



## **The impact of employer branding marketing on becoming the employer of choice**

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## Abstract

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<p>This bachelor's thesis examines employer branding strategies and the importance of employer branding marketing on becoming the employer of choice. The objective of the thesis was to investigate key factors that influence top talents' decision-making on selecting their employer for BC Platforms, and based on the research results develop an Employer Branding strategy.</p> <p>The outcome of this thesis offers invaluable insight into understanding what motivations top talent has for selecting one employer over another. The purpose of the study was to understand the impact of employer branding marketing in the decision-making process for the top talent and developing an Employer Branding strategy that gives BC Platforms actionable steps for its implementation.</p> <p>The thesis consists of a theoretical and empirical research. The former gives a thorough understanding based on the available literature on employer branding, marketing's role in employer branding, and factors influencing employee decision on selecting their employer of choice. The latter provides results and valuable insights into factors that convinced top talent to select BC Platforms specifically as their employer of choice. Qualitative research was conducted to understand the specific reasons BC Platforms' top talent had, and to measure the existing employer branding marketing on BC Platforms becoming the employer of choice.</p> <p>The data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews. The sample included 8 people, divided into two groups: (1) scientific/commercial talent and (2) software developer/tech talent. All interviewees held senior or higher position at the company. The interviews were conducted remotely via the company's Google Workspace due to the global aspect of the company and the interviewees being located internationally, and the interviews were recorded with the interviewees' knowledge and permission.</p> <p>The results showed that marketing communication had a marginal impact on attracting top talent to BC Platforms, mostly due to lack of appropriate materials. The key aspects that both groups valued as important was attributed to the possibilities for career growth. The clear difference between the two groups, as shown by the results, was placed on the importance of team dynamics and atmosphere for group 1, over meaningful challenges leading to personal growth offered by BC Platforms for group 2.</p> <p>The purpose of the Employer Branding strategy is to ensure the company's steady growth and that the company can realise its financial and strategic goals. Thanks to this thesis' empirical research and results, a robust and dedicated strategy was developed, helping BC Platforms understand which factors need to be highlighted and improved in the recruitment processes and employer branding marketing efforts. The results suggest that employer branding marketing plays an important role in attracting top talent and stresses the importance of understanding these reasons and applying them in practice to succeed in becoming the employer of choice.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Employer Branding strategy, marketing communications, talent acquisition, talent retention, Employee Value Proposition

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# **1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview and states the main purpose of this thesis. It provides relevant background information on the topic. Further, the chapter discusses project objectives and thesis goals as well as the project scope. Finally, the author provides background information on the commissioning company.

## **1.1 Background to the topic**

Employer branding and the related marketing communication plays a vital role in employee retention and attracting new talent. In the past, companies veered clear off political and societal issues. However, the recent years, social values have gained in importance and people judge businesses based on their stance, or lack of thereof, on them. (Chatterjee, Bongarzone & Schanne 2022.) This, and the fact that studies show, more than 40% of employees are expected to look for new opportunities within the next 12 months has influenced C-suite leaders to give this topic a priority (Forrester S.A., in Chatterjee et al. 2022). Further, as the Harvard Business Review article points out, over one third of companies report talent shortages (Mosley 2015). According to Ferizal (2016, in Rinaldi & Putra 2022) companies can gain a competitive advantage by creating a strong, distinctive company image which impacts new employee selection and best candidate retention. However, as Rinaldi et al. (2022) point out, this task cannot be solely the HR department's responsibility, and a more collaborative effort from the marketing team is needed to build employer branding (Heding et al. 2008, in Rinaldi & Putra 2022). Stokes (2015) further stresses the importance of cross-collaboration between HR, marketing, and C-suite executives to ensure effective creation and implementation of an employer brand. Stokes (2015) mentions in his article that many organisations neglect to proactively monitor their brand's reputation on social media. The marketing departments have an opportunity to utilise social media to track, evaluate and correct their brand's reputation and have a direct impact on employer branding and employee retention.

## **1.2 Benefits**

BC Platforms is a rapidly growing and expanding company in need of attracting and retaining great talent across the globe. The topic of top talent attractiveness and retention has been on the C-suite managements' radar and is a part of 2023 deliverables. This thesis offers BC Platforms a needed solution to improve their current recruitment and retention practices, as well as its marketing communication around employer branding. Being able to become the employer of choice for top talent and their successful retention will certainly improve the

workforce productivity, business performance and its overall profitability. Furthermore, BC Platforms gains an opportunity to improve its alignment between the company's culture and values through a successful implementation of the employer branding strategy, which may improve employee engagement and their job satisfaction. With job satisfaction and improved employee engagement comes higher motivation and productivity, which may lead to an improved customer experience and customer loyalty. Additionally, a comprehensive employer branding strategy and marketing communication, as well as improved recruitment and retention, may give BC Platforms a competitive advantage over its competitors and improve its position in the market. Lastly, on a personal level, a successful execution of a project of this magnitude within a company will allow the author of this thesis to further her professional growth through acquiring new knowledge and skills, and may shape a path towards professional specialisation and future employment opportunities.

### **1.3 Research question**

This thesis aims to explore the impact of employer branding marketing on establishing the commissioning company as the employer of choice. The aim is to understand which aspects of Employer Branding marketing are considered to be the most effective in attracting and retaining the top talent at BC Platforms. The study provides additional insights into the Employer Branding concept from the marketing perspective, as most available literature focuses on the Human Resources.

The research will provide valuable perception into the aspects that resonate with the current and potential employees. Additionally, it will assess how the current employer branding marketing shapes perceptions of what the culture and value proposition, as well as what the actual employee experience is like. The goal is to gain a thorough understanding of how marketing contributes to developing a company's reputation as the employer of choice. Finally, the data gathered will be used to formulate a comprehensive employer branding strategy leveraging the marketing communication strategies to secure BC Platforms' position as an attractive employer globally.

#### **Research Question (RQ):**

What impact does employer branding marketing have on establishing BC Platforms as the employer of choice, and what are the key factors that influence talent acquisition and retention?

**Investigative Questions (IQs):**

**IQ1:** What channels and first impressions play a significant role in informing potential candidates about BC Platforms as an employer?

**IQ2:** Which specific employer branding aspects have the most critical impact on attracting new talent to BC Platforms?

**IQ3:** How well does BC Platforms' employer branding marketing reflect the actual employee experience?

**IQ4:** Which employer branding marketing strategies have an impact on employees' perceptions of BC Platforms, and where can they be improved?

**IQ5:** How is BC Platforms' culture described, and what impact does it have on their retention?

**IQ6:** What are the main factors that contribute to employee tenure at BC Platforms, and how are they aligned with the marketing branding efforts?

**IQ7:** What strategies could BC Platforms use to elevate its status as the employer of choice?

Table 1. Overlay matrix

<b>Investigative Question</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Results Chapter</b>
<b>IQ1:</b> What channels and first impressions play a significant role in informing potential candidates about BC Platforms as an employer?	Employer Branding, Marketing Communication, Industry	Literature Review, qualitative interviews	Questions 1-2	Chapter 7.1
<b>IQ2:</b> Which specific employer branding aspects have the most critical impact	Employer Branding, Marketing Communication	Literature Review, qualitative interviews	Questions 3-4	Chapter 7.1

on attracting new talent to BC Platforms?				
<b>IQ3:</b> How well does BC Platforms' employer branding marketing reflect the actual employee experience?	Employer Branding, Marketing Communication	Literature Review, qualitative interviews	Questions 5-8	Chapter 7.1
<b>IQ4:</b> Which employer branding marketing strategies have an impact on employees' perceptions of BC Platforms, and where can they be improved?	Employer Branding KPIs	Literature Review, qualitative interviews	Questions 9-10	Chapter 7.1
<b>IQ5:</b> How is BC Platforms' culture described, and what impact does it have on their retention?	Evaluation criteria	Qualitative interviews	Questions 11-13	Chapter 7.1
<b>IQ6:</b> What are the main factors that contribute to employee tenure at BC Platforms, and how are they aligned with the marketing branding efforts?	Employer Branding, Marketing Communication, Industry	Literature Review, qualitative interviews	Questions 1-15	Chapter 7.1

<b>IQ7:</b> What strategies could BC Platforms use to elevate its status as the employer of choice?	Employer Branding, Marketing Communication	Literature Review, qualitative interviews	Questions 1-15	Chapter 7.1
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#### 1.4 Key concepts

**Employer branding** can be described as creating positive perceptions about an organisation by prospective employees and current workforce. The organisation’s strength is enhanced through the creation of a value proposition and aids in organising various functional, psychological, and financial benefits by “positioning the organisation as the “employer of choice”. (Zahidi & Naz 2021, 1, in Rana et al. 2021.) In the traditional meaning of the word *branding* it has always been related to marketing, but since then *employer branding* has evolved into a blend of Human Resource Management and marketing (Wojtaszczyk 2012, in Rana et al. 2021).

