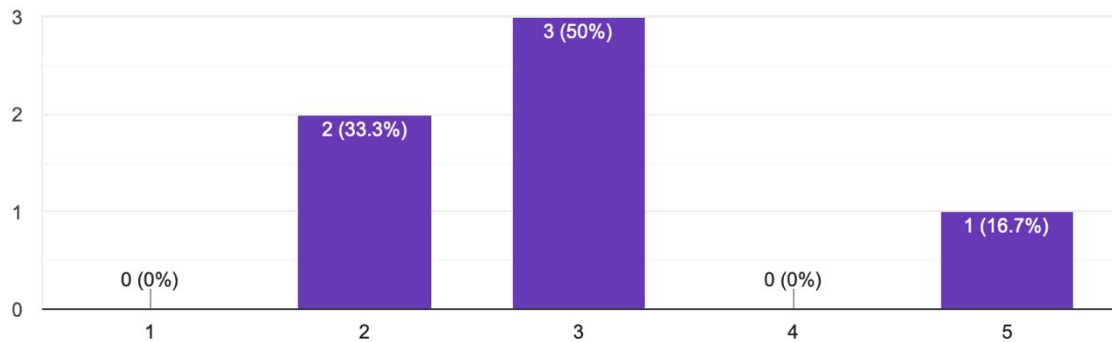
Q: I enjoyed working at Company X

The correlation between the company’s values and the former employees’ personal values are very similar compared to current employees’ answers. In this question 1 is for “no” and 5 for “yes, definitely”. What is interesting is that the lowest value is given by someone who worked with the company for 2-3 years.



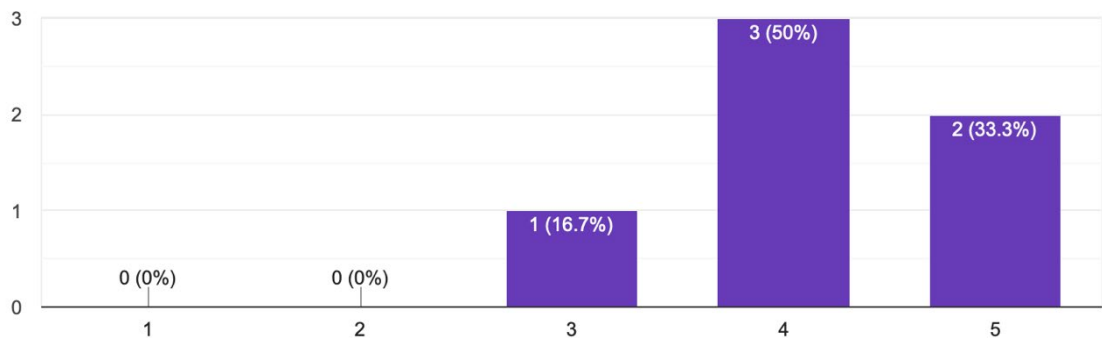
Q: Company values were aligned with mine

When it comes to recommending the case company as a great place to work, the former employees differ from current employees. What is interesting here is that the highest value is given by someone who worked with the company for less than a year. At the same time the lowest value is also given by someone who worked with the company for less than a year as well as by someone who worked with the company for over three years. In this question 1 is for “no” and 5 is for “yes, definitely”.



Q: I would recommend this employer

The former employees were as proud to tell where they worked at, as the current employees are. In this question 1 is for “I tried to avoid telling” and 5 “absolutely yes”. The lowest value is given by someone who worked with the company for less than a year.



