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Personal brand strategy
Framework for further career development

Bachelor’s thesis
Information Technology

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Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli luoda henkilökohtaisen brändistrategian viitekehys Kaakkois-Suomen ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelijoiden käyttöön. Viitekehyksen tarkoituksena oli auttaa opiskelijoita tai muita kolmansia osapuolia ymmärtämään brändien vaikutus nykymaailmassa ja tarjota työkalut omien henkilökohtaisten brändien hallintaan. Vaatimuksena oli, että viitekehys on yksinkertainen, selkeä ja toiminnallinen.

Opinnäytetyön rakenne koostuu seitsemästä luvusta, jotka yhdessä johdannon lisäksi moodostavat teoreettisen viitekehyksen, laadullisen tutkimuksen ja johtopäätökset. Asetettuun tutkimuskysymykseen vastaamiseksi suoritettiin kattava kirjallisuuskatsaus Al Riesin, Jack Troutin, David Aakerin, Marty Neumeierin, Simon Sinekin sekä muiden bibliografiisiin teoksiin siltä osin, kun ne liittyvät suoraan brändeihin käsittäen biologisen, psykologisen ja historiallisen kontekstin.

Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että brändin määritelmä on luonnostaan sama kaikentyyppisille brändille niiden edustaessa tunnistettavia kokonaisuuksia yksilön mielikuvassa maailmasta. Todettiin, että perinteisen markkinoinnin taustalla olevien psykologisten periaatteiden lisäksi on biologisia tekijöitä, jotka on otettava huomioon ja joiden vaikutus voi olla suurempi kuin vastaavien psykologisten.

Johtopäätöksensä voidaan todeta, että opinnäytetyö muodostui ainutlaatuiseksi niin lähestymistapansa kuin tuloksensa puolesta muihin vastaavaan aihealuettii opinnäytetöihin verrattuna. Lopputilausenä saatiin nyykaikainen, perusteellinen ja modulaarinen kolmen askeleen henkilökohtaisen brändistrategian viitekehys.

Asiakas
brändi, henkilökohtainen, strategia, viitekehys
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**Thesis title**

Personal brand strategy Framework for further career development

**Commissioned by**

South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences Ltd.

**Supervisor**

Niina Mässeli

**Abstract**

The objective of the thesis was to create personal brand strategy framework for the use of students at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. The purpose of the framework was to help students, or any third parties, to understand the influence of the brands in the modern world and provide tools to manage their personal brands. The requirements for the framework were that it had to be simple, clear and actionable.

The thesis structure consists of seven chapters which together constitute, in addition to introduction, the theoretical framework, the qualitative study, and the conclusions. In order to answer the research question, an extensive review of literature was done in the bibliographical sources of Al Ries, Jack Trout, David Aaker, Marty Neumeier, Simon Sinek, and others in contexts of biology, psychology and history as they relate directly to brands.

The results show that the definition of a brand is inherently the same for all types of brands as they represent identifiable entities in an individual's perception of the world. It was found that in addition to traditional marketing and its underlying principles, there are biological factors which must be taken into account and that can have greater influence than psychological factors.

As a conclusion, in comparison to other theses with a similar topic, this thesis became unique in both its approach and results. The result being an up-to-date, thorough and modular three-step personal brand strategy.

**Keywords**

brand, personal, strategy, framework
1 INTRODUCTION

Today, the best workplaces in Finland set standards for the culture of trust and communication (Martela & Jarenko 2014, 4; Rautiainen 2017; Strömsholm 2017). As studies show, trust between management and staff has been a key success factor in these workplaces (Great Places to Work® 2014). Finnish technology organizations such as Arcusys, Fraktio and Nitor, and foreign as well such as Valve, belong among these workplaces which are aware of and understand the paramount importance of hiring cultural fits (Arcusys 2016; Great Place to Work® 2017; Great Place to Work® 2018; Nitor 2017; Nitor 2018). As an example, Valve, in their Handbook for New Employees states that: "Hiring well is the most important thing in the universe." (Valve Corporation 2012, 44). Organizations such as these are the ones who are doing the pioneering work in taking people into account as individuals because they are conscious of the fact that any organization is only as strong as its culture (Sinek 2009, 88 – 90).

The fact that so many relatively new organizations place such a tremendous amount of emphasis on hiring cultural fits together with its constantly increasing popularity in cultural conversations leads one to speculate that awareness towards importance of cultures at workplaces must be on the rise. Historically, the importance of the cultures is undeniable. The reason the human race has been so successful is due to our ability to form cultures. Cultures are groups of people brought together around a common set of values and beliefs. As people share their values and beliefs with others and are driven by things other than their self-gain, trust emerges. (Sinek 2009, 84, 88.) Thus, it is important that individuals as well as organizations take great care to express and communicate their values and beliefs. However, while being a cultural fit is important, alone it is not enough. There are further requirements for expertise and experience in the chosen field of industry. However, the complexity of working life, not to mention the complexity of the world we live in, makes it impossible for an individual to be an expert in all areas of the chosen field of industry regardless of their experience. Therefore, collaboration is increasingly more important. Collaboration in any meaningful and effective way requires the ability to understand others and to be enthusiastic about their skills. This is why individuals who are willing to stretch outside their core competencies are
held in higher value. The traditional I-model, which represents deep expertise, has been and still is a prerequisite for progress and success at work — though alone, it is not enough. Today, there are expectations and pressure to stretch laterally. This phenomenon to move forward in two directions, both vertically and horizontally, is known as T-model. Often, it appears that the same organizations who set standards for the culture of trust and communication in workplace, also recognize the value of people with T-shape skills and expertise. That is, people who are both generalists (a broad set of knowledge and skills in various aspects of working life — the top of the T) and experts (a deep understanding in particular discipline of chosen field of industry — the vertical leg of the T). (Great Place to Work® 2017; Markkinointi instituutti 2011; Valve Corporation 2012, 46 – 48.)

Here begins the premise of this thesis — how to communicate both values and beliefs together with expertise and experience — while taking into consideration the communication clutter of today. The answer to this question in one word is: brands. The fundamental truth is that people live and react to their perception of reality and not the reality as it is. Today, brands represent identifiable parts of that perception in the minds of the people and therefore the question becomes how to do we influence that perception. To influence perception of ourselves in the minds of the people is to influence our personal brands. This, in turn, requires a clear definition of a brand which begins with a strategy; a personal brand strategy.

1.1 Thesis purpose

The purpose of the thesis is to provide an actionable deliverable in the form of personal brand strategy framework for the use of students at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, especially those studying in the degree programme of Information Technology. The reason for this is to help and enable students to develop a more deliberate focus during their studies and define themselves both in their personal and professional life. The resulting awareness and understanding from the framework has the potential, if students so choose, to target and manage their time and effort towards those courses of their studies that will yield highest return on their investment in themselves.
In addition, this can support their career development in several ways. First, developing focus and self-awareness from the beginning of their studies increases their ability to establish themselves as professionals within their niche in alignment with their interests. Secondly, defining themselves enables students to identify organizations with such cultures where they feel they belong and are at their natural best, which in turn results in sense of fulfillment at work and overall meaningful life.

A further aim is to provide general understanding about biological and psychological principles and aspects as they relate to brands, as well as brands themselves and their role and omnipresence in the world of today. This understanding, especially regarding differentiation, provides the context to many underlying reasons why something succeeds or fails.

1.2 Thesis background

At the time of writing this thesis, search in Google using keywords such as "theseus personal brand", "theseus personal branding", "theseus branding" and other similar keywords, produced exactly 19 theses in Theseus (open repository for theses and publications of the Universities of Applied Sciences on the Internet) that in one way or another covered the topic of personal brand. These theses were from degree programmes in International Business (10) by Siina Hietajärvi (2012), Xinyan Zhang (2012), Anni Malmi (2014), Kaisa Pyhtilä (2015), Mirza Sagdati (2015), Niklas Menard (2015), Selene Anttila (2015), Jenni Vilander (2017), Stefan Anręs (2017) and Stefani Kirilova (2017), Business Administration (3) by Iina Niiranen (2016), Sonja Katila (2016) and Sebastian Allén (2017), Business Management (1) by Tomi Kuusiniemi (2015), Media Engineering (1) by Kim Daeun (2017), Mechanical and Production Engineering (1) by Jussi Ylönen (2017), Film and Media (1) by Aino-Maija Neuvonen (2015) and Design (2) by Alexey Tsykunov (2016) and Anastasia Parfeeva (2016).

The wide dispersion and recent appearance of these theses suggests that the topic of personal branding is constantly growing in its importance and popular-
ity regardless of the field of education. The reason for this is the general increase of awareness of the omnipresence of brands in our everyday life, especially due to the rise of information economy. The focus of this thesis is not on action and execution through different mediums and platforms but rather on the underlying principles of biology, psychology and marketing together with considerations of strategy in order to explore and discover the primary factors which separate one brand from another.