**Marketing communication** is thought by Eagle, Dahl, Czarnecka & Lloyd (2021) to be a difficult term to explain as it is often portrayed by various authors from different perspectives: either it being a process of communication or focusing on the impact of communication. Eagle et al. (2021) therefore provide an extensive overview of various literary sources and strive to provide a comprehensive definition of what *marketing communication* is. According to Schramm (in Eagle et al. 2021, 23), communication allows to establish a feeling of “commonness of thought between a sender and receiver”. The authors (Eagle et al. 2021) believe this definition to be lacking when presented alone; hence, they offered another definition by Fiske (in Eagle et al. 2021, 24) whereby “communication is a form of social interaction through messages”. Therefore, a joint definition of communication can be derived from Schramm and Fiske together, as proposed by Eagle et al. (2021, 25) as “a process of social interactions undertaken with the aim of achieving an ideal end state in which all parties involved arrive at a consensus of meaning.”

**Life Science industry** term is often used when referring to any organisations whose primary work centers around research, development and manufacturing of drugs, medical devices, biomedical technologies aimed at improving living organisms’ lives (Scilife Life Science Glossary s.a.).

**Talent acquisition** can be considered as a strategic approach to recognising, evaluating and acquiring new talent for an organisation. This process varies greatly from *recruitment* in that it favours only the best fit for the business over quantity. (Hennigan, Bottorff 2022)

**Talent retention** is thought of as a programme intended for employees in an organisation who are critical to that business' performance (Chao, Kaetzler, Lalani & Lynch 2020).

**Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** are intended to help organisations in planning its operations taking into account its strategic objectives, improving overall performance, and establishing ownership, empowerment and fulfillment (Parmenter 2019).

## 1.5 Commissioning company

BC Platforms was originally established in 1997 in Finland as a spin-off to the Whitehead Institute/MIT Center for Genome Research lead by Eric Lander responsible for developing tools automating laboratory and computational genomics applied to producing detailed genomic maps. Eric's groups' achievements and genomic maps laid the foundations for genome sequencing. (Careers BC Platforms s.a.; Your Genome s.a.) BC Platforms operates as an international bioinformatics software company with a mission to revolutionise drug development and personalising patient care by providing genomic data management and analysis solutions to customers globally. Since its inception in Finland, BC Platforms' headquarters relocated to Zurich, Switzerland. The other operating locations include research and development office in Espoo, Finland, sales and marketing in Boston, USA, London, UK as well as Singapore. There are around 100 colleagues from 15 different nationalities working at BC Platforms. The company's turnover in 2021 was CHF 10,7M. (Careers BC Platforms s.a.)

Currently, BC Platforms set ambitious goals to keep its steady growth and increase business profitability in 2023. Top management at BC Platforms understands the importance of having the right people for the job and BC Platforms' ability to drive employee engagement and job satisfaction. Introducing a stellar employer branding strategy and marketing communication in its support has been on the radar and is considered a crucial part of this year's deliverables. This thesis' topic has been selected with collaboration with its author to ensure that both parties find value in the project.

## 2 Employer Branding

In this theoretical part of the thesis, the author will cover the current literature knowledge on employer branding, the importance of marketing in employer branding, marketing communication related to employer branding, BC Platforms' operating industry and related employer branding standards. In the following chapter, the author will analyse the theory on key factors that talents base their opinion on when choosing their employer of choice.

(Figure 1.)

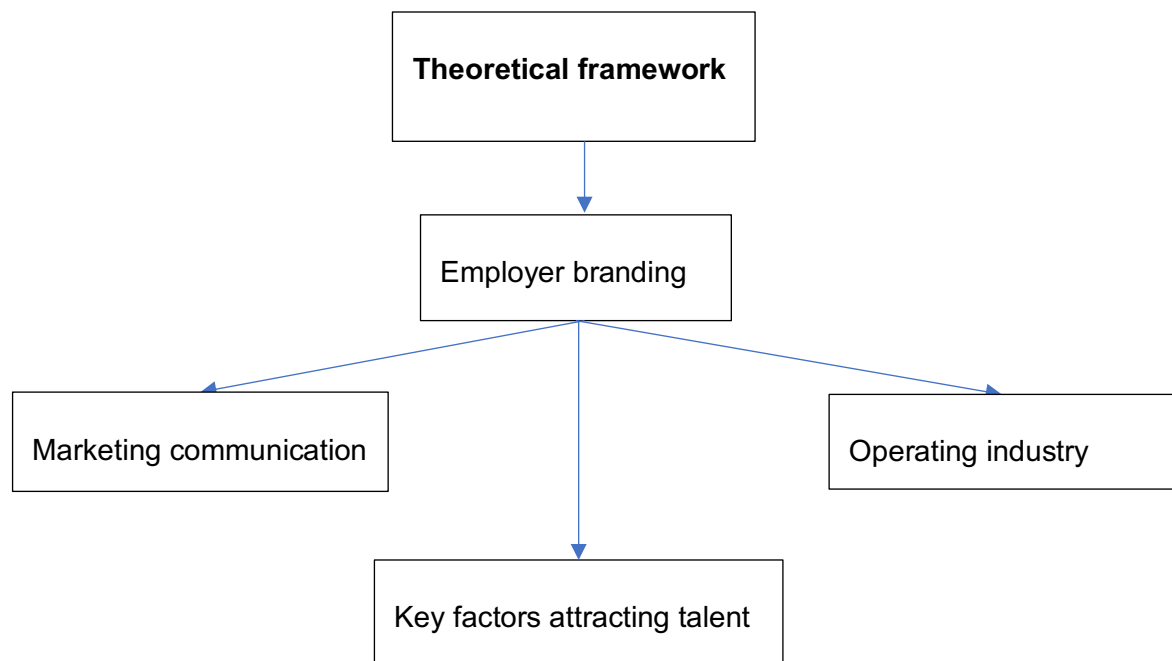


Figure 1. Theoretical framework flow

As times change and new businesses open up, skilled workforce becomes scarce and employers often lack qualified human resources. This scarcity forced many brands to reconsider their branding and marketing messaging to influence skilled talent to select them as a work place. This idea started to be researched around 2000s (i.e. Cable & Turban 2001, in Lievens & Slaughter 2016), starting the movement on understanding how the perception of the employer influences job seekers' decisions. The *employer brand* was first introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996, 187) as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employment company" and was meant to emphasise the organisation's values and propositions to

employees in a clear and concise manner, following the same application as customer brand (Mosley 2007).

Mosley (2007) points out that, in the past, the employer branding activities tended to focus on developing a robust external reputation with a very limited effort on improving the internal efforts to increase employee engagement and a positive culture shift. Nowadays, this approach appears to be much broader, encompassing the internal employee experience along with the external employee recruitment promises.

In order to understand what building a successful employer branding strategy means, one must first understand the difference between a few concepts it is related to. Lievens and Slaughter (2016, 409-410) begin by pointing out the concept of *employer branding* can also be known under different terms, such as *organisational image*, *employer image* or *familiarity and reputation*, *identity*, and finally *employer brand*. The first concept presupposes that an individual may hold multiple organisational images about the firm's finances, social responsibility, and its products or services. The next concept focuses on mental imagery held by a single person, which may change over time and tend to concentrate on specific aspects. The *employer familiarity and reputation* concept according to Cable and Turban (2001, in Lievens & Slaughter 2016) is based on the fact that employer image and reputation is preceded by employer familiarity due to the fact that any evaluation of an employer can only begin when a job seeker is aware of their existence in the first place. Afterwards, reputation would entail a more stable imagery a general public may hold about the organisation, which may not align with the former (i.e. what an individual thinks). Then, *identity*, refers to what the organisation's employees consider the core characteristics to be, as opposed to *imagery* being about the job seeker's beliefs. Finally, Lievens and Slaughter (2016) suggest bringing the previously described concept under *external* and *internal employer branding* umbrella to provide clarity. The former deals with what outsiders perceive the organisation to be like, whereas the latter with the internal identity. Theurer, Tumasjan, Welp, and Lievens (2016) highlight the word *brand* in the phrase employer branding and cite Keller's (2011, in Theurer et al. 2016) definition as one which has been purposefully curated with great care to create a logical series of steps in customers' minds. They further differentiate between two concepts: *employer brand* vs *employer branding*; the former concentrating on various benefits, such as economic, psychological, functional benefits, provided by and identified with the employment within the company. Whereas, the former describes a process of creating and promoting a unique image which can be identified with a specific company. (Theurer et al. 2016.)