Q: I proudly told others where I worked at

The former employees were asked to describe the case company's employer brand with three words. As employer brand as a term might not be clear to everyone, it was clarified in the survey. As there are only six respondents, not many words occurred more than once, but one of the words was again ambitious.

ambitious bold energetic friendly great-people great-product innovative leader
poor-leadership selfish social sustainable uncertain visionary

Q: Describe the employer brand

The strengths the former employees raised in the survey are quite similar to current employees' strengths. For example, transparency and benefits are raised in both groups.

autonomy employee-
benefits fearless great-
teams innovative product
salary sustainable
transparency trust

Q: Company's strengths as an employer

The former employees were asked what the company should develop in order to be a better place to work. Two areas are mentioned more than once: work-life balance and focusing on new hires. There are some similarities with the other research group, such as trust, clearer goals, and employees' personal development.

chances-to-grow-in-role clearer-goals communication empowerment focus leadership **new-
work-**
hires organization organizing-teams'-work prioritisation trust
life-balance

Q: What should the company develop

5.3 Analysis

As the research data was collected with both qualitative and quantitative methods also the analyzing methods are a mix of both worlds. Qualitative analysis methods are mainly used to understand ideas and experiences (Scribbr, 2021). Qualitative data analysis can be done with data collected with for example open-ended questions, interviews, literature reviews, and case studies (Scribbr, 2021). Quantitative analysis methods are mainly used to understand frequencies, averages, and cause-and-effect relationships (Scribbr, 2021). Quantitative data analysis can be done with data which is collected for example during an experiment and by using probability sampling methods (Scribbr, 2021).

All candidates are asked in job interviews why are they interested in the case company and why did they apply. There are two areas that recurs in almost all the answers - sustainability and the company's vision. Even though these messages are clearly well visible, the case company could emphasize them even more when planning and executing employer branding actions or at least make sure they remain at the same level. What is lacking from the answers, but would be good to have in the future, are for example the case company's consumer product, company values, and that employees seem to enjoy oneself. These areas should be emphasized as well in order to widen the knowledge about what the company is actually like. According to the HR, the biggest issues in hiring new employees are at the moment with finding talented enough applicants for senior IT positions. It remains unclear if the problem is that there is simply not enough job seekers to begin with or if the company is too keen on finding the perfect match instead of hiring good potential.

According to the survey, employees are rather happy with their employer. This means that there is a good possibility that they would be willing to share company content in their social channels, or that there would be volunteers to participate in employer ambassador team if the company wishes to have such a team. Even though the employees seem rather happy, there was a bit more dispersion in if the employees would recommend the case company as a good place to work for their friends and wider networks. This is something the case company should look into more than what has come up in this survey: what are the reasons the employees would not want to recommend the company and what can be done to change the situation to better. It is a bit contradictory that the employees seem happy, but they are less willing to recommend the employer to their networks.

What emerged in many survey answers is hiring new people. Some responses are asking for more juniors than seniors when hiring new personnel, some are asking for the company to fill crucial open roles and not just leave them open when someone leaves the company, some are asking the company to employ enough people to ease the workload and so on. Clearly the employees feel that there would be a lot that could be done in the recruiting area to make it

work even better. This is something that the employees can influence themselves as well, but they might not have the tools or time to actually think about it. A strong and positive employer brand helps recruiting new people: more applicants, better quality applicants and overall easier and faster recruitment processes. One solution to ease this would be to help the employees to strengthen the employer brand themselves and help them to share company content in their channels. It also gives the employees a feeling that they are also involved and concretely helping the situation. As the company has some challenges in recruiting for example senior IT persons, what would be a better channel to raise the awareness than the current employees' and their social channels. At the moment it's an opportunity missed but luckily, it's rather easy to change it for the better.

What came up when asking the employees about what the company should develop to be a better employer, clarity, focus, and better benefits came up several times. What is important in clarifying things is good communication. As the company is going forward with high speed and they do have a lot on their plate, it's crucial to be able to simplify certain things to make them better understandable. As someone from for example marketing team isn't as well informed about what they are working on in tec team and how they are working on projects in the first place, everything might seem a bit confusing and hard to understand. One option to help clarity and staying focused would be for example to establish a physical wall with easy to read and understand milestones for each team. Another good way to be clearer and more focused is of course to set up clear goals, write them down for everyone to visit when needed and then work towards them. What can be read from the survey answers is that the company has a lot of goals, but they might change too frequently, and the overall focus is lost.