1.3 Thesis research question

The research question of the thesis is *what are the fundamental components of personal brand strategy in order to establish basis for communication as it relates to expressing values and beliefs together with expertise and experience?*

In order to answer the research question, the thesis focuses on four separate questions (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. The research question of the thesis, supplementary questions.](image)

1.4 Thesis structure

The overall structure of the thesis derives from the research question and other supplementary questions that are in direct relation to it. The thesis comprises seven chapters. In addition to this introduction chapter, there are six chapters which together constitute the theoretical framework, the qualitative
study and the conclusion of the thesis. Chapters two through five form the theoretical framework, chapter six presents qualitative study and chapter seven the conclusions of the thesis (Figure 2). Each chapter will attempt to answer one or more supplementary questions.

1. INTRODUCTION
2. START WITH WHY
3. POSITIONING
4. BRANDS
5. STRATEGY
6. STUDY
7. CONCLUSIONS

Figure 2. The structure of the thesis.

Starting with the theoretical framework, the thesis first explores the fundamental principles of human biology as it relates to brands and further establishes connections to brands as soon as they arise. Next, the theoretical framework explores the fundamental principles of human psychology as it relates to brands and further establishes connections to brands as soon as they arise. Then, the theoretical framework explores the fundamental theories and concepts regarding brands themselves. It begins by presenting historical context of brands and continues to establish a working definition of a brand as well as a personal brand following with theories and concepts from the perspectives of marketing and design. Finally, the theoretical framework explores strategy and further builds upon it in order to create a personal brand strategy framework.

In the qualitative study, the thesis applies the personal brand strategy framework in order to create a personal brand strategy for a student of Information Technology at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences.

Ending with the conclusions, the thesis summarizes and recapitulates, presents results, discusses limitations and makes important distinctions.
1.5 Thesis commissioner

The commissioner of the thesis is South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, or XAMK for short. XAMK is an innovative higher education institution driven by the idea of unlimited lifelong learning and study and is a result of merger between Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences and Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences at the beginning of 2017.

2 START WITH WHY

In this chapter was explored, presented and discussed some of the fundamental biological principles as they relate to brands. The theoretical foundation of this chapter bases mostly on theories and concepts by Simon Sinek from his book *Start with WHY: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (2009) with additions by Neumeier, and other relevant sources from the Internet. His TED Talk on the same topic is currently number three on the TED Talks playlist of the most popular talks of all time (TED Talks s.a.). Sinek, in his personal exploration and fascination with the leaders who make an impact in the world, made a discovery about a naturally occurring pattern in how these leaders think, act and communicate. This pattern, grounded in fundamental principles of human biology, explains and provides understanding and insight as to why some leaders are able to inspire others. Due to this biological groundwork, ideas, concepts and theories put forth by Sinek, will serve as a foundation as we will continue to scaffold throughout this thesis towards a higher perspective of the brands and their significance in the world of today. In the midst of all, there is a simple idea which suggests that in everything that we do we should start with WHY, a purpose, cause or belief. (Start with WHY s.a.; Sinek 2009, 7; TED s.a.)

Including other thought leaders by the same token and within the context of this thesis as it relates to brands, Marty Neumeier (Neumeier s.a.) believes, agrees, and overall acknowledge the importance of having a purpose above all else. In his blog series *Steal This Idea*, he presents *The Strategic Pyramid* which explains the relationship as well as the difference between a purpose, mission and vision as they relate to organizations and brands (Figure 3). It reflects the notion that strategy should begin with a clear purpose — or in the words of Sinek, a reason WHY.
2.1 Biological principles

The fundamental principles of human biology dictate that as human beings all people across all cultures have an immutable necessity to belong and are naturally driven towards establishing and sustaining belongingness. The sense of belongingness is crucial for our well-being and significant to a meaningful life. It is a feeling that is felt when those around us share the same values and beliefs. It is in this situations that people experience connection, feel safe and form trust. This feeling to belong is so strong that people will go to great lengths, do irrational things and often spend money to experience it. Thus, it is important to distinguish that this feeling is not rational. (Baumeister R. F. & Leary M. R. 1995; Sinek 2009, 52 – 54.)

In relation to our need to belong, Neumeier (Neumeier 2006, 38 – 39) states that over the last century there has been an evolution in how brands market themselves. This shift in marketing appeals from features, benefits and experiences to tribal identification — from "what is has", to "what it does", to "what you will feel", to "who you are" clearly reflects our biological need to belong. It demonstrates that while features, benefits and experiences are still important
to people, the personal identity has become even more important. Therefore, today people want to surround themselves with other people, organizations and brands who share their values and beliefs.

Even though other people, organizations and brands might have an appeal to us when they communicate and talk about WHAT they do, or HOW they are different or better, it does not necessarily mean that they represent something to which we want to belong. In contrast, when other people, organizations and brands communicate and talk about WHY they do WHAT they do, and we happen to believe what they believe, then there is a possibility that we will go to extraordinary lengths to include those people, organizations and brands into our lives. The reason for this is that these people, organizations and brands then become symbols of the values and beliefs that mean a great deal to us and reflect who we are. They make us feel like we belong. (Sinek 2009, 52 – 54, 58.)

2.1.1 Tribes as a means to belong

Today, there is no global world in a sense of a single language and culture. Instead we have a global communication network. As a result of this global communication network together with Gordon Moore's bold prediction in 1965, also known as Moore's Law (the observation that the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles approximately every two years), there has been an explosion of connectivity and the power it has given to people turns organizations upside down. As globalism in this sense removes barriers, people, organizations and brands create new ones. They create tribes. (Neumeier 2006, 40 – 41.)

Traditional marketing segmentation where marketers identify a large market and divide it into smaller segments according to chosen categories, is a common practice to target customers in existing market. Today, however, there are quickly changing markets where customers have become moving targets, where every customer wants to be their own segment and those that do not yet exist. This, together with the fact that people constantly ignore the boundaries that others place on them and innovations wrought by the internet enable
people to from groups across boundaries. Thus, the basic unit of measurement today is not segment, but the tribe. A tribe is any group of people who share interests, information, and identify themselves with the tribe. It is an intimate world which people alike can understand, where they can be somebody, and most importantly feel to belong. People identify with tribes as they identify with brands. Thus, tribes which can form quickly and organically, are ideal for growing a brand, and vice versa as brand itself creates a kind of tribe. Further, research shows that customers who interact socially with other customers in a brand community often develop an intense sense of loyalty, both to the brand and each other. (Neumeier 2016, 40 – 43.)

Joining a tribe is as easy as buying or using products or services of a chosen brand which commands a certain activity, situation, mood or need that best reflects the current state of mind. In other words, today, people are at the top of Maslow's Pyramid where goals are about self-actualization such as autonomy, growth and fulfillment — people buy and use products and services of certain brands to build their identities. Thus, the focus is not on the products or services themselves, but rather on their meaning — to be more has become much more important than to have more. (Neumeier 2006, 40 – 41; Neumeier 2016, 3, 8 – 18.) It is no accident that yet another leading Finnish information technology organization Siili uses word "tribe" to describe their work environment (Siili Solutions 2017).

2.2 The Golden Circle

Sinek, as a result of his personal exploration and fascination with the leaders who make an impact in the world, made a discovery about a naturally occurring pattern in how these leaders think, act and communicate, which he calls The Golden Circle. The concept of The Golden Circle provides an alternative perspective to existing assumptions which suggest why some individuals, organizations and brands have such a disproportionate amount of influence in their industries. (Sinek 2009, 1, 5 – 7.)

The original inspiration behind the concept of The Golden Circle is in the golden ratio (a mathematical relationship where two quantities are in the golden ratio if their ratio is the same as the ratio of their sum to the larger of
the two quantities) which demonstrates evidence of order in the seeming disorder of the nature. The Golden Circle, similar to the golden ratio, finds order and predictability in human behavior and help us understand why we do what we do. The Golden Circle, grounded in fundamental principles of human biology, works in many ways from which all require balance and right order; a clarity of WHY, a discipline of HOW, and consistency of WHAT. Once in balance and right order, it provides compelling evidence of how much more we can achieve if we remind ourselves to start with WHY in everything that we do. (Sinek 2009, 37 – 38, 65.)