A successful Employer Branding strategy is no longer optional for any organisation wishing to keep their competitive advantage as an employer brand is having a significant impact on the ability to hire top talent. As Bandarouk, Ruel, Axinia and Arama (2013, 27) point out, an Employer Branding strategy works as a tool to achieve competitive advantage and is a “long-term strategy to construct an authentic and attractive employer personality to handle the opinion of future and existing talents”. It also helps organisations to lower hiring costs and maximising their revenue through increasing the quality of applicants motivated to work for the company and reducing turnover rates (Keller 2017).

## **2.1 Marketing communication**

Employer branding appears to be clearly connected with HR and talent acquisition practices with no obvious link to marketing. This connection becomes clearer once we realise what marketing department’s role is within an organisation. Some of the key tasks of any marketing department that help draw the missing link would be to define and manage the brand, creating and curating promotional materials (The Hartford s.a.). Further, as Samdahl (2019) reminisces, a marketer’s role is to gain new leads and bring in new business opportunities. However, businesses would not be able to execute on their goals without the right people in the correct positions, which means that employer branding plays a vital role in any organisation’s existence. Samdahl (2019) argues further that companies no longer compete against each other for customers, but top talent as well, which can only be achieved by “differentiating the employee experience”. Fumagalli (2021) shares a similar sentiment in that employer branding and talent acquisition, at first glance, appear to be entirely HR-function related; however, as one takes a closer look at various tasks required to manage a brand, the link between HR and marketing function becomes noticeable. Most notable in communication, messaging, and brand cohesiveness. (Fumagalli 2021.) Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen (2013) highlight the link between HR and marketing functions by pointing out the fact that social media has seen a significant increase in employer branding and recruitment campaigns. Borstorff et al. (2005, in Sivertzen et al. 2013) and Boyd et al. (2008, in Sivertzen et al. 2013) show how in the past recruiters relied on newspapers and word-of-mouth in order to advertise job vacancies; with the World Wide Web available in most parts of the globe, all of a sudden, recruiters were able to reach a much wider network of jobseekers, active or passive, at a much lower cost, with shorter response time, and higher response numbers. (Sivertzen et al. 2013.) Other organisations understand that attracting talent lies in “quality, trust and value that the job seeker wants in the application/employment experience” (Putre 2013, in Phillips-Wren, Doran & Merrill 2016, p. 451) and can be achieved by re-thinking the standard approach and focusing on building

personalised relationships with niche talent pools rather than promoting new job advertisements. One of those approaches includes utilising corporate websites to provide potential job seekers with first impressions of the company, company culture, and a way to communicate (Phillips-Wren et al. 2016.)

Having established the importance of attracting the top talent, it becomes apparent that, in order to differentiate and communicate attractiveness, organisations need to develop a proper recruitment strategy. Thanks to easy access to the internet and an overwhelming amount of information available, individuals can form their own opinions and perceptions of the brand. Companies realise this and attempt to influence these perceptions by clearly stating their values, mission, achievements, and points of attractiveness such as possibilities for professional development and advancement, corporate responsibility, supportive and positive work environment (Elving 2011.) Kashyap (2022) points out that marketing offers a unique insight into Employer Branding as it possesses the right knowledge of the market and skillset to transform their mindset from customer-centric to employee-centric since both require to attract “leads”, convert “prospects”, strengthen relationships, and promote advocacy. Kashyap (2022) mentions that many companies have a strong HR-led Employer Branding strategy focused on talent acquisition but inadvertently neglecting its other aspects. Marketing communication, which focuses on strengthening relationships and employee advocacy, has many positive outcomes that exceed employee lifecycle at the company; as their employment ends, they continue to advocate their experiences and insights, influencing brand image. Further, Ng et al (2010, in Bejtkovsky & Copca 2020) and Saini et al. (2014, Bejtkovsky & Copca 2020) highlight the impact marketing department has on employer branding efforts as strengthening the company’s competitiveness, reputation and image; decreasing the overall costs related to recruitment processes; as well as, an increase in employees’ job motivation and satisfaction.

## **2.2 Operating industry**

BC Platforms is a biotech IT software company operating within the healthcare and life sciences industries. The author of this thesis will investigate the importance of employer branding and HR Marketing within IT, healthcare and life sciences industries to gain the best understanding of the practices within these industries.

Bejtkovsky and Copca (2020) in their paper discuss effective strategies used by healthcare service providers to attract and retain top talent. These strategies include developing and maintaining a strong employer brand by highlighting the company’s core values and culture, as well as showcasing the work environment. Secondly, these strategies concentrate on

offering competitive compensation and benefits to their staff, which relates to salaries, health insurance and retirement options, as well as other perks. Thirdly, by providing ample opportunities for career and self-growth through training programmes, mentorships, and leadership development programmes. Forthly, by supporting and promoting a positive work environment, work-life balance, and recognising employee's achievements. Finally, by making use of technology to reach and appeal to the top talent.

Dabirian, Paschen and Kietzmann (2019) refer to *external* and *internal marketing* as part of Employer Branding, which can be generalized to any industry, including IT. In their paper, they point out this difference and particular role of marketing as establishing the company's brand as a great workplace which, in turn, allows it to attract top talent; whereas the former which supports obtaining impossible to imitate workforce through continuous exposure of the company's value proposition to its employees. If performed successfully, the authors believe it to be crucial to "contributing to employee retention" (Dabirian et al. 2019, 84). In their research, Dabirian et al. (2019) concentrate on identifying key factors that appeal to IT talent specifically, which will be further investigated in the following chapter.

### **3 Key factors attracting top talent**

In this chapter, the author will first examine the top key factors associated with successfully attracting and retaining top talent across all industries, and then conduct own qualitative research on top talent currently employed by BC Platforms to develop a comprehensive understanding of reasons for which they chose BC Platforms as their employer of choice.

De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi and Schaninger (2021) in their research show that employees are looking to leave their employment, even without having another job lined up, which means that executives must take their time to understand what factors help talent decide between various employers, not only to attract new talent, but also to retain the current one. In the early 2000s there was scarce empirical research on the exact criteria employees consider as important in their search for the employer as the concept of Employer Branding was only beginning to emerge. Sutherland, Torricelli and Karg (2002) stress the importance of organisations to identify what those factors are to correctly “apply traditional marketing principles to achieve the status of Employer of Choice” (Branham (2000, 18, in Sutherland et al. 2002, 16). As the concept was further researched along the years, it suggested the existence of common factors that organisations may want to address in their internal and external branding activities to increase their chances of becoming the Employer of Choice. For instance, Dabirian et al.’s (2019) research findings revealed eight value propositions that top talent looked for in their employer of choice: social, interest, application, development, economic, and management values, as well as work/life balance and brand image. While others, such as Samoliuk, Bilan, Mishchuk and Mishchuk (2022) who point out that it is difficult to address as those experiences vary due to differences in expectations, education, experiences, gender or age.

#### **3.1 Social value**

As described by Dabirian et al. (2019), the social value aspect refers to organisations which support human interaction and team cooperation in problem solving. The research conclusions revealed that the highly collaborative and peer supporting environment was held in high regards amongst current and former employees, suggesting that employer branding conscious organisations may want to concentrate their efforts in promoting this aspect and feature it in their external branding efforts. Dabirian et al. (2019) compared top IT companies to the worst and discovered that this aspect was rarely highlighted or mentioned in the bottom companies, which suggests that they are not putting nearly as much effort or attention to this aspect as the top companies.

### **3.2 Interest value**

This value refers to how challenging and achievable employees found their tasks and job requirements to be. Further, it included concepts such as willingness to apply new technology or find innovative ways to problem solve at work. (Dabirian et al. 2019.) The research conclusions showed that employers should focus on featuring these aspects in their external marketing communication to advertise their stimulating and interesting work-environment. Some of the common complains brought up against the interest value included things such as “bureaucracy, repetitive tasks, and a mismatch between qualifications and job profile.” (Dabirian et al. 2019, 87.)

### **3.3 Application value**

According to Dabirian et al. (2019), IT-industry employees often valued the fact that their skills and knowledge were being applied meaningfully in their tasks and allowed them to contribute to the success of the company through high-quality products and services offered. De Smet et al. (2021) in their analysis discovered that over half of the employees leaving, did so due to the feeling of being unappreciated or not value; a sentiment senior executives did not take into consideration.