According to the survey results, the employees strongly share the same values as the case company. Company values are great content in employer branding work and as they are aligned with the employees' own values, they most likely would like to share this kind of content for example in their social channels and when mingling in events. What would be good to pair up with company values are the areas that come up in the question where the employees are asked about the case company's strengths as an employer. The most frequent words are flexibility and the company's vision. As the employees might just need a small push, the company could use the values as well as the strengths and come up with nice material to be shared in both the company's social channels as well as the employees' own. Another solution could be that the company could encourage the employees to share different things in their channels for example on monthly basis: one month could be about the employees' favorite benefits, one about their favorite place at the office, one about their favorite company values and so on.

As the survey results seem very honest and there is a lot of good information on how the employees see the case company, the results need to be brought into both managers and

later the employees knowledge. The results need to be shared with managers who then would need to make an action plan of how they are reacting to the results. As it came clear in the previous chapters, it's crucial for employees to see and feel that the company takes needed actions after asking for employees' opinion and ideas. At this point the plan for the development of the case company's employer brand is purely the thesis researcher's interpretation and analysis and it's crucial to start the work with the case company's representatives as soon as possible to make a change for the better. The reason the analysis, plan and overall work related to this thesis and development work hasn't yet been presented for the case company is purely a resource matter. The case company has worked closely with the researcher when planning and executing the research and it has been done in dense cooperation.

6 Development: Creating a plan for better employer brand

In this chapter you can find the end product: the plan for better employer brand. The plan includes plans and actions for employees and leaders as well as a sections for social media and company websites. As the company has done quite little for their employer brand before this, there is quite much to improve. Therefore, all the sections include actions to be done as soon as possible as well as actions to then maintain the better employer brand. Employer branding belongs to HR team in the company, and they are responsible for executing and managing the plan.

6.1 Development methods

The plan for the actions for better employer brand for the case company is created purely by the thesis writer and her own ideas. As there are resource challenges in the case company, it wasn't possible to use more time together to create the plan. This said, the thesis and the plan for better employer brand was discussed with the company representatives. The feedback from the case company can be found on page 37.

6.2 Leader involvement

To get the leaders onboard it's important to make a strong case for employer branding (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017). The leaders need to understand their very important role in employer branding and getting the employees onboard as well.

The case company's leaders need to lead with an example and be actively strengthening the employer brand, and also understand their value in the matter. The leaders would need to actively share open positions and other company content, but to be really effective and genuine they should also actively start conversations of important matters in their channels

and in for example business events. When the employees' see that their manager is active and bold enough to bring up their opinion on important matter, it's easier for them to do the same. This is something the managers should also go through with their teams: to help the employees understand what can be done, where and when to strengthen both their own brand as well as the employer brand.

The managers should also encourage their team members to take part into various business events both as a guest as well as a speaker. When employees feel they are valuable and "real" professionals, it's easier to become an employer ambassador as well. This can only be done with the support of the managers, and they need to understand their vital role. Strengthening the employees' own brand and feeling that they do have a professional brand themselves is at the same time strengthening the employer brand. Another good way to strengthen the employees' own professional brand is to encourage them to actively start conversations in their social channels about important matters. Managers should lead by example what comes to strengthening the employer brand: it should be one of their tasks to share company news, open jobs, start conversations, and so on in their social channels and encourage their team members to do the same.

6.3 Employer involvement

As can be read from the earlier chapters, employees want to feel appreciated and heard in order to stay motivated and engaged. In the case company employees should be encouraged to share their work in the company's "Friday meeting", where the whole company is present. It's highly important to encourage the employees to participate and the meeting shouldn't just be leaders talking about their teams and accomplishments - let the employees speak for themselves.