There are three levels in The Golden Circle (Figure 4) which are WHAT, HOW and WHY in this exact order when we look from the outside in. These three levels correspond precisely with the cross section of the human brain, from top down. The outer section comprise the neocortex and the middle two sections comprise the limbic brain. In short, the neocortex is responsible for rational and analytical thought and language, and the limbic brain for feelings, behavior and decision-making. The neocortex corresponds with WHAT –level, and the limbic brain with HOW and WHY –levels. It is important to establish connection and to distinguish between the most important difference — a capability for language. The neocortex being responsible for language and the limbic brain for our feelings, it is this natural disconnection that makes it hard to articulate how we feel, explain why a certain decision feels right and why we behave a certain way. The limbic brain is also where our "gut" feelings and decisions come from. (Sinek 2009, 55 – 56.)

Figure 4. The Golden Circle (Sinek 2009, 56).
The right order of The Golden Circle requires a clarity of WHY, a discipline of HOW and a consistency of WHAT. A clarity of WHY is prerequisite for everything else as due to human biology — in order to feel to belong and further experience connection, feel safe and form trust — there must be a clear communication of purpose, cause or belief. Therefore, organizations and brands must know WHY they do WHAT they do, because people don't buy WHAT they do, they buy WHY they do it. Thus, it follows that if organizations and brands don't know WHY they do WHAT they do, no one else will either. The ability to inspire, rather than manipulate, starts with a clarity of WHY. (Sinek 2009, 65 – 66.) A discipline of HOW are the values and principles that guide HOW to bring WHY, a purpose, cause or belief to life. Understanding HOW to do things that reflect WHY they are done in the first place and to have the discipline to hold organization and its employees accountable to those values or principles enable and enhance everyone in the organization to work to their natural strengths. Contrary to the general perception these values and principles are not nouns as nouns are not actionable — for values and principles to be actionable they must be verbs as verbs give a clear idea on how to act in any given situation. (Sinek 2009, 66 – 67.) A consistency of WHAT is the tangible proof, a result, of a purpose, cause or belief, and actions taken to realize it. The reality is that we live in a tangible world and the only way anyone will know what someone believes in is a result of everything they say and do. In other words, everything we say and do must prove what we believe. (Sinek 2009, 67 – 68.)

2.2.1 Authenticity

The result of The Golden Circle when in balance and right order is authenticity. Authenticity means that everything someone says and does they actually believe. In other words, to be authentic means to know WHY and follow with consistent HOW and WHAT. Thus, authenticity is about action in accordance to guiding principles upon a belief and happens at tangible WHAT –level. However, without a clarity of WHY it is impossible to view something as being authentic. That is, without context as to WHY something exists and thus WHY does it matter, there is no way to perceive WHAT as being authentic. Similarly, there is no way to ask someone else what one has to do to be authentic—because authenticity means that one must already know. It is authenticity that
results in relationships which build trust, and eventually loyalty. Therefore, authenticity matters. The lack of authenticity enables manipulations to thrive. Even though authenticity is not a requirement for success depending on how one measures success nevertheless it results in lasting success no matter how one decides to measure it. (Sinek 2009, 68 – 69.)

In similar fashion, Neumeier (Neumeier 2016, 51 – 56) states that the rise of consumerism gave people courage to look deep inside organizations and brands they do business with in search for more than authority, namely authenticity. Therefore, today, in order to achieve authenticity with a tribe, one must start with purpose. However, Neumeier adds that authenticity is individual perception, and thus what may seem authentic to one person may seem inauthentic to another. It all comes down to whether the organization’s or brand’s purpose align with customer’s identity. If they do, something known as fit happens. To put it simply, the brands purpose fits their identity.

2.2.2 Certainty of a decision

People make decisions all day long — on average, according to some estimates, an adult makes about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions every day (Hoomans 2015). In other words, every course of action we set, result we desire and instructions we give begins with a decision. Regardless of the process or the goals, everyone wants to make the right decisions. People base their decisions alternately on a rational and emotional basis.

At times, when people make decisions on rational basis, the logic dictates that information and data are of paramount importance. Therefore, people read books, attend conferences, listen to podcasts and ask friends and colleagues for advice — all with the purpose of finding our more so they can figure out what to do and how to act. The problem arises in situations when people have all the information and data along with all the good advice, but regardless things don’t go quite right. In this cases people intuitively understand that there must have been some minor significant detail that was not taken into account. Thus, the whole process begins all over again. However, despite our best effort, the amounts of information, data and good advice not all decisions work
out to be the right ones. There are factors that we must consider that exist outside our rational, analytical and information-hungry brain; the neocortex. In other times however, in which there was no information, data or advice, or we chose to ignore it and simply went along, and things went fine, sometimes even better than one could expect, is the times we chose to go with our gut feelings; the limbic brain. Despite all the good advice and all the compelling evidence, we are left where we began — how to explain or decide the course of action that result in desirable outcome that is repeatable and fully within our control. (Sinek 2009, 12 – 15.)

According to Sinek, there are three levels of certainty one can achieve with any decision. As we communicate from the outside in — that is, when we communicate WHAT we do — communication happens to the neocortex. Thus, when we provide only a rational basis for a decision, the highest degree of certainty that one can achieve is: "I think it is right." As we communicate from the outside in — that is, when we communicate WHY we do WHAT we do — communication happens to the limbic brain. Thus, when we provide only an emotional basis for a decision, the highest degree of certainty that one can achieve is: "I feel it is right." It is important to realize that decisions made on an emotional basis are not scalable as they are individual. However, when situation necessitate that more people be able to make decision that feel right, it is a clear sense of WHY everyone shares, that provides an emotional context for this. Thus, when we provide an emotional basis for a decision and are then further able to verbalize it, the highest degree of certainty that we can achieve is: "I know it is right." When we know that the decision is right, not only does it feel right, but we can also rationalize it and easily put it into words. (Sinek 2009, 78 – 79.) Further, as people make decisions with only neocortex they almost invariably end up overthinking. These rational decisions tend to take longer and are often of lower quality. In contrast, decisions made with the limbic brain tend to be faster and of higher quality. It is often our inability to verbalize the reasons that may cause us to doubt ourselves or trust the empirical evidence, despite our gut telling us not to. (Sinek 2009, 57 – 58.)

Individuals, organizations and brands that fail to communicate a sense of WHY force us to make decisions with only empirical evidence — features and benefits, facts and figures — upon which to base our decisions. Therefore,
those decisions take more time, feel difficult or leave us uncertain. A failure to communicate WHY creates nothing but stress or doubt. In contrast, great leaders who have sense of WHY and are clear to communicate it make us feel the utmost confidence in our decisions and the only question becomes which one of their product or service best meets our needs. Only then rational features and benefits, facts and figures matter, but not to drive the decision to give money or loyalty to the organization or the brand. That decision is already made. The tangible features and benefits, facts and figures are simply to help direct the choice of a product or service that best fits our needs. Those decision started with WHY — an emotional component of the decision — and then the rational components allowed the customer to verbalize or rationalize the reasons for their decision. (Sinek 2009, 57 – 60.)

2.2.3 Emergence of trust

The reason the human race has been successful is due to our ability to form cultures. Cultures are groups of people brought together around a common set of values and beliefs. As people share their values and beliefs with others and are driven by things other than their self-gain, trust emerges. (Sinek 2009, 84, 88.) Trust is a feeling. Therefore, trust does not emerge as a result of a rational argument, as it is not a rational experience. There are times when we trust some people, organizations and brands even when things go wrong, and we don’t trust others even though everything might have gone exactly as it should have. Trust result in sense of value. Value, by definition, is transference of trust. The same way as no one can convince us that something has a value, no one can convince us to trust someone. (Sinek 2009, 84 – 85.) People naturally thrive in cultures where their values and beliefs align and reflect those of the culture and result in mutual view of the world. Cultures themselves are not comparable as it is not matter of better or worse — they simply differ in values and beliefs they represent. (Sinek 2009, 88 – 90.)

An organization in this context, in addition to being a corporate structure, is before all a culture; a group of people brought together around a common set of values and beliefs. Therefore, it is a culture that defines and creates a strong organization and not the products or services, nor the size of the organ-
ization. It is a purpose, cause or belief that everyone, from CEO to line-workers, all share that result in a strong sense of WHY and further inspires everyone. Thus, the logic follows that the single most important decision any organization can make, as we recall from the Introduction chapter, is to hire those who believe what they believe. (Sinek 2009, 6, 88 – 90.) In other words, the primary goal of any organization should be to hire individuals who are passionate for their purpose, cause or belief, and who have the attitude that fits their culture. Only then should their skill set and experience matter. (Sinek 2009, 93.) Trust that emerges in these organizations allow employees to rely on each other and thus take risks to explore and experiment in order to advance their organization — their culture — as whole, and in the end for no other reason than it is good for their own personal health and survival. (Sinek 2009, 104.) In these organizations with a strong sense of WHY where inspiration is the driving force employees are more productive and innovative, and the feeling they bring to work attracts other people eager to work there as well. As everyone in the organization know WHY they come to work every morning, people outside the organization are much more likely to understand WHY the organization is different, special or unique. (Sinek 2009, 95 – 96.)