### **3.4 Development value**

Development Value shows that employees were interested in opportunities to grow within the company and develop their skills in both lateral and vertical positions (Dabirian et al. 2019). A similar testament is mentioned by Chitu et al. (2014, in Bejtkovsky & Copca 2020), who believes that career growth opportunities and possibilities, including further training, is amongst main factors influencing the choice of the employer.

### **3.5 Economic value**

The research has shown that IT-industry employees were primarily interested in adequate compensation and additional perks such as holidays, medical benefits, office snacks, and more (Dabirian et al. 2019). The research revealed that employees at the top IT sector companies were satisfied with the monetary value offered; however, Dabirian et al. (2019) note that further research may be needed to understand whether this is a true motivator behind increased job satisfaction, employee loyalty or one that increases job dissatisfaction leading to employee churn, even though employees often mentioned their discontent.

### **3.6 Management value**

Another aspect that IT sector employees pay attention to when selecting their employer is based on their superiors' leadership qualities, competence, a sense of vision, and having the ability to motivate and inspire. Some of the common reasons for discontent amongst employees is related to micromanagement and lack of leadership skills. Dabirian et al. (2019) point out that these skills in superiors play a tremendous role on employee retention, suggesting that management should be monitored, and any criticisms addressed to ensure employee retention as part of the internal branding.

### **3.7 Work/Life balance**

Nowadays, employees seek employers who support the work/life balance of their employees with flexible working hours which enable them to keep their non-work-related commitments (i.e. family, interests, volunteering) (Dabirian et al. 2019). Aboul-Ela (2016) takes this further by pointing out that employees seek in their employer the ability to care about their well-being.

### **3.8 Brand image**

A relatively new value proposition which IT sector employees have started looking for in their employer of choice. This value relates to whether they themselves consider the company as interesting and exciting to work for. However, for this to be effective, these cannot be just marketing words. Dabirian et al. (2019) noted a major issue in that some organisations mastered conveying the brand image to new talent, but failed at brand identity, meaning how they deliver on their promises once the new hire starts. This suggests that the external and internal branding should go together to ensure there are no contrast between the two. Saini and Jawahar (2019, in Bejtkovsky & Copca 2020) agree that the employer brand image, as well as their current employee experiences, have an impact on whether an organisation becomes the employer of choice. Aboul-Ela (2016) brings up an idea that employees seek to identify with and work for the organisation which reflects on its business and practices corporate responsibility.

### **3.9 Other factors**

Aboul-Ela (2016), in his literature review, found that top talent often pays attention to how attractive and comprehensible the company website is. Another aspect mentioned in De Smet et al.'s (2021) research identified the company's efforts of creating a sense of community amongst the employees, which differs from the social value in that it encourages

employees to interact with each other or to take care of themselves and their closest ones aside from work.

## **4 Modern practices**

In this chapter, the author will focus on introducing the research design, discussing the sampling and identifying the factors that top talent working at BC Platforms considered important when selecting their employer of choice and analysing what role the current marketing communication had on their decision.

### **4.1 Research design**

The purpose of this chapter is to identify key themes that top talent mention as important in directing their decision-making when deciding on their employer of choice, which will be later used in developing an Employer Branding strategy for BC Platforms in chapter 6. The research was qualitative in nature and the interviews were semi-structured. The author conducted a total of eight interviews with BC Platforms employees and every interview was conducted online via Google Meets as participants are based outside Finland. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the participants' knowledge and permission. The sample consisted of two types of talent: software developers and customer success; both of which are crucial to BC Platforms' success and business goals.

Flick (2007) suggests that qualitative research has different origins; personal experiences (Glaser & Strauss 1965, in Flick 2007), social circumstances (Hochschild 1983, in Flick 2007), or interests (Jahoda 1995, in Flick 2007). From these different origin sources, develops a research project for which one needs to create a research question. (Flick 2007.) The interest for this thesis topic came from the author's own interest in identifying the impact a marketing department can have on a commonly thought of as a Human Resource only topic, as well as the commissioning company's need for establishing thorough Employer Branding processes. The timing for this thesis was ideal as the company underwent structural and brand design changes, which meant it would have been easier to implement the recommended strategy and embed it into the new brand design.

Once the need was identified with a marketing aspect to be investigated, the author proceeded to developing a research question, and selecting the appropriate research method, deciding to use a qualitative research method as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of complex human actions and motivations in the context of selecting their employer of choice. It also allowed the author a chance to follow up on a question to further deepen the understanding and contextualise reasoning for certain actions or choices. (Queiros, Faria & Almeida 2017.) Further, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) in their book point out that the gathered data is rich in contextual details and the subsequent data

analysis happens naturally due to the descriptive and explanatory nature of the qualitative research.

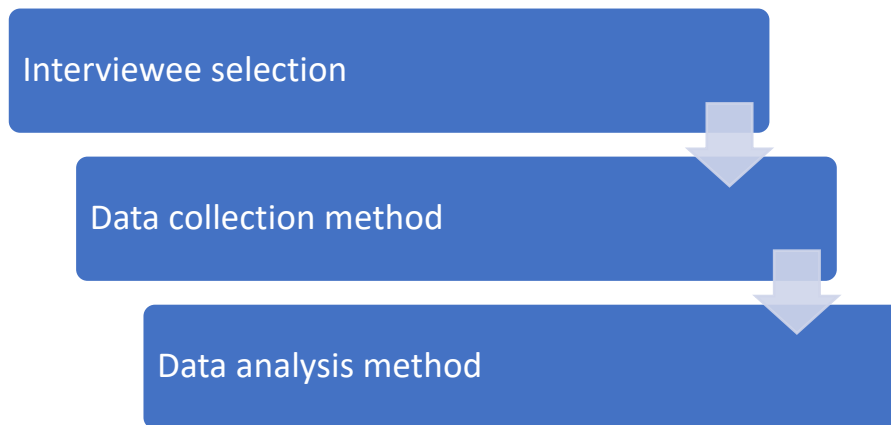


Figure 2. Research design

#### **4.2 Data collection**

The research data was collected using qualitative semi-structured interviews between 12 October and 7 November 2023. In total eight interviews were conducted, and each took about one hour. The interviews were conducted remotely due to large distances between the participants. The author sampled the right individuals for the interviews according to the wishes of the commissioning company. In the outreach and invitation email, the author stressed to the participants that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, as well as the fact that any data obtained would be anonymised and used solely for the purpose of this thesis project. Each interviewee received the thematic interview questions in advance via the Google Meets invite after the interview was agreed upon. At the beginning of every interview, the interviewees were reminded that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, as well as of the purpose of the interview and its anonymity.

#### **4.3 Data analysis**

The author decided to use the thematic data analysis as it helps reduce the large quantity of gathered textual data into more manageable chunks of information (Miles & Huberman 1994, in Durdella 2019). During the analysis, the author will develop codes for the segmented portions of the data, and using these codes, connect common characteristics or patterns. The result should reveal patterns which are under the investigation of the interview. (Durdella 2019.)

In the research phase, the author collected voice recordings to transcribe word for word every interview. The total page count for the transcribed interviews was 114. The transcribed data was then used as a basis for thematic analysis and the resulting codes were developed using tables in a separate Microsoft Word file.

#### **4.4 Data reliability and relevance**

The first step to ensuring that the data gathered will be reliable and relevant for this project thesis was to decide on the correct data collection method. In this case, the choice was to proceed with qualitative research method as it allowed for a deep understanding of human motivations and allowed for an opportunity to ask follow-up questions. By showing consideration towards an appropriate data collection method, the author fulfilled the first of the conditions for ensuring the quality of data. Another step was careful and frequent re-assessment of the selected data collection method to ensure that the choice fit the purpose of the study. Finally, the quality of the research was preserved through thorough reporting style and making a clear connection between the theory and results. (Flick 2007.)

## 5 Results

This chapter is focused on introducing the results of the qualitative research providing the answer to the Research Questions and its Investigative Questions by dividing them into five themes. The author will also introduce the reader briefly to the interviewees.

The author decided to present the results of the qualitative research in themes to be able to better understand the thought processes top talent showed in selecting their employer of choice, which could be applied to in designing the Employer Branding strategy in Chapter 6. Furthermore, this division allowed the author to examine the impact of marketing communication on top talent's decision-making when selecting their employer of choice, which helps find the answer to the research question discussed in Chapter 7.