Another way to involve employees is to encourage them to take part in events as speakers. It's highly important to help the employees strengthen their personal expertise in their special field. A great way to do this is to have a speaker slot in different kind of events. Of course, this has been a bit more difficult during COVID-19 but as the world is opening again, the situation will most likely get better rather soon.

The case company has its own blog, which mainly shares the CEO's thoughts. There are few posts from others as well and that's something the company should increase. The company has a great amount of talented and inspired employees who would have a lot to tell from their expertise. This should be utilized better even though it of course requires some resources. In the ideal situation every second post could be from the CEO and then every other from someone else in the company. There is a huge variety of different themes that can be shared: "my day at company X", career stories, marketing team thoughts, taking care of the customers, designing the service and so on.

All in all, what comes out from employees' mouths is perceived as more reliable than what can be seen from the CEO's or company's side. This is a great asset that should be better utilized. As the days are busy and it's easy to forget to engage with others in social channels, in coffee table conversations outside the company and to share interesting company related material, the employees should be reminded of this on a regular basis.

As every employee in the company probably isn't very social media oriented or willing to share company content in their social channels one option is to have few employer ambassadors. Employee ambassadors are employees who want to promote the employer and their brand to their networks (Bamboo HR, 2018). If there's enough active employees who are sharing company content in their social channels it might not be necessary to run a specific employee ambassador program, but if the situation isn't as good the company might want to start a program. Even if the company doesn't have an ambassador program or has it, there are few things the company should do in order to boost the company content sharing among their employees. The company vision, values and long-term goals should be communicated clearly and understanding the big picture makes employees more invested in their work and therefore they are more likely to talk about it with their networks (Bamboo HR, 2018). Instead of rule books and guidelines on what to share and what not to share, the company might want to provide their employees some basic training on the matter. As all employees are not social media oriented, they might just be scared to post as they might do something wrong and a training about social media, marketing and employer branding might do the trick (Bamboo HR, 2018). As for the case company, they should take brief employer ambassador training as part of the briefing for new employees. Of course, as there hasn't yet been any training, training should be provided to old employees as well in the beginning. The training should contain the company values and vision to begin with as well as some basic information about the company's social media channels and their purposes. There should be nice examples about posts someone from the company has posted on their channels before and few themes they could share content about. As the company is actively hiring at the moment, these brief employer branding training could take place once a month.

6.4 Social media

Today's world is full of social media channels, so the first step is to choose the right channels for your company and purposes. The main thing in choosing the channels is to find out where the people are who you're trying to reach (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017). When you have figured that out, the next step is to start creating content the audience is interested in and looking for, as well as planning how you can interact with them (Mosley, 2017; Schmidt, 2017).

At the moment the case company has presence in Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. The company also has few reviews on for example Glassdoor. The Facebook page hasn't been active since early 2020 and has under 2000 followers so it's easy to say that this channel has a lot more to offer than what it's used for at the moment. LinkedIn is more active, and the content is mostly concentrated on sharing company news about for example expansion, investment rounds and mentions from third parties. When looking at this from employer branding point of view, the content could have more posts about what working at the company looks like, who is working there, what are the people working on and so on. Basically, the only face seen on the LinkedIn page is the company's CEO. The Glassdoor reviews are fairly OK, but there's so few of them that they don't really tell too much about the company. Again, can be said that Glassdoor is an opportunity missed and should be utilized more in the future.

As said the case company's Facebook page has been quiet since the early 2020's. If this is the first place a potential employee encounters the company it doesn't seem very vibrant. They might even question if the company still exists. The case company has decided to abandon their Facebook page and stop using it, but they haven't said that in the page. Therefore, they should make a last final post and tell all the followers where to find the company today. From employer branding point of view the Facebook page could be widely used as a channel for sharing company news, blog posts as well as a conversation platform. When taking the company area of business into consideration Facebook probably isn't the most important channel, so it's understandable the company doesn't want to use too much effort on that.