In accordance to The Golden Circle individuals, organizations and brands can earn trust by communicating and demonstrating their values and beliefs. In others words they have to talk about their WHY and prove it with WHAT they do. WHY in itself is simply a belief, HOWs are the actions they take to realize that belief, and WHATs are the results of those actions. Once all three levels of The Golden Circle are in balance and in right order, trust and perception of value is built. (Sinek 2009, 84 – 85.)

Neumeier (Neumeier 2006, 8 – 11) states that trust is foundation of modern branding, and that the fundamental goal of brand design is building trust. Today, in our economy of mass customization our purchasing choices have become endless and as a result we are no longer able to choose and decide by simply comparing features and benefits, facts and figures. Today we base our decisions more on symbolic attributes such as what does the product look like, where is it being sold, what kind of people buy it, which tribe we will join if we buy it, what does the cost say about its desirability, what are people saying about it, and who makes it. In other words, the degree of trust we feel towards
the product or service, rather than an assessment of its features and benefits, facts and figures, will determine whether we will decide to buy and use that particular product or service, or some other. Thus, trust is the ultimate shortcut to a buying decision.

2.2.4 WHY as a differentiator

Today, most organizations communicate outside in, in relation to The Golden Circle. That is, they start with statement of WHAT they do, following by HOW they think they are different. Sometimes they call it "differentiating value proposition", "proprietary process" or "unique selling proposition". In every case HOW is given to explain or as a reason how something is different or better. (Sinek 2009, 39 – 40.) However, today people can buy similar products and services from different organizations and brands for about the same price, features, quality and level of service. The competitive advantage of being first is often lost in matter of months, and if someone comes up with something truly novel, someone else will soon come up with something similar or even better. (Neumeier 2016, 104; Sinek 2009, 16.) Ironically, most organizations today answer that their customers are their customers because of these tangible reasons. In other words, most organizations have no idea why their customers are their customers. Similarly, the odds are that these organizations have no idea why their employees are their employees either. The reality is that this lack of understanding drive organizations to make decisions that are based on incomplete or faulty assumptions. It is in these situations that organizations rely on disproportionate amount of manipulations to get what they need — whether it is to motivate existing employees, attract new ones or to drive business. (Sinek 2009, 16 – 17.)

These organizations that face the challenge of how to differentiate themselves in their market are basically a commodity, regardless of WHAT they do or HOW they think they are different or better. The problem that arise with many products and services that these organizations offer is that people have to be experts in order to tell the difference between their offerings. In other words, with focus on WHAT and HOW without consideration of WHY, people lump all the offerings together and call them commodities. The more people treat these offerings as commodities the more organizations continue to focus on WHAT
and HOW. (Sinek 2009, 47.) Therefore, without clear sense of WHY it is impossible for the outside world to perceive anything more than WHAT these organizations do (Sinek 2009, 64).

In contrast, as we recall from the previous section, as a result of a clear sense of WHY inside organization, outside world is able to perceive WHY that organization is different, special or unique. Organizations with a clear sense of WHY never worry about how to differentiate in their market because they don't think of themselves as being like anyone else and they do not have to convince anyone of their value. They are different, and everyone knows it. These organizations start with WHY in everything that they do. (Sinek 2009, 64, 95 – 96.)

### 2.3 Great leaders inspire

There are two ways to influence human behavior — either to manipulate it or to inspire it. Manipulation, which in this context is not necessarily derogatory, is highly effective and addictive, and have thus become the norm in most organizations regardless of their size or industry. (Sinek 2009, 29, 33 – 34.) Typical manipulative techniques include price drops, promotions, fear, peer pressure, aspirational messages and promise of innovation (Sinek 2009, 17). Manipulation result in short-term returns, transactions and repeat business and is thus great for rare or single occasions (Sinek 2009, 28 – 29, 31). However, in the long-term it increases uncertainty for buyers, instability for sellers, and result in overall stress (Sinek 2009, 65). Therefore, manipulation do not result in relationships which foster trust and create loyalty (Sinek 2009, 28 – 30, 76). Further, manipulation puts the health of an organization at risk regarding profitability as it creates expectations that are difficult, if not impossible to maintain as their cost to the organization constantly increases. (Aaker 1991, 8 – 12; Sinek 2009, 28.) In contrast, to start with inspiration is opposite of everyone else. The ability to inspire is to provide a sense of purpose or belonging which does not necessarily have anything to do with external factors. Inspiration result in will to act, pay premium and endure inconvenience or even personal suffer. (Sinek 2009, 5 – 7.) Even though a simple claim of better especially with rational features and benefits, facts and figures to support it can create desire and even motivate a decision to buy, it does not create loyalty. It is the cause that organizations and brands represent that inspires loyalty. Inspiration
rather than manipulation behind a feeling to buy a certain product or service enable the customer to verbalize and articulate the reasons why they think what they bought is better. (Sinek 2009, 49.)

Neumeier (Neumeier 2016, 28 – 31) claims in similar fashion that short-term results rather than long-term growth is still the default position for most organizations that practice traditional marketing. Even though traditional marketing appreciates the halo that branding brings to the sales, the focus is in short-term results — that is, tactical approach of manipulative techniques in order to close this sale. It assumes that without sales this quarter, there may be no next quarter. Today, however, even though organizations sell products and services, people join brands and their respectful tribes. Therefore, branding takes a different approach assuming that customers are more valuable over time in comparison to transactions and repeat business. Branding creates the organization’s most powerful strategic advantage: customer loyalty. In relation to marketing, branding is not only an effort to acquire customers, but to keep them.

Similarly, as there are two different ways to influence human behavior, there are two different types of leaders — leaders and great leaders; those who lead. Both leaders embody different patterns of influence in relation to The Golden Circle. Leaders are those who choose to manipulate rather than inspire and hold position of power or authority. In relation to The Golden Circle, leaders communicate outside in. In contrast, great leaders are those who choose to inspire rather than manipulate and create a following of people who follow not because they have to but because they want to. In relation to The Golden Circle, great leaders communicate inside out. (Sinek 2009, 5 – 7.)

Though both manipulation and inspiration can motivate people to act, only inspiration creates deep personal motivation, also known as inner motivation, to act. These great leaders, whether individuals, organizations or brands come in all shapes and sizes, are found both in public and private sectors, have the most loyal customers and employees, are more profitable than others in their industry and most importantly are able to maintain this over the long term. It is these great leaders who have been able to provide a sense of purpose or belonging, because they start with WHY. (Sinek 2009, 1 – 7.) It is absent WHY or in the case that WHY is lost when individuals, organizations and brands
begin to define themselves by WHAT they do. The lack of WHY enable manipulations to thrive.

There is a connection between great leaders and something known as charismatic brands which are by definition products, services or organizations for which people believe there is no substitute. These charismatic brands are a constant topic in cultural conversations — brands such as Apple, BMW, Coca-Cola, Disney, IBM, IKEA, Nike and Virgin. In the same way as great leaders, charismatic brands often claim the dominant position in their categories with market shares of 50% or higher, command the highest price premiums up to 40% more than generic alternatives and most importantly are least likely to fall victim to commodization. (Neumeier 2006, 18 – 19.) Both, Sinek and Neumeier believe in their own respective approaches, that anyone can achieve status of great leader or charismatic brand. (Neumeier 2006, 19; Sinek 2009, 1 – 7).

2.4 Apple starts with WHY

In this part was summarized everything from this chapter with an example of Apple. Today, according to global brand consultancy Interbrand, Apple is the most valuable brand in the world for fifth consecutive year (Campbell 2017; Interbrand s.a; Interbrand 2018). Apple, since its founding in late 1970s, has been able to remain one of the most innovative organizations regardless of the industry they are in and to attract loyal, cultlike following, which is something that very few organizations are ever able to achieve (Sinek 2009, 39 – 40, 42). This, together with their broad recognition, and products and services that are easy to understand and to compare to others makes them a great example to demonstrate many of the principles of The Golden Circle (Sinek 2009, 39 – 40). In order to further support the example regarding Apple, many of the examples that Sinek himself presents through the book were used.