### 5.1 Brief introduction to interviewees

Due to the nature of the business where BC Platforms operates, the author of this thesis distinguished between two types of top talent working at the company: (1) scientific or commercial talent and (2) software developer or tech talent. The reason for this division is mainly to measure whether there are any similarities or differences in the motivations that guide these two groups in how they select their employer of choice and identify potential strategies on how marketing could communicate the value proposition differently based on the needs.

All the interviews were held with the current BC Platforms employees whose tenure at the company varied from 7 years to over a year. Out of 8 total interviews, 4 of them were conducted with the first group of talent, and 4 with the second group.

Table 2. Introduction to interviewees

<b>Number</b>	<b>Interview group</b>	<b>Interviewee job title</b>
Interviewee 1	1	Female, Head of the Unit
Interviewee 2	1	Male, Executive Vice President
Interviewee 3	1	Female, Executive Vice President
Interviewee 4	1	Male, C-level executive
Interviewee 5	2	Male, Vice President in Tech

Interviewee 6	2	Male, Senior level in Tech
Interviewee 7	2	Male, Vice President in Tech
Interviewee 8	2	Male, Senior level in Tech

## 5.2 Theme one: About the company

The majority of the interviewed people learned about BC Platforms either directly through business involvement or by being contacted by someone who already worked at the company. Their initial impressions of the organisation included recognising its value proposition, “great work ethics”, and providing good learning opportunities. Interviewee 1’s initial impressions of the company where that it was “fit for purpose and it was doing things that we wanted it to do”. Interviewee 6’s initial interest was sparked by BC Platforms’ “complex product development range”. Another reason was linked to being a smaller global company in the rapid growth stage. Whenever the interviewee heard of the company through its direct competitor and prior to considering applying, their view of the company was very positive.

Group 1, comprising of scientific or commercial talent, indicated that their initial interest in the company was linked with appreciation towards the team, work ethics, and company culture. Whereas, Group 2, encompassing software developer or tech talent, were focusing on the complexity of the “product development range” (Interviewee 6) and were bringing in topics of the company being more mature, bigger, or offering “a wider portfolio” (Interviewee 5).

However, both groups indicated their interest in working for a global company (Interviewee 2 & Interviewee 7).

**Interviewee 1** came across BC Platforms in her former workplace where she was directly involved for several years in using the software that BC Platforms provides. Her initial impressions of the company were linked with the service it provides and that it was “fit for purpose and it was doing things that we wanted it to do”. She appreciated the honesty and the dedication that BC Platforms’ team showed in ensuring their client received exactly what they had been promised or be further developed to suit the needs of their clients.

**Interviewee 2** was interested in exploring other employment opportunities within early stages companies and got scouted by someone at BC Platforms. He didn't have any prior knowledge about the company as, at the time, the Life Sciences industry was not a focus for the company. His initial impression about the company was that it was a rapidly growing and expanding firm with a global footprint.

**Interviewee 3** first heard of BC Platforms when working for their direct competitor. She recalls her initial impressions of the company to be that of embracing towards new employees and engaging to sustain employee tenure, bringing in different cultures, and offering an interesting end-to-end product.

**Interviewee 4** was connected to someone at BC Platforms through his former workplace and met with some of the other members to work on a collaboration. During those presentations, he became more familiar with the company and its offering. When an opportunity opened at the company, he decided he would be the right fit. His initial impressions were that BC Platforms was a global company, offering "a little bit different" experience than his previous workplaces which were much more local. He noticed the company was very "tech oriented" with a "philosophical and Scandinavian" approach.

**Interviewee 5** learnt about BC Platforms when working for a competitor at a local market. His first impressions about the company came from the competitor's sales department and, due to a loss of business to BC Platforms, the word was not favourable. However, it made the interviewee interested and eventually he learnt that BC Platforms was a bigger organisation, with more capacity and a wider product portfolio.

**Interviewee 6** found the company through a LinkedIn job advertisement at the time when he was looking for another role to further his professional development. His initial interest was sparked by BC Platforms' "complex product development range". This complexity of the product range meant he initially underestimated the role the company plays in improving patients' lives and outcomes, but later gained admiration towards. He also recalled that during his interviewing period at BC Platforms, he was promptly contacted and scheduled for interview meetings, and the entire hiring process was swift and kept him informed.

**Interviewee 7** felt discouraged at his previous company after the departure of his work mentor and other disconcerting activities at the company. He received a job description for a tech role at BC Platforms through a colleague and decided to interview. He recalled his first impression of the company being global and having different expectations than a local company he worked for at the time. But he didn't like the long wait in-between the interviews,

which made him feel anxious about the entire process, so the initial impressions were not overly positive nor negative.

**Interviewee 8** first joined a sister-project company and got to be a part of BC Platforms' early days. He was initially interested in the reasons for which the company was founded as he has a very strong moral values code. He felt like the company was serving people and considers it to be of high importance to him.

### **5.3 Theme two: Reasons for joining**

Interviewees identified several reasons for which they were interested in joining BC Platforms. Mainly to the fact it offered a dynamic structure: "structure is ever changing (...) and you don't really know where you are going to be in half a year's time" (Interviewee 1), its "broader scope for learning" (Interviewee 6), and finally the company's culture and work ethics. These factors highlight the importance talent places on being able to do meaningful work and be able to grow professionally.

Both groups indicated as their reason for joining being a stable environment, which offered various career development paths, indicating that professional growth is equally important to both talent groups and should, therefore, be prominently highlighted in the Employer Branding strategy. This aspect may mean different things to different individuals, as shown during the interview, where Group 1 interviewees concentrated on the "structural changes" and being unable to foresee what one will be doing in a period of time (Interviewee 1), "exposure to a different market" (Interviewee 2) and learning through that experience, whereas Group 2's interviewees focus more on their learning opportunities within the same role.

**Interviewee 1** felt she was ready for a career change and explored other opportunities, when she was approached by someone at BC Platforms and accepted the role. She appreciates the constant challenges this work brings and is looking forward to seeing where this takes her in the future as the "structure is ever changing (...) and you don't really know where you are going to be in half a year's time". She stressed that the fact the team is tight-knit, and the work is constantly evolving, it allows one to constantly learn more and be very flexible. Through her previous contact with the company, she knew she would enjoy the working ethics of her new colleagues.

**Interviewee 2** felt drawn to the company based on the global footprint and the fact that he could be a valuable addition to albeit small but expanding business. He felt like the international component appealed to him giving him "a different level of exposure to a

different market” outside of his local one. He also appreciated being able to actively engage with the executive management team from the beginning, allowing him to grow professionally more rapidly and keep a better level of communication.

**Interviewee 3** came across a senior executive at BC Platforms who shared his enthusiasm and passion for the product and company future, making it for an attractive place to work. What ultimately won her over, was the work culture, the team, and what the company stands for.

**Interviewee 4** liked the feeling and approach of the company which is a complete opposite to what he was familiar with, i.e. companies being results oriented, prioritising performance over corporate culture. He enjoyed the “friendly atmosphere” which made the company appealing to him. Another aspect that convinced him about the role at the company, was that people “are not forced into one specific role” and that “the way (one works) is more versatile” and “everybody has a chance to develop”.

**Interviewee 5** did not see any growth and career development potential at his previous workplace, which made him be more receptive to what his network was offering. He heard about an open position from a contact at BC Platforms and after doing his own research, he decided to transition. He appreciated the fact that BC Platforms appeared to be a stable, mature company which was still at the stage of growth but without the heavy bureaucratic burden associated with huge corporations. This, connected with his lifelong desire for knowledge and personal development, meant that he saw great opportunity at the company.

**Interviewee 6** made the final decision based on the “broader scope for learning”, which he pointed out to be a common factor amongst developers. He also pointed out that it was important for him to understand that the software he would be working on developing is continuously being worked on and improved, which helps him understand future potential for development.

**Interviewee 7** based his decision on the unstable and uncertain environment in his previous workplace. He mentioned that he appreciates the constant challenge BC Platforms’ offers.

**Interviewee 8** mentioned his ultimate reason being his previous position was becoming redundant at the time when BC Platforms’ offered him a possibility to work, but he was also looking forward to the company’s “strong values and morals”.

#### **5.4 Theme three: Marketing efforts and influence**

Based on the interviewees' answers, it becomes apparent that BC Platforms has made tremendous improvements to its visibility and branding, but more areas require additional work. One of the commonly mentioned topics across most interviews, was the wish for defining a clearer value proposition, for instance through customer testimonials or detailed product insights. It appears that the currently available marketing materials seen during the first interactions with the company are not sufficiently informative or convincing to be the sole reason for potential employee's decision-making in their selection of an employer. Rather, the decision came down to personal interactions or connections at BC Platforms that played a crucial role in driving the understanding of what the company does and what it offers.