From employer branding perspective LinkedIn is probably the most important social channel for the case company. According to a report by the case company, most of the candidates find the available jobs as well as apply through LinkedIn. There's a lot of active and interesting people from the company's field of expertise and a lot of valuable job seekers. The case company has a fairly good presence in LinkedIn, and they post there quite often. The main topics include for example company news, company blog posts, and posts about events where someone from the company has been giving a speech. From employer branding perspective the most interesting posts are those which are telling interesting company news (such as good financial news and expansion news) and the posts with employees. These kinds of posts are something the company could share more. The LinkedIn page is lacking for example posts about available jobs and what it's like to work with the company, and basically there could be more talking from the employees' point of view. As LinkedIn is working best when actively taking part into conversations, the company should both take part and start conversations with the company account as well as encourage employees to take part with their own accounts. This is a great way to both raise good topics to public conversation as well as boost the employees' expertise.

Another great social channel for the case company is Twitter. It's great basically because of the same reasons LinkedIn is - active conversations, decision makers, influencers, and job seekers can all be reached there. As Twitter is all about conversations, the company should take actively part into conversations as well as encourage the employees to do so as well. Social channels like Twitter, which are very fast-moving platforms, can be very time consuming and even stressful. The case company's Twitter account is fairly active and sharing relevant company news, successes and also re-tweeting others' interesting posts. The posts are both in English and Finnish which is understandable as it is a Finnish company and some of the shared links (like news in Finnish newspapers) are in Finnish. What is lacking in this social channel as well is the employees' voice and open jobs. From employer branding perspective the case company should share all open jobs on their Twitter account and try to bring up the employees' side. The employees voice could be best brought up by encouraging them to take actively part in conversations and starting conversations. This way the company can use LinkedIn as the main channel for their own posts about employees and working in the company and then in Twitter the employees could raise their own voices in their own channels. Of course, the company account should then share the best posts from employees' accounts.

An easy and low-effort way to start is to make sure that at least all HR and recruitment team members have a link to the company recruitment page on their work-related social media channels (at least LinkedIn). Of course, it would be the best if all the employees would add the link on their profiles as well, but it's understandable if not all feel comfortable doing so. Nevertheless, all employees should be encouraged to add the link to their profile and the ones who are willing to do so can participate. It's important to introduce all these kind of actions as obligatory ones and mainly encourage the employees rather than ask them to do it. If the link to the job page doesn't feel right for some, of course they can link to another page on the company page, such as company blog or news.

The case company regularly posts news about their actions and there's at least at the moment many open jobs, so there's not really a lack of content. When there's a big workload and you need to hurry from a meeting to another it's clear that you don't necessarily have time to think about posting something to your LinkedIn page for example. Not to mention making up the post texts and so on. The suggestion is, that someone from the company (from recruitment team or communications team perhaps) would write ready posts with links and pictures for employees to share on their social channels. This would lower the threshold and the employees would start sharing the company content more frequently. This would not only make the employees actually read what the company shares but it would also show people outside the company that the employees are proud and inspired of where they work at. If the company would want to boost it even more, they could for example raffle a monthly prize among the employees who have shared company content on their social channels. Another

very easy way to share company content is of course sharing company page posts, which requires just one click. Here as well it might be a good idea to tell the employees that there's a new post that can be shared as they are of course busy with their tasks and not able to monitor social media all day.

Glassdoor is a social channel where many of job seekers go to find out true reviews of companies, as can be read from the previous chapters. The case company doesn't have too many reviews which can be interpreted in many ways depending on the candidate. The current employees should be encouraged to share their reviews on Glassdoor to get the page a bit more active. As encouraging the employees to share their thoughts anonymously to a huge audience might feel a bit intimidating, the company should probably save this for a bit later and take some other actions first to improve the employer brand in the first place. Of course, they shouldn't wait for too long either as the company needs new skilled and motivated employees as we speak.