Apple, despite its broad recognition and being a constant topic in cultural conversations, is not a market leader in most of the industries it is in. In fact, it is a market leader in exactly two: tablets, and only recently mobile phones. (Inter-
In practical terms, there is nothing special about Apple — it is an organization like any other. There is no real difference between Apple and any of its competitors — such as Asus, Dell, Huawei, Lenovo, and Toshiba. They all make computers, desktops and laptops, some of them make tablets, mobile phones and other small electronics. They all have equal access to the same resources, talent, consultants, agencies, and media. They all have intelligent engineers, brilliant designers and capable managers. They all have products and services that work well and some that do not — including Apple. In other words, even if one would steal all the employees at Apple and copy all the things that Apple does, the results would not be the same. (Sinek 2009, 41.) However, it is Apple who have been able to amass such a disproportionate level of success, is more innovative, is constantly more profitable and been able to build such a loyal cultish following (Sinek 2009, 42.) Thus, there must be something else beyond tangible products and services that is near impossible to copy that gives Apple such a disproportionate level of influence in everything that they do (Sinek 2009, 41). This logical conclusion begins to prove that WHAT organizations do are external factors, and WHY they do it is something more.

Apple, as a great leader and a charismatic brand, starts with WHY in everything that they do — to challenge the status quo and to empower the individual. In relation to The Golden Circle their communication happens in the right order from the inside out and engage the limbic brain which then drives feelings, decisions and behavior, and only then the neocortex which then enables to rationalize or explain the reasons behind those feelings, decisions and behavior. It is WHY they do things that serve as a reason to buy and WHAT they do as a tangible proof to which people can then point to rationalize or explain the reasons they choose Apple. In other words, their products and services no longer serve as the reason to buy, but as a tangible proof of their purpose, cause or belief. Thus, it is not WHAT they do that distinguishes them, but WHY they do it. It is important to understand and distinct that however, their products and services do matter — it is the reason they matter that is contrary

national Data Corporation 2018a; International Data Corporation 2018b; International Data Corporation 2018c.) However, even though Apple might not be a market leader in these other industries, it leads by inspiring.
to the conventional wisdom. The products and services Apple makes serve as the tangible proof of what they believe. It is this correlation between WHAT they do and WHY they do it that separates Apple, and why people perceive Apple to be authentic. (Sinek 2009, 43.)

Apple, regardless of the industry they are in, has been able to compete and to become a market leader in multiple industries outside their "core business" among computers. Their stakeholders, consumers and investors alike, are completely at ease with Apple offering so many different products and services in so many different categories. (Sinek 2009, 42 – 43.) The reason for this is that Apple does not define itself by WHAT they do, but WHY they do it (Sinek 2009, 45). Regardless of the industry, Apple "thinks different" (Sinek 2009, 43). In 2007, Apple Computer, Inc. became Apple, Inc. In practical terms, there is no difference as to what the organization's legal name happens to be. However, to Apple, it reflects the fact that they are more than simply a computer company. Even though there were no restrictions or limitations with their former legal name as to WHAT they could do, it had influence on their perception of themselves. Thus, the change was completely philosophical. (Sinek 2009, 46.)

As an example, it was Creative Technology Ltd., a technology company from Singapore, that first brought multigigabyte hard drive music player to life. Creative had risen to its prominence with their Sound Blaster audio technology which enables desktop computers to have sound. Creative was first in the market with their digital music product Zen. Given their history in digital sound, Creative was highly credible and competent to introduce such a product to the market and had a first-mover advantage. However, even though it was not Apple who invented the digital compression that became mp3, nor the technology that became iPod, it is Apple who received all the credit for transforming music industry with their iPod and iTunes. In fact, it took Apple twenty-two months to introduce iPod to the market after Creative's entry with their Zen. (Sinek 2009, 44.) The reason for this was that while Creative advertised their product as "5GB mp3 player", Apple advertised their product as "1,000 songs in your pocket". In other words, while Creative told us WHAT their product was, Apple told us WHY we needed it. Once people knew WHY they want an iPod and had made the purchase decision, did the WHAT matter, and people
choose between models with different storage capacities. Our decision started with WHY, and so did Apple's offering. (Sinek 2009, 44 – 45.)

When it comes to the features and benefits, facts and figures, one has to be an expert to tell for sure if what Apple is offering is actually better or worse than what other companies in their respective industries are offering, due to technical aspects of it. The reality is, however, that most people are not experts, and frankly they do not even care. The reason for this is that those who share Apple's purpose, cause or belief firmly believe that their products and services are better, and any attempt to convince them otherwise is pointless. Despite the available information and even the factual evidence, the argument about a relative comparison of better or worse without first establishing a common standard creates nothing more than debate. Thus, the comparison itself is of no value to the person who is making the decision without first understanding WHY. Only after there is understanding of WHY can there be a discussion between different needs, and not a debate between better or worse in otherwise comparable situation. (Sinek 2009, 48 – 49.)

Nevertheless, there is ongoing discussion between different parties what sets Apple apart. Some, even those who work for Apple, believe that what sets Apple apart is in fact the quality of their products and services alone (Sinek 2009, 48). However, for the reasons above, that is not the case. Others claim it is their ability to market themselves as a lifestyle that sets Apple apart. However, to call something a lifestyle is a recognition that people who live a certain way choose to incorporate Apple in their lives. Apple, therefore, is simply one of brands that people who choose to live a certain way are drawn to. Those people use certain brands with their respective products and services in the course of living in that lifestyle. That is, in part, how others recognize people living a certain lifestyle in the first place. The brands these people choose become proof of their own WHY reflecting who they are. (Sinek 2009, 47.)

2.5 The power of WHY

In this part, everything from this chapter was summarized in order to explore the different options how one can use many of the principles of The Golden
Circle in order to employ in the organization where one can thrive. That is, experience satisfaction, fulfillment and passion towards their work, and eventually feel to belong.

According to Statistics Finland survey regarding quality of work life conducted in 2013, in general terms less than 30% of Finns are content with their current job. That is, more than 70% of Finns do not have their dream jobs. Even though there have been improvements across all metrics since the last survey that was conducted in 2008, the most significant improvements were with the management style and social relationships in the workplace. To quote the summary of the latest survey: "Wage and salary earners' satisfaction with social relationships in the workplace and the management style have improved in particular." (In the midst of uncertainty, positive changes in working conditions also viable 2013; Quality of work life 2018.) These metrics seem to correlate with former assumptions and speculations from the as we recall from the Introduction chapter as they relate to increase in public awareness regarding hiring cultural fits and reflect practices that are in use in the best workplaces in Finland.

The reality is that most organizations today choose to manipulate rather than inspire. As they set out to hire new employees they place tremendous emphasis on proving their value to the prospect. In order to accomplish this, organizations provide long lists of benefits and experience they have to offer to the prospect, all with sole intention to build such a strong rational argument that prospect will not only find them desirable, but irresistible. However, these strong rational arguments that base on external incentives while being able to motivate the prospect, seldom reveal what the organization believes. Therefore, eventually, these rational arguments are of no use to the prospect who is trying to make the right decision as to which organization to employ. Further, as with any manipulation, the short-term results of successfully hiring new employees often come with long-term costs which statistics reflect all too well.

The biological principles of decision-making dictate that a strong rational argument alone is not enough for prospect to know if the decision being made regarding employment is the right decision. The reason for this is that while there is rational component to the decision, there is no emotional one. Thus,
while prospect might *think* that the decision being made is the right one, how the prospect *feel* towards this decision might be totally different. As most organizations do not communicate to us WHY they exist beyond making money, there is no way for the prospect to know WHY to come to work every morning. Money in itself is simply the result of whatever we decide to pursue in our lives. Further, it is exceedingly difficult to start building a trusting relationship by trying to convince someone of all the rational features and benefits, facts and figures considering their often manipulative nature (Sinek 2009, 77). Trust is built through sharing mutual values and beliefs, and when there is no communication on these values and beliefs, there is no way to know if the prospect is going to fit the culture on rational components alone. However, with the knowledge and understanding of the many principles of The Golden Circle there are many ways one can try to discover values and beliefs of the organization, and sometimes even their purpose, cause or belief.

Most organizations today, for one reason or another, are unable or unwilling to communicate what they believe — WHY they were founded in the first place and WHY they exist beyond making money. However, in general, organizations are a result of original founder's intent. Thus, there might be a possibility to discover this reason by asking the founder directly if possible or by exploring the Internet. Furthermore, when writing applications, applicants should start with WHY. In other words, to tell what they believe and see if it will resonate with the organization's representative on the other end. Once in interview, it is important to listen to one's gut. Ask the organization's representative who is conducting the interview why did they choose to employ to this particular organization and see if their response resonates.

### 3 POSITIONING

In this chapter of the thesis was explored, presented and discussed some of the fundamental psychological principles as they relate to brands. The theoretical foundation of this chapter bases mostly on theories and concepts by Al Ries and Jack Trout from their book *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* (2001) with additions by Aaker, Neumeier and Wheeler. Positioning is a revolutionary concept first brought to life in 1969 by Ries and Trout when they wrote an article for *Industrial Marketing*. However, most people consider that
the concept was born in 1972 after their series of articles entitled *The Positioning Era* which they wrote for the trade paper *Advertising Age*. Since, the discipline of marketing has never been the same. (Ries & Trout 2001, 1–3, 38; Wheeler 2013, 136.)