Group 1 was exposed through various channels to BC Platforms prior to their desire to join the company; however, despite the apparent exposure to the brand, this group felt the inability of the marketing communication to convey the company's vision and mission, as well as the true impact of its offering. This group has expressed their wish that the marketing material focuses less on the technology itself, but rather on the problems it aims to solve and real implications (i.e. through customer testimonials).

Group 2, on the other hand, were more interested in the technical details, such as the programming languages or technical environments BC Platforms utilises in their product portfolio, which are missing from the currently available marketing materials. Their motivations lie in understanding what challenges they can expect in their work and the types of growth or learning opportunities working at BC Platforms would provide them with. It becomes apparent that this group of talent would have benefited from marketing materials showcasing the cutting-edge technical capabilities and innovation, for example through technical whitepapers, tech radars, or detailed case studies.

**Interviewee 1** based on her previous encounters with the company, she knew enough of what the brand is about to go straight into the interviewing phase and not look up the website to gather more information.

**Interviewee 2** recalled a much smaller scale marketing footprint compared to nowadays efforts, but he remembered reading up on press releases and product offerings that helped him understand the company had managed to develop something many other organisations in the industry were unable to. However, at the time, he needed to look for that information elsewhere, as there were no readily available marketing materials that would help him understand better the value proposition. Over the years at the company, he has seen great

improvement in the marketing branding and communication that he believes is crucial in increasing the company visibility; however, he would have liked to see more testimonials to showcase how the software is used and impact it plays on the market. Another aspect missing, according to him, are dedicated press releases related to specific “cutting-edge product solutions” and “more competitive differentiating statements” that speak to the tech and data science talent (effectively, the second group of talent pool) laying out the groundwork for what BC Platforms’ product can do technically and what makes it special or different from the others on the market.

**Interviewee 3** saw a lack of consistent marketing communication and poorly established brand, which was a motivator for her to make a difference.

**Interviewee 4** found the information available to him a little bit confusing and overpromising with a clear focus on what the technology is rather than what problems it tries to solve. Once he became a part of BC Platforms, he understood better on what the offering is. He mentioned that he wished he would see more customer testimonials that would help him understand how the company was doing and who it was helping.

**Interviewee 5** recalled searching more information about BC Platforms online but not everything “was clear at first”, with little material available providing a better overview. He mentioned being intrigued by one of BC Platforms’ products offering a more extensive end-to-end solution, which he felt was a missed opportunity at his previous workplace.

**Interviewee 6** mentioned that his focus was on understanding what knowledge he would be gaining while employed at the company, and the marketing branding communication available to him at the time did not provide enough insight to help him grasp the complexity and growth possibility. His understanding and, finally, decision to join was based on his interview meetings with more senior team members who introduce him to the scope of work. He mentioned that it would have been helpful to gain that level of insight or understanding of the working developer environment from the marketing communication and website, citing examples of other tech companies who use that level of transparency.

**Interviewee 7** remembered searching for available marketing material to learn more about the company and its value proposition but recalls the then available material not making much sense to him. That view remained with him for the first year at the company, where he still had very little understanding on what the company really does.

**Interviewee 8** recalled that at the time he started at BC Platforms there were no marketing branding materials available and he needed to rely entirely on what was being presented to him by those already involved with the company.

## **5.5 Theme four: Company culture and employee experience**

The majority of the interviewees value the company culture and the opportunity for professional growth and learning. However, the interviews highlighted a need for better integration and support of new employees, as well as striving for more effective communication of company culture, especially due to the challenges of remote work and having many different offices. These insights suggest that people appreciate the current company culture, but there are areas for improvement in order to elevate the employee experience.

Group 1 indicated, in their interviews, the need for clearer responsibilities communication and better onboarding guidance, for instance with the help of an “Employee Handbook” (Interviewee 1). This group has also indicated that the recent changes in the company, as well as the remote work, have impacted their view on company culture leading to a decreased understanding of the mission and values.

Group 2, on the other hand, were appreciative of the flexible and collaborative environment created by the hybrid work model. They indicated their satisfaction with their work and their job challenges, but they stressed that this may not be reflected across other departments. One way of dealing with the challenges of bringing in the culture and the company values across to all groups was suggested to be possible through the introduction of the Culture Ambassadors. This group has also highlighted the challenges created by the company’s physical locations and the compensation level being potentially a roadblock to attracting top talent.

**Interviewee 1** stressed that she enjoys “everyone’s work ethics” and the continuous learning and development the company can provide. However, she found that coming through to the company by means of open position, the interviewee felt like her initial employee experience was poor due to the lack of clearly defined work responsibilities. She recommended putting together an “Employee Handbook” which could help new talent understand better what other people are responsible for and know who they can turn to receive support and additional training needed in their role. She also felt like the company culture was suffering due to the recent structural changes, acquisitions and due to the nature of remote work. She feels that

company culture is important in bringing people closer together, “understand them better” and empathise with others more.

**Interviewee 2** noticed that the company culture suffered a blow caused by the global pandemic and has yet to recover. He acknowledges that it is a challenge to bring remote employees together and that there are not enough resources to activate that side of company culture. Further, he noticed that the company has matured and developed over his tenure and understands that, as the company grows, culture or what it represents, will also evolve. Without culture ambassadors to “bring cohesiveness”.

**Interviewee 3** points out that due to the global aspect of the company, the perceptions on what company culture is and how the company delivers on its promise, can vary from region to region. She mentions that “overall, the company strives to deliver on its tag line” but, adds that no company should consider its job done in that regard as it requires consistent work on communicating the vision and mission to customers, prospects, and employees.

**Interviewee 4** pointed out that the team is great with a transparent structure and a robust team which he thought to be extraordinary for the company of this size. He was initially a little bit sceptical about the capabilities and being able to serve customers, but his reservations were cleared as time moved on. He enjoys being able to interact with other team members at the office and thinks that “one of the strengths of this company is its employees”, which he noted “seems like everybody is happy at the company and it has a low turnaround”, which he felt was very important. He agreed that the marketing outreach is very polished, giving the impression that the company is much bigger than it is. He would have liked to see more of the other team members be featured on the company website as, now, it gave him the impression that the company was highlighting only the top talent. This would have helped him understand better how the company functions and where most resources are invested.

**Interviewee 5** enjoys the current hybrid work model enabling him to mingle with other people but also work from home. He thinks that within his own team the spirits are high, and people feel motivated to put in their work, but he has noticed other departments feel detached and less connected to the whole organisation. He suggested that to raise the team spirit and attract new talent, the company needs to appoint “Company Ambassadors” who will spread positive word about the company.

**Interviewee 6** remembers having been introduced to the company and company culture early in the hiring process, where he learnt what the company stood for, what values

motivates the company and what his involvement would look like. He felt like that representation held true through his years at the company and confidently acknowledged that everything he was promised, was delivered. Also, he brought up the flexibility of choosing his own place of work (remote or office) and lack of micromangement in that regards, allowing him to be productive.

**Interviewee 7** brings up the fact that the company places a lot of importance on its physical locations around the globe, creating a certain expectation that comes from being present in these spots; most specifically linked to economy, which it is unable to provide or meet currently. He brings up the fact that the current level of pay may be attractive to middle range talent, which is way below what top talent would consider. Additionally, he brought up the issues of the lack of adequate personnel to carry on the company culture outside of the main company headquarters.

**Interviewee 8** enjoys the “collaborative environment” the company fosters currently by allowing people to work together at the office. He believes it be an important factor to be able to see his colleagues and exchange valuable ideas or experiences. He appreciates the “good company atmosphere” and everyone’s willingness to resolve conflicts quickly and get along with their colleagues.

## **5.6 Theme five: Retention and future attractiveness**

The interviewees indicate that the company has a strong potential for growth. They have an appreciation towards the company’s mission and the impact its solutions bring, which has been indicated to be a reason for employee retention and the overall company attractiveness. The interviewees highlighted the ability for professional growth and their meaningful nature of work as a key element to keep them engaged and satisfied with their work, even though they all consistently found shortcomings. These two aspects seem to be worth capitalising on to make BC Platforms more appealing to prospective talent. Both groups appreciated the growth and learning opportunities BC Platforms is able to offer.