6.5 Company website

Potential employees will most likely take a look at the company website, and they can be easily put off if the website is poorly designed, works slowly or they don't get answers to their questions fast enough (Benton, 2019). Therefore, it's important to make sure all relevant information is easily accessible. At the time of this thesis, open jobs were not displayed on the company's website, and this alone can drive away potential employees. When asked from the company, they said they were renewing the job section on the website and therefore it couldn't be found at that moment. The company also has a CEO's blog but it's very difficult to find it. The blog itself is interesting and the blog posts are published frequently so it should be easier to find. Even though the case company's blog is good as it is, there would still be room for improvement from the employer branding point of view. As the company mainly shares the CEO's thoughts it would be a good idea to raise other voices as well as explained in the previous chapter.

As stated in the previous chapters the most reliable voice is the voice from the employees rather than the company or even the CEO. The employees' voice can be raised through blog posts, but testimonial videos would work as well. Testimonial videos are an easy way to make the outside world know who you are and what you have to offer (Verma, 2021). The testimonial videos work best when they're real and engaging, they share great stories, and are short and concise (Verma, 2021). The case company has done few testimonial videos in the past, but they are already out of date and the employees have already either left the company or changed their position. Testimonial videos are great content on the company website and also great for sharing in social channels, so even though they require some effort and money it's resources well used. The testimonial videos should be about employees,

working environment and giving the idea of compassionate, driven, and stable work environment (Benton, 2019).

6.6 Tracking

The KPI's chosen for the case company to track their employer brand are chosen as they are rather easy to track and measure without taking too much effort and time, but at the same time they provide enough information. In the case company's situation, it's crucial to use as low-effort actions as possible as otherwise there is a big chance, they will be left undone. The KPI's the case company could follow are for example job acceptance rate, time-to-hire, number of applicants, employee satisfaction, and new hire retention rate.

At the moment the case company is tracking roles filled (monthly), roles currently open (at the end of a month), time-to-hire (days), applicants processed (monthly), and hiring velocity.

6.7 Action table

This table summarizes the actions that should be taken to improve and in the long run to sustain stronger employer brand.

Who	What	Details	Where	Who's following up	Schedule
Employees	Blog posts	My day, projects, career stories	Website, LinkedIn, Twitter	Communications	Every other month
	Events		Events, LinkedIn, Twitter	Communications, HR	When available
	Friday meetings	Projects, accomplishments, fun facts	At the office, Teams	Teams, office assistant	Every Friday
	Company SoMe posts	Sharing posts from company account	LinkedIn, Twitter, other	Communications	On weekly basis
	Own SoMe posts	Projects, accomplishments, fun facts, company news, blogs	LinkedIn, Twitter, other	Communications, HR	On weekly basis
CEO	Blog posts	Social impact, opinion leadership	Website, LinkedIn, Twitter	Communications	Every other month
	SoMe posts	Blog posts, actively taking part into conversations, sharing interesting news	LinkedIn, Twitter	Communications	On daily basis
	Events		Events, LinkedIn, Twitter	Communications, HR	When available
Company	SoMe posts	Open jobs, blog posts, events, employees' posts	LinkedIn, Twitter	Communications, HR	On weekly basis
	Employer ambassador training	For new employees	Face-to-face	Communications, HR	On monthly basis

6.8 Feedback from the case company

The company representatives are overall happy with the plan and suggestions and they will use the information when developing for example the company's career pages. They found it interesting to find out more about employer branding as such as well as information on the case company's employer brand as it stands today. Now they can start to develop the employer brand with the research in mind instead of going with purely what they personally think. The company's strengths which were found in the study help the company to develop their messages in order to speak to the right audiences. The case company especially liked all the ideas that were related to social media and that's something they will take on as they develop the employer brand further.