According to Ries and Trout: "Positioning is an organized system for finding a window in the mind. It is based on the concept that communication can only take place at the right time and under the right circumstances." (Ries & Trout 2001, 19). In other words, positioning is a process to discover, occupy and own a mental box — depending on the context also known as mental ladder, category, or product class — in the minds of the people. It implies a frame of reference, reference point usually being the competition. The difference between *positioning* and *position* is that while positioning reflects the aspiration, position reflects the reality. (Aaker 1991, 110.) To own a position in the mind means that the brand name becomes a surrogate or substitute for the generic name of the category. This substitution takes place depending on the strength of the position. In an ideal situation, the brand name would be completely generic enabling to ignore the brand altogether and promote the category itself. (Ries & Trout 2001, 102–103.)

The concept of differentiation, the art of standing out from the competition, is in close relation to positioning. To distinct between different positions is to understand what differentiates them from each other. Differentiation works because of the way our cognitive system works. In order to keep us safe, our brains act as a filter to protect us from the vast amounts of irrelevant information that surrounds us every day. They learn to tell things apart by comparing the information from our senses to previous knowledge and experiences and put it into mental boxes. Thus, we learn to tell things apart, or to differentiate, in the first place. (Neumeier 2006, 34–35; Wheeler 2013, 136.)

As a concept, positioning acknowledges the fact that the mind accepts only that which matches prior knowledge or experience, and that therefore the only reality that counts is what is already in the minds of the people. Once the mind is made up, or the mental box receives a label, it is almost impossible to change it. Thus, inherently, the approach of the positioning is not to create something new and different, but to manipulate connections that already exist.
The mind has a slot, or position, for each bit of information found interesting or relevant that it has chosen to retain. Thus, it is possible to position virtually anything — a product, service, organization, institution, or person. Even though positioning starts with tangible information from our senses such as product, it is not what is done to a product, it is what is done to the mind of the prospect. Though positioning often involves change, changes made in the name, price, quality and other associations that relate to position are made in order to secure a worthwhile position in the mind of the prospect. (Ries & Trout 2001, 2.)

3.1 Positioning as a basis for communication

The single most common reason people give for their problems is the failure to communicate, and in today’s world the communication itself is the problem (Neumeier 2007, 1 – 5; Ries & Trout 2001, 1). Today, the only real competition comes from the extreme clutter of overcommunication. There are five types of clutter that are present in our everyday lives (Figure 5). (Neumeier 2007, 6 – 9.)

Figure 5. Marketplace clutter takes 5 forms (Neumeier 2007, 7).

1. **PRODUCT CLUTTER**: Too many products and services.
2. **FEATURE CLUTTER**: Too many features in each product.
3. **ADVERTISING CLUTTER**: Too many media messages.
4. **MESSAGE CLUTTER**: Too many elements per message.
5. **MEDIA CLUTTER**: Too many competing channels.

It is a paradox that while there is so much clutter, nothing has become more important than communication. Today, the best approach to communication is to keep the messages clear and simple. (Ries & Trout 2001, 7, 19). In this context, positioning is the first body of thought that comes to grips with the difficult problem of getting heard in our overcommunicated society (Ries & Trout 2001, 3, 6 – 7). As a concept, positioning was born out of most difficult form of communication; advertising. Thus, it is applicable with any other activity that requires communication in a way which involves influencing the minds of the
people — a concept so simple that people have difficulty understanding how powerful it is. (Ries & Trout 2001, 1 – 3.)

3.2 Into the grey matter

In order to penetrate to the mind requires an open window and receptivity. In other words, there must be an existing mental ladder which is available. (Ries & Trout 2001, 20.) In order to cope with the clutter, people rank brands each on their respective step on these mental ladders. The number of steps may vary depending on the category that the mental ladder represents. (Ries & Trout 2001, 32.) If someone was to introduce a completely new category, it must relate to an existing one and even then, the task can be extremely difficult. The reason for this is that it is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to create something new that does not already exist in the minds of the people. (Ries & Trout 2001, 5, 32.)

There are two ways to get into the mind. The first way, or the easy way is to be the first. The second way, or the hard way is to be the second. (Ries & Trout 2001, 19 – 21.) The hierarchical structure that the positioning follows, especially in the more mature categories, is the one where the number-one brand has about twice the share of the number-two brand which in turn has about twice the share of the number-three brand and so on. This phenomenon is known as power laws which also explain the "first-mover advantage". Given the presence of power laws, the only positions worth owning are the number one and two. If there is no way to someday become number one or two, it is best to redefine a category. However, it is important to distinct that it is not enough to be the first in the marketplace, one must be first in the minds of the people. (Neumeier 2006, 44 – 45; Neumeier 2007, 61 – 62.)

Further, due to fundamental psychological principles of positioning, the first brand in the minds of the people will always occupy a special place (Ries & Trout 2001, 47). Therefore, the higher the brand is on the mental ladder, the harder it is to dislodge and as it comes to the leading brand of the category, it is impossible head-on in the absence of strong reasons to the contrary. That is, if the leading brand itself does not blunder and thus give any reasons to
switch. (Ries & Trout 2001, 32, 44.) Therefore, it is always better to be a number one in a narrow category than to be number three in a large one (Neumeier 2006, 44). In general, the number two and those that follow will have to try to reposition the leading brand or to position against it with different attributes and associations which are both compelling and meaningful in category in question (Aaker 1991, 109 – 129; Ries & Trout 2001, 53 – 69).

4 BRANDS

In this chapter of the thesis was explored, presented and discussed some of the fundamental theories and concepts regarding brands themselves. The theoretical foundation of this chapter is mostly based on theories and concepts by David Aaker from his books *Managing Brand Equity* (1991) and *Building Strong Brands* (1996) with additions by Neumeier, and other relevant sources from the Internet. The idea of brand and act of branding have been around at least 5,000 years tracing back to Agrarian economy of Egypt 2,700 BCE and beyond (Khan & Mufti 2007, 75; Neumeier 2006, 8). The word "brand" itself originates from the word "brandr" from Scandinavian language of Old Norse meaning "to burn". It later spread into Anglo-Saxon countries adopting meaning "to be hot". The meaning of the word derives from the fact that at the time the ownership of a livestock was done by burning a stamp into the skin of an animal. (Khan & Mufti 2007, 75.) This is the same procedure that was in use among the ancient Egyptians 2,700 BCE and only a century ago by cattle ranchers in America (Khan & Mufti 2007, 76; McLaughlin 2011). Those days farmers would use brands as a means to deter theft, and those in interest to buy from these farmers, to distinguish between the cattle of one farmer from another. Farmers with a good reputation for the quality of their livestock were sought after, while farmers with a questionable reputation for the quality of their livestock were to be avoided. Thus, the utility and use of brands as a guide to choice was established — a role that is present and relevant today. (Khan & Mufti 2007, 75 – 76.)

Further, some of the earliest products of mass production at the time, the clay pots, have evidence of the use of brands on them. In their earliest forms these were the marks of a potter. A potter would identify his pots by making a thumbprint or by making a mark of a fish, star or cross at the bottom of the
pot. In the rest of the world, marks with similar purpose have been found on early Chinese porcelain, on pottery from ancient Greece and Rome, and even on some goods from India dating back to 1,300 BCE. Thus, it is also safe to say that symbols, rather than initials or the name were the earliest visual forms of a brand. Overall, the focus of branding was on trademarks and differentiation. (Khan & Mufti 2007, 76 – 77.)

In order to sustain themselves, it has been necessary for organizations to create barriers to competition (Neumeier 2007, 14). The industrial revolution, which took place from the 18th to 19th centuries, was historically significant turning point with improvements in manufacturing processes and communications (Industrial Revolution 2018). It was also a starting point for phenomenon of modern branding between late 19th and early 20th centuries (Khan & Mufti 2007, 78). In its earliest phases, at the beginning of the industrial revolution, these barriers to competition took form of machines replacing work formerly done by hands. Thus, the ownership of the means of production became barrier to competition. The organization with machines in contrast to hand manufacturing usually won. Subsequently, when most organizations had machines, the barrier to competition became the factory. Finally, when most organizations had factories, the barrier to competition became the capital. Later, with the rise of information economy, monetary capital gave way to intellectual capital. In other words, if an organization had patents and copyrights to keep its competitors from reproducing its products and processes, the organization with patents and copyrights won.