Group 1 clearly appreciated the company’s mission and its impact on the society to be significant motivators. This group indicated that they valued the growth and development opportunities, as well as the current direction the company is heading for. These factors can be of pivotal importance in becoming an attractive employer choice, but they stressed the importance of offering competitive compensation and benefits to be able to appeal to top talent.

Group 2, similarly to group 1, indicated their appreciation for professional development; however, they also highlighted their satisfaction with the flexibility and lack of rigid processes within the company to be a reason for their high satisfaction.

**Interviewee 1** believes the company has a great potential and room for growth, which she considers to be vital to employee retention and company attractiveness. She also stressed that the company has a great mission and the product it is creating is “actually making a difference in people’s lives.”

**Interviewee 2** firmly believes that the amount of professional growth opportunities available at BC Platforms is what keeps him around and engaged in his work. He appreciates that the company is able and willing to accommodate highly motivated individuals, as well as support them in expanding their horizons. To further magnify his point, he stated that he was responsible for several other people joining the team, who similarly, felt like the growth opportunities, international aspects and what the company tries to achieve appealed to them.

**Interviewee 3** admits that she feels loyal to her team and enjoys the highly collaborative and pro-BC Platforms perspective driving the company forward. Still, she thinks the company, with its recent changes and acquisitions, presents great opportunities for growth. However, in order to remain competitive on the market, BC Platforms will need to ensure equal compensation and benefits model.

**Interviewee 4** mentioned that he enjoys it when his role is meaningful and keeps him happy and satisfied for “as long as (he) sees a purpose in it”, but he is fine with occasionally doing some tasks beyond his job description. He sees potential in the company to offer a lot of growth opportunities outside the role’s requirements, which is not always possible in big corporations. He believes in the company, so he is willing to recommend it to his network, as he wants to attract “strategic additions” to ensure the company’s success. He makes a point that the existing opportunities and challenges within the company are all a sign of growth, but he wants to help ensure the direction of the growth is towards becoming a better place to work.

**Interviewee 5** believes that the company needs to remain true to its mission and vision to successfully communicate it down to the workforce. He appreciates the fact that his work feels meaningful and has a real impact on other people’s lives. In order for him to advocate for the company, he needs to feel like there is “a really good match within the network” so as not to “waste anybody’s time”.

**Interviewee 6** mentioned that he has had a great employee experience and the company truly delivered on his career development. He considers this aspect to be very important when considering a change. Also, his positive experience and professional advancement mean that he thinks the company is really very attractive to like-minded individuals aspiring to learn and grow their software developer skills.

**Interviewee 7** recalls the opportunities for career growth and the amount of driving challenges available that were the driving force behind his motivations to remain at BC Platforms.

**Interviewee 8** mentions the importance of passing the values and mission over to new generations of people through continuing to be active in the students' places and by taking on interns.

## **6 Employer Branding strategy**

In this chapter, the author will use the key findings from the qualitative research to develop a comprehensive Employer Branding strategy for BC Platforms. The proposed strategy is meant to leverage the existing strengths of the company and address its weaknesses to establish the organisation as the employer of choice.

### **6.1 Objectives of the Employer Branding strategy**

McKinley (s.a.) recommends setting specific goals as the first step in preparing a comprehensive Employer Branding (EB) strategy. With the help of these measurable targets, it is possible to stay on track, measure success and keep track of Return on Investment (ROI). Ambassify (s.a.) lists the following common objectives for wanting a robust EB strategy include:

1. Reducing time to hire
2. Improving employee retention
3. Increasing employee engagement

While McKinley (s.a.) further divides the objectives to include:

1. Improving the candidate quality
2. Boosting potential candidate's engagement with the company
3. Raising awareness of the brand as an employer of choice
4. Improving reputation as an employer

Barrow and Mosley's (2005) work seems to indicate similar goals set in attracting talent, raising brand awareness, reducing hire costs and time, and improving brand efforts.

### **6.2 Strategy**

Developing a comprehensive EB strategy needs to begin with clearly identifying the ideal candidate's profile and developing a robust Employee Value Proposition that align with the company's goals and mission. The following subchapters breakdown the process and delve deeper into the process of developing the strategy.

### **6.2.1 Ideal candidate profile**

McKinley (s.a.) suggests beginning the EB strategy by preparing a semi-fictional candidate profile, defining the ideal candidate's experience, titles, qualifications, characteristics, and traits with the goal to understanding their personal aspirations and career motivations. Since BC Platforms has at least two different candidate profiles, it is of pivotal importance to spend time polishing the candidate profiles to understand their motivations and frustrations. These profiles will serve as a backbone for all employer branding efforts, guiding how to tailor marketing communication, shifting the focus on specific aspects of the brand they are likely to be attracted to, and assist you in preparing on how to talk to potential prospects.

### **6.2.2 Employee Value Proposition**

With the help of the conducted qualitative research for the thesis, it is possible to generalise what specific employee groups especially value about working for BC Platforms as this will help create the overall narrative for EB strategy. According to Kinley (s.a.), these findings are commonly referred to as the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and is a carefully crafted marketing message informing potential candidates of the benefits of working for a particular organisation over their competition. Kinley (s.a.) lists "pay, benefits, rewards, perks, career progression, work environment and culture" as some of the aspects that candidates look for in their employer when deciding to work for them.

The qualitative research, conducted during the course of writing this thesis, showed that both talent groups particularly appreciated the career advancement and growth opportunities available at BC Platforms. This aspect was of pivotal importance to the tech talent and suggests that a particular focus should be placed on creating appropriate marketing materials highlighting these learning opportunities when targeting this group. For the scientific and commercial talent, the aspect of growth was important, but other aspects such as great work environment and culture also played a role. A similar idea has been put forth by Adams (2022) who believes offering office perks is no longer enough to attract top talent and suggests that candidates consider an organisation in terms of "the three Cs", which stand for *career catalyst*, *culture*, and *citizenship*. The first one relates to candidates considering whether working for the company would allow them to advance in their career, preferring those which offer ongoing development; culture stands for an environment that appeals to particular individuals, rather than to nobody in particular. Adams (2022) suggests that the final step to increase the organisation's reputation and attract top talent, is to take a deep look at the company's efforts to making it an equitable workplace.

Once a particular aspect has been selected to be the main point aimed at attracting the right talent, Kinley (s.a.) suggests that it is crucial to begin drafting the message with a lot of detail before shortening it to the final version. The details can be helpful in finding the right tone of voice needed to convey the values to the potential candidate.

### **6.2.3 Visual branding**

Kinley (s.a.) points out that a visual representation of what it feels and looks like to work at a company may be more meaningful to potential candidates than a description or a carefully crafted marketing message. She recommends incorporating authentic photographs or videos of employees and the working environment, or creating a dedicated branding video to show what working at the organisation is like. Ashworth (2020) agrees that it is of pivotal importance to stress to potential candidates why the organisation is special and speak to it across various channels.

### **6.2.4 Communication channels**

Before a candidate is selected, they come across many touchpoints where they come into contact and interaction with the company and the employer brand. In order to keep the candidate's interest up to entice them to apply, an organisation needs to ensure they are able to present a unified brand look across all touchpoints. These touchpoints include career website page, social media channels, communication, job advertisements, but also the application and interview processes. (Kinley s.a.)

## **6.3 Implementation**

When implementing a new EB strategy, it is of critical importance to perform a thorough assessment of the current brand identity and related materials to identify effectiveness and areas of improvement. Once a goal is set and a course of action chosen, it is equally important to set up clear measurement metrics that will determine the success and support decision making to ensure constant improvement. The following subchapters provide more detailed take on each step.

### **6.3.1 Assessment**

Before a new EB strategy is developed, it is recommended to assess constructively at the current brand and related materials to assess how well they serve the purpose and if anything requires modifying. It would also be beneficial to understand what others in the industry are doing and assess how well their tactics are working by conducting market

research. (Ramotion 2023.) Reiners (2022) also suggests doing a thorough audit of the application process to ensure that it adheres to the brand standards and what that experience looks like from their point of view.

Another way of understanding the current market is through quantitative research amongst students and amongst working-age population to gauge current brand awareness, attitude, and position (Dyhre & Parment 2009, 63-64).

#### 6.4 Measurement and improvement

As the EB strategy emerges and takes shape, it requires constant revisions and improvements to ensure it adheres to the company's goals and objectives. Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 81) suggest that employee targeted surveys are an effective assessment method which can be utilised to measure the efficiency of the current EVP and serve as a guide for further improvement; provided it asks yes/no type of questions, open-ended questions, as well as rating.

Some of the most common measurement metrics are EB specific and include candidate quality, hiring cost, brand awareness, applicant number, number of accepted offers; whereas others relate to engagement, ROI, business performance (Figure 3.)