The case company representatives would have liked to have even more development ideas for the employer brand work they have ahead. Some of the ideas would need more resources than the company currently have, but the ideas are still something they would be willing to try when they have more resources. The case company also was hoping to have more information on some of the ideas to help them to execute them properly. Something that could be studied further is that how does the length of the employment affect on the experience on the company's employer brand. Even though the case company liked the ideas related to social media, they would have liked to have more information on which social channel would be the best choice for each action and why.

7 Summary and conclusions

The research is made specifically for the case company and to fill the case company's needs in the field of employer branding. As the research is so specific, it cannot easily be generalized to similar companies, or it cannot easily be repeated as such.

The reliability of a research means the extent to which the same research could be done again with similar results (Morrison, J. 2019). Reliability of a research or a questionnaire can be estimated with for example test-retest method, in which the questionnaire is repeatedly sent to different groups of respondents and the results are then afterwards compared (Morrison, J. 2019). Other methods are for example inter-rater reliability or parallel-form reliability test, which includes developing two equivalent forms of the same survey (Morrison, J. 2019). What comes to the research and questionnaire in this thesis, the reliability was not tested with any of the methods mentioned. This said, the research is probably not very reliable and should not be repeated.

As the whole point of this thesis and the research was to set up a starting point in the journey of better employer branding, the work has succeeded in that.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The title of the first appendix 42

Appendix 2: The title of the second appendix 43

Appendix 1: Survey form for current employees

Company X Survey for employees All changes saved in Drive **Send**

Questions Responses Settings

Company X's employer brand

We are currently in the process of developing our employer brand. Please take a few minutes and answer the questionnaire below.

What does employer brand mean? Employer brand defines the company's reputation as an employer. It defines and positions what and who the company is, what it's like to work there and also what the company visually looks like.

I work as a

Employee

Manager

I work at

HQ

Other offices

I have worked at Company X for

Less than a year

1-2 years

2-3 years

Over 3 years

I enjoy working at Company X

1 2 3 4 5

It's not my cup of tea Yes, definitely

Company X's values are aligned with my own values

1 2 3 4 5

No Absolutely yes

I would recommend Company X as a good place to work for my friends and wider networks

1 2 3 4 5

No Absolutely yes

I proudly tell my friends where I work at

1 2 3 4 5

I try to avoid telling Absolutely yes

Please describe Company X's employer brand with three words

Long answer text

In your opinion, what are Company X's strengths as an employer?

Long answer text

In your opinion, what should Company X develop to be a better employer?

Long answer text

Anything else you would like to add?

Long answer text

:::

Thank you for answering!

We highly appreciate the effort and time you spent with the survey. Have a lovely day!

Appendix 2: Survey form for employees who have left Company X during 2021

Company X Survey for employees All changes saved in Drive Send

Questions Responses Settings

Company X's employer brand

We are currently in the process of developing our employer brand. Please take a few minutes and answer the questionnaire below.

What does employer brand mean? Employer brand defines the company's reputation as an employer. It defines and positions what and who the company is, what it's like to work there and also what the company visually looks like.

I work as a *

- Employee
- Manager

I work at *

- HQ
- Other offices

I have worked at Company X for *

- Less than a year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- Over 3 years

I enjoy working at Company X *

1 2 3 4 5

It's not my cup of tea Yes, definitely

Company X's values are aligned with my own values *

1 2 3 4 5

No Absolutely yes

I would recommend Company X as a good place to work for my friends and wider networks *

1 2 3 4 5

No Absolutely yes

I proudly tell my friends where I work at

1 2 3 4 5

I try to avoid telling Absolutely yes

Please describe Company X's employer brand with three words *

Long answer text

In your opinion, what are Company X's strengths as an employer?

Long answer text

In your opinion, what should Company X develop to be a better employer?

Long answer text

Anything else you would like to add?

Long answer text

Thank you for answering!

We highly appreciate the effort and time you spent with the survey. Have a lovely day!