Today, however, this barrier is losing its relevance due to constant race to innovate and the fact that it can slow the growth of an organization's ecosystems. In fact, for the first time in history, the most powerful barriers to competition are not in control of organizations, but customers. In other words, in today's world of too much communication barriers are mental walls that people create in their minds to keep out the clutter. Therefore, today competition comes from the clutter itself rather than other organizations. While manufacturing efficiencies, access to capital and intellectual property are still important, to get to the mind is more important. (Neumeier 2007, 14 – 15.)
4.1 Definition of a brand

The first step in identifying the value of a brand is to understand what it is and what really contributes to the value of a brand. Thus, it turns to the definitional issues. The fact that there is no mutual understanding among brand experts on the definition of a brand reflects the fact that brand is a complex phenomenon (Avis 2009, 1; Kapferer 2004, 7; Maurya & Mishra 2012, 122). Nevertheless, in this section of the thesis it was arrived to a logical conclusion of working definition of a brand which is based on and is in line with historical context and former theory, namely the fundamental principles of human biology. The reason for this is that absence of any clear definition of a brand presents significant problems in understanding brand theory and results in misconceptions and confusion.

Brands began to emerge in the field of marketing in the late 19th century initially in the form of product packages. The reason for this was that generic products of mass production that came out of centralized factories were unable to compete with more familiar local ones. Therefore, organizations saw brands as a means to convince the market and the general public that they could place equal trust in their non-local products. (Khan & Mufti 2007, 78.) Then, barriers to competition were tangible and in organizations' control while products and services were about features and benefits. Today, barriers to competition are intangible and outside organizations' control while products and services are about experiences and personal identity. (Neumeier 2007, 14 – 15.) Parallel to this historical shift during the industrial revolution, both in barriers to competition and marketing appeals, there has been a corresponding shift in what the brand means from tangible to intangible.

Today, a search on Google using keywords such as "brand definition" among top results on the first few pages there are definitions by authors and authorities such as American Marketing Association, BusinessDictionary, Entrepreneur and Investopedia. These definitions, each with their slight differences, describe brands as being something tangible and take perspective of the organization (Maryua & Mishra 2012, 123.) However, while doing so they fail to account for the intangible aspects of the brand which are increasingly more important than the tangible ones. (Avis 2009, 2; Neumeier 2006, 8, 38 – 41.)
In contrast, there are definitions that reflect the historical context of evolution of a brand and account for the intangible aspects of it while taking consumer-centric perspective (Maryua & Mishra 2012, 125, 133). The following definition of a brand set forth by Neumeier is adequate for the context of the thesis. According to Neumeier (Neumeier 2006, 1 – 3; Neumeier 2016, 20 – 21): "A brand is a person's gut feeling about a product, service or company." In his definition of a brand, there are two important parts that require further analysis for complete comprehension of the definition.

The first part concerns a word "person's" which suggests that each individual creates their own version of the brand and further implies that brand is an individual perception. This correlates with historical context that today barriers to competition are outside of control of organizations, in that being an individual perception while organizations can influence that perception, they cannot control it. Hence, the mantra of the Neumeier goes: "A brand is not what you say it is. It's what they say it is." (Neumeier 2006, 4 – 7).

The second part concerns the words "gut feeling" which suggest a connection with the fundamental principles of human biology and overall importance of the limbic brain. In other words, without saying it directly, Neumeier acknowledges the importance of engaging the part of the brain that controls our feelings, decisions and behavior, and understands that despite our best efforts to be rational, we are all emotional and intuitive beings. Further, it is important to distinct that with this definition of a brand everyone has a brand and thus only relevant questions becomes what each of us is doing in order to affect the perception of our brand.

4.1.1 Personal brand

In practical terms, the only difference between brand and personal brand is the word "personal". Originally the word "personal" was attached to the brand in order to distinct that the brand bases on a person and not on organization. Therefore, by understanding brands as they relate to organizations we are then able to translate that understanding to application in personal brands as well. (Rosso 2013.) In other words, referring to previous section, our personal
brands are a perception of ourselves in the minds of other people, to which they react with their gut feelings, and therefore, each and every one of us has a personal brand and the only question becomes whether we are willing to begin to manage it. This awareness and understanding enables us to take control of our personal brands, unlike in so many organizations, where brands often happen while they are busy doing something else (Neumeier 2006, 14).

Even though many may think that the idea of a personal brand was born when Tom Peters wrote an article for Fast Company entitled The Brand Called You in 1997, there are many references to suggest that more likely the idea originates from Napoleon Hill when he wrote in his book Think and Grow Rich (1937) that: "It should be encouraging to know that practically all the great fortunes began in the form of compensation for personal services, or from the sale of ideas." (Peters 1997; Hill 2009, 161; Rosso 2013; Personal branding s.a.). Today, this idea is as relevant as ever, and one of the reasons why everyone should consider personal branding is the fact that jobs no longer last forever (Wheeler 2013, 90).

### 4.2 Brand equity

"Brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers." (Aaker 1991, 15). These assets and liabilities of brand equity form five groups which to some degree form interrelationships among each other as they can affect each other. These five groups, categories, or dimensions form the basis for brand equity (Figure 6).

![Brand Equity](image)

Figure 6. Brand Equity (Aaker 1991, 17).
These assets and liabilities either add or subtract value both for customer and organization who owns them. Further, brand equity assets and liabilities are always in relation to a particular brand name or symbol and require investment to create and maintain or will otherwise dissipate over time. (Aaker 1991, 15 – 18.) Overall, the purpose of brand equity model is to explain all the different ways in which brands create value to all stakeholders (Aaker 1991, 32).

### 4.3 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is a measure of the attachment that a customer has towards a brand and is often single most important contributor to brand equity. In other words, to an extent, it is brand loyalty that creates value for the brand and thus, further for the organization. In fact, a brand without a loyal customer base is vulnerable or has value only in its potential to create loyal customers. (Aaker 1991, 39; Aaker 1996, 21.) However, other dimensions of brand equity have a significant influence on brand loyalty, and thus there is also inverse connection between brand loyalty and brand equity (Aaker 1991, 17 – 19). Even though brand loyalty is relatively distinct from other dimensions of brand equity, to consider brand loyalty as an asset provides validation and encouragement for actions which aim to create and foster the relationships between the brand and the customers. It is much more reasonable and efficient in terms of costs to retain existing customers rather than attract new ones. (Aaker 1991, 42; Aaker 1996, 21.)

Brand loyalty cannot exist without prior purchase and use experience unlike brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality (Aaker 1991, 42). If the customer is indifferent to the brand and bases decisions on external factors alone — features and benefits, facts and figures — there is likely little to none brand loyalty. If the customer continues to choose one brand over another despite superior offerings of competition, there is likely substantial amount of brand loyalty. As brand loyalty increases, the probability that a current customer will change brand due to competitive action, decreases. (Aaker 1991, 39.) It is important to notice, that brand loyalty is always in relation to particular brand. Therefore, it is impossible to transfer brand loyalty to another name and symbol. (Aaker 1991, 43.)
Aaker presents two slightly different ways to separate five different stages of brand loyalty in his books *Managing Brand Equity (1991)* and *Building Strong Brands (1996)*. Thus, here we will explore these stages as they appear in his more recent publication and further supplement with the initial one. There are five separate groups, levels, or stages of brand loyalty from which some, or all, can be present depending on the market or product class (Aaker 1991, 39; Aaker 1996, 22). These are noncustomers (those who buy competitor brands or are not product class users), price switchers (those who are price-sensitive), the passively loyal (those who buy out of habit rather than reason), fence sitters (those who are indifferent between two or more brands), and the committed (Aaker 1996, 22).

The noncustomers are the bottom group regarding brand loyalty. These customers are indifferent and pay little to no attention towards brands as they are unable to perceive any additional value from the brands at least in the given product class. The price switchers are the second group regarding brand loyalty. These customers are open and susceptible to manipulative techniques of price drops, promotions, fear, peer pressure, aspirational messages and promise of innovation with intention to buy whatever is convenient for the given purpose. The passively loyal are the third group regarding brand loyalty. These customers choose brands they are familiar, and to some degree content with, as a result of a habitual behavior. The fence sitters are the fourth group regarding brand loyalty. These customers have positive experiences with the current brand and have switching costs in terms of money, performance or time that causes serious inconvenience if one was to switch brands within similar product class. The committed are the top group regarding brand loyalty. These customers experience emotional attachment and identify themselves with the brand. (Aaker 1991, 39 – 41; Aaker 1996, 22 – 23.)