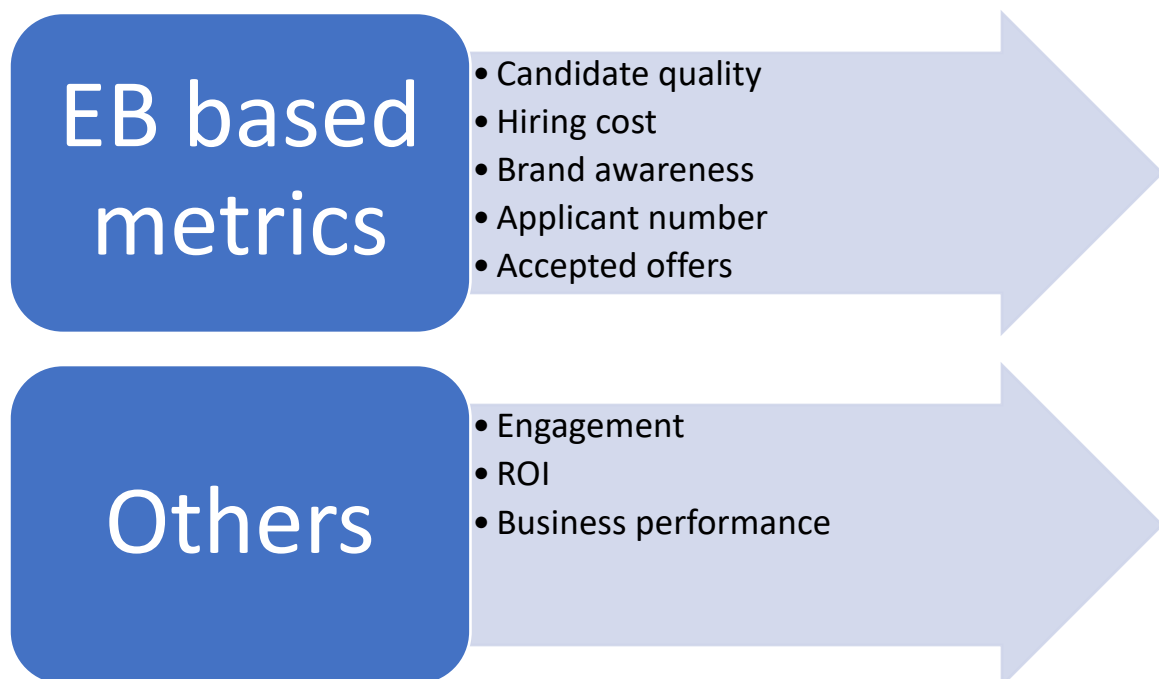


Figure 3. Metrics used in measuring EB strategy effectiveness (adapted from Harver 2022)

## **7 Conclusions**

The final chapter of this thesis provides the reader with a thorough understanding of the key findings of the research. In this chapter, the author provides BC Platforms with some suggestions and recommendations for future research to further improve its chances at becoming the employer of choice for top talent. And lastly, the author provides some remarks regarding her own learnings from conducting the project.

### **7.1 Key findings**

The qualitative research conducted aimed at answering the Research Question “What impact does employer branding marketing have on establishing BC Platforms as the employer of choice, and what are the factors that influence talent acquisition and retention?” and providing a thorough understanding of key factors that top talent considers important in their selection of employer. The research conducted revealed the following key findings which the author of the thesis divided into categories based on the Investigative Questions.

#### **IQ1 & IQ2: Employer Branding**

The research revealed that the two top talent groups at BC Platforms: the scientific/commercial group and the software developer/tech talent group perceive employer branding differently from one another. Group 1 indicated their interest in team dynamics, work ethics, and environment; while Group 2 tended to focus on the personal development offered by the technical challenges. However, both groups noted that the company’s branding communication was not sufficient to drive talent attraction, indicating a need for creating more brand focused marketing materials and customer testimonials.

#### **IQ3 & IQ4: Marketing communication**

Both interviewee groups showed a lack of compelling marketing communication which would clearly highlight the company’s value proposition and culture. The research revealed a desire for more comprehensive marketing material focusing on the company’s impact through its product offerings through customer testimonials which would speak to BC Platforms’ strong ethics and value. These findings suggest that the company’s offering brings tangible value to humanity in general, which resonates with its employees. The marketing communication, therefore, needs to adequately reflect the company’s mission to be able to convey the appeal to top talent.

## **IQ5: Company culture and employee experience**

The research has shown the importance of having a unified and strong company culture across all teams and offices, and a more robust and supportive onboarding process which could be achieved by introducing Culture Ambassadors and Employee Handbooks. The research has also shown the need for improvement in communicating across departments to avoid getting siloed and fostering a better team integration for new employees. While the current company culture has been mentioned as positive and highly collaborative within a team, this indicates that there is more areas for improvement to ensure cross-collaboration, mutual understanding, and integrating remote employees into the company to maintain cohesion and consistent employee experience across the globe.

## **IQ6 & IQ7: Employer attractiveness and employee retention**

Interviewees pointed out the company's growth and potential, as well as its mission to improve patients' lives as being a great area responsible for its attractiveness towards new talent and retention for current employees. Further, the possibilities for professional advancement and the meaningful impact people can contribute to were also mentioned as important in their retention at BC Platforms. However, in order to remain competitive and attractive on the market, the company needs to improve its Employee Value Proposition which includes compensation, benefits, and further support of professional development opportunities.

To sum up, the presented key findings clearly indicate the potential BC Platforms has in becoming the employer of choice for top talent; the continuously growing company, interesting and impactful job, as well as clear career advancement opportunities score high on the talents' list of reasons to work at the company. However, the research also clearly indicates room for improvement in the employer branding marketing to convey these points to potential talent on the lookout for new opportunities.

## **7.2 Recommendations for future research**

As BC Platforms aims to develop and implement a comprehensive Employer Branding strategy, it is recommended that further research is conducted in order to understand what their competitors are doing in this area to try and learn from their experience, and either apply it in ways that it makes sense for the company or to understand where the differentiation could be used as an advantage. Further, as the company implements the strategy, it would be beneficial to continuously research its impact on employee experience to make any necessary adjustments or avoid getting side tracked. Finally, the author would

recommend that BC Platforms focuses on measuring the return on investment of its Employer Branding initiatives to ensure it supports the company's business goals and decisions are made on valid research data rather than perceptions.

### **7.3 Reflections on learning**

The author found this thesis work to be meaningful and impactful in her role at BC Platforms. The research findings will serve as improvement points and, hopefully, lead to a better hiring, onboarding, and employee experience across all its offices.

The nature of working full-time at a growing company and trying to work simultaneously at a thesis project proved to be a bit challenging with many important projects running at the same time, requiring some timeframe adjustments and very clear goal setting from the author to ensure both commitments would receive the attention they needed to be delivered on time and well.

The previous thesis projects that the author had done have helped in designing the study and drawing the timeframe for the project's successful completion. Additionally, some of the courses taken immediately prior to the author's thesis process began proved to be of pivotal importance to ensure quality research and good findings. The qualitative research study was new to the author and required additional preparation in order to be conducted successfully, but it has shown to be a very intuitive way for the author to collect the needed information, and with the help of the existing literature on the topic of conducting successful qualitative research, as well as the support of the University's staff, the end result led the author to obtaining great insights. This thesis may prove to be an important stepping stone towards future career developments in the field of Employer Branding and Marketing Communications.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Interview questions

### 1. Learning About the Company:

- How did you first hear about BC Platforms?
- Can you recall your initial impressions about the company?

### 2. Reasons for Joining:

- What attracted you to join BC Platforms initially?
- What factors made you choose us over others in the industry?

### 3. Marketing Efforts and Influence:

- What (branding) marketing efforts/materials played a role in your decision in choosing BCP as your employer of choice?
- How well do you think the company's (branding) marketing aligns with the actual employee experience and the value proposition it promises?
- How do you think our (branding) marketing efforts have influenced your perception of our company?
- What do you think our company does well in terms of (branding) marketing?
- Are there any (branding) marketing efforts that you think could be improved?

### 4. Company Culture and Experience:

- How would you describe our company culture?
- Have your perceptions of the company changed since you first joined?
- Are there any areas where there's a gap between the marketing promises and the actual employee experience?

### 5. Retention and Future Attractiveness:

- What makes you stay with BCP?
- Have you ever recommended our company to someone else? If so, why?
- What do you think our company could do to become an even more attractive employer?