Aaker refers to these kinds of top level brands as charismatic brands in the same context as Neumeier discusses charismatic brands (Aaker 1991, 41; Neumeier 2006, 18 – 19). Further, regarding charismatic brands and importance of brand loyalty, Neumeier presents list regarding the power of brand loyalty. This list is as follows (Neumeier 2016, 31):
• The most loyal 50 percent of customers would pay a 25 percent premium before switching brands
• Loyal customers spend 33 percent more than new customers
• The probability of selling to a new customer is only 5 – 20 percent, whereas the probability of selling to an existing customer is 60 – 70 percent
• Customers who have an emotional connection to a company are 4 times as likely to do business with it
• In many categories, the most loyal 10 percent of customers generates 50 percent of the revenues
• In some sectors, a 2 percent increase in loyalty is equivalent to a 10 percent cost reduction
• A 5 percent increase in customer retention can mean a 30 percent increase in profits
• A 5 percent increase in loyalty can mean a 95 percent in profits over a customer's lifetime

According to Aaker, at the highest level of brand loyalty, brands are able to establish an emotional connection with the customer. Further, they enable customer to express who they are. (Aaker 1991, 40 – 41). Here, it was further possible to connect this to theories put forth by Sinek, namely fundamental principles of human biology, as were discussed in Chapter 2. Start with WHY. It appears to be evident that these brands, charismatic brands, or great leaders, who are able to create such an astounding loyalty among their customers, are the ones who are able to communicate their values and beliefs with which customers are then able to identify themselves. In other words, these brands, charismatic brands, or great leaders, embody the naturally occurring pattern of The Golden Circle and communicate from the inside out resulting in following of people who believe what they believe.

4.4 Brand awareness

"Brand awareness is the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category." (Aaker 1991, 61). In other words, brand awareness reflects the presence of a brand in the mind of the consumer, assuming there is one. The strength of this presence is directly proportional to how well the consumer remembers the brand and ranges from being recognized, recalled and preferred all the way to being dominant. However, in practical terms, being preferred or dominant are both manifestations of being recalled. (Aaker 1991, 61; Aaker 1996, 10.)
In situations when a consumer is choosing between brands, an individual brand must first enter a consideration set — a mental list of plausible options regarding brands in a given product class. The brand awareness is crucial factor in these situations, because people are comfortable with familiar, and thus familiar brands will have an advantage over the unknown ones. (Aaker 1991, 19.) In fact, research in psychology has shown that any level of familiarity results in more positive feelings towards nearly anything. Therefore, people instinctively prefer something they are familiar with to something that is new to them. (Aaker 1996, 10.)

The assessment of brand awareness is performed by recall tests which can be either aided or unaided. In aided recall test the respondents are given a set of brand names from a given product class with purpose to recognize the brand, whereas in unaided recall test respondents are not given brand names with purpose to recall brand names from a given product class. The difference between these two recall tests reflects the difference between brand recognition and brand recall. (Aaker 1991, 62.)

The lowest level of brand awareness is simply that the consumer is unaware of the existence of the brand. The second level of brand awareness, or according to recall test evaluation criteria the first of two primary brand awareness levels, is brand recognition. Brand recognition means that consumer remembers, or recognizes, that there has been a past exposure to the brand without necessarily remembering where this past exposure took place, how the brand differs from other brands, or what the product class is. (Aaker 1991, 62; Aaker 1996, 10.) The third level of brand awareness, or according to recall test evaluation criteria the second of two primary brand awareness levels, is brand recall. Brand recall means that consumer remembers, or recalls, brand name when the product class of the brand is brought up. (Aaker 1991, 62; Aaker 1996, 11.) The fourth and fifth levels of brand awareness are both manifestations of brand recall and reflect stronger presence of the brand in the mind of the consumer. The fourth level represents being preferred which means that the brand is the first one to come to the mind of the consumer when the product class of the brand is brought up. The fifth level represents being dominant which means that the brand is the only one to come to the
mind of the consumer when the product class of the brand is brought up. (Aaker 1991, 62 – 63; Aaker 1991, 15 – 16.)

In relation to the context of brand awareness, namely brand dominance, there are several other contexts and connections from former theory that can be equated with each other in order to gain an additional insight. Brand dominance in a given product class correlates with being at the top of the mental ladders and charismatic brands. In all these concepts only one brand in product class will come to the mind of the consumer, for which consumer believes there is no substitute, and thus will be the only brand to fall under consideration set and eventually result in purchase decision providing a strong competitive advantage. (Aaker 1991, 62 – 63; Aaker 1996, 15 – 16; Neumeier 2006, 18 – 19; Ries & Trout 2001, 32.)

4.5 Perceived quality

"Perceived quality can be defined as the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives." (Aaker 1991, 85). In other words, perceived quality is individual perception of quality which is dependent on factors which customer associates with quality regarding certain product or service (Aaker 1991, 85; Aaker 1996, 17 – 20). Thus, perceived quality which is in a way an overall feeling of the brand, is not the same as actual quality (the extent to which the product or service delivers superior service), product-based quality (the nature and quantity of ingredients, features, or services included) and manufacturing quality (conformance to specification, the "zero defect" goal). (Aaker 1991, 85.)

It is also important to distinct that perceived quality is not the same as satisfaction or attitude, because if perception of quality aligns with expectations regarding certain product or service, a customer can experience both satisfaction and/or positive, or negative, attitude. (Aaker 1991, 86.) In order to achieve desirable perception of quality among certain customer segment, organizations must engage in thoughtful consideration in order to determine what quality means to that segment. In other words, in order to create or sustain the perception of quality, organizations must, eventually, support it with tangible
factors of quality. However, to identify what quality means to a customer segment, alone is not enough. There is also need to create the perception of quality. Otherwise, perceived quality of the products and services of the organization can, and often does, differ from the actual quality.

There are several reasons which can affect how customers perceive the quality when the gap in alignment with the actual quality is vast. These reasons are as follows:

- In the mind of the consumer, there might be previous perception of quality at place, which prevents or contradicts the newly founded claims of quality
- The areas in which organization is able to achieve quality are those that customers do not consider important
- The customer may lack the expertise, information, motivation or time to sort out the information regarding product or service in order to make a rational assessment of the quality
- The customer may not know how to best assess quality and thus may be looking for the wrong cues

Hence, overall, it is necessary for organizations to make sure that investments in quality occur in areas which resonate with the customers. (Aaker 1991, 87; Aaker 1996, 19 – 20.) Even though theoretically perceived quality is one of brand associations, Aaker classifies and thus suggests that organizations should approach it as brand asset because according to studies it is evident that perceived quality drives financial performance. Studies using PIMS database (annual data measuring more than one hundred variables for over 3,000 business units) have shown that perceived quality is the single most important contributor on return on investment. (Aaker 1996, 17.)

4.6 Brand associations

According to the definition set forth by Aaker: "A brand association is anything "linked" in memory to a brand" (Aaker 1991, 109). In other words, brand associations are the associations that consumers make with the brand such as product attributes, symbols, and spokespersons (Aaker 1996, 25). The underlying value of brand name, or any name, is in the meaning of it which often bases upon the associations that the name represents (Aaker 1991, 20). Unique brand associations have been established using product attributes, names,
packages, distribution strategies, and advertising (Aaker 1991, 7 – 8). However, according to Aaker, there has been too much focus on product attributes and other tangible functional benefits of the brand alone, and thus, brand associations are chosen according to broader perspective; brand identity — which is what the organization wants the brand to stand for in the minds of the customers (Aaker 1996, 25). Brand identity will be explored in the next chapter.

In relation to brand associations, it is important to understand the close concept of brand image. According to Aaker: "A brand image is a set of associations, usually organized in some meaningful way." Thus, brand associations and brand image both represent perceptions which may or may not reflect the reality as it is. In this sense, definition of brand image resembles one of brand itself as it was previously established in this thesis, the only difference being the perspective and context regarding their respective theories. (Aaker 1991, 109 – 110.) Further, there is connection between brand associations, brand image and positioning. In relation to brand associations and brand image, the positioning implies a frame of reference, the reference point usually being the competition. In other words, position is brand association(s) in the mind of the consumer in relation to competition in certain category. A brand that has been able to position itself in meaningful position in the minds of the consumers and has attractive associations to support it will rate high on these desirable attributes. (Aaker 1991, 110, 115.)

4.6.1 Brand identity

"A brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members." (Aaker 1996, 68). This definition has two important points. The first point relates to word "aspires". This is the most important word in the definition in order to distinct between brand associations and brand image. In other words, while brand associations and brand image both reflect the reality regarding associations in the minds of the consumers, brand identity reflects intention, or what associations the brand aspires to create or maintain. The difference ap-
pears to be similar as the one between position and positioning — position referring to reality and positioning to intention, or aspiration, to claim a certain position in the minds of the consumers. (Aaker 1996, 68.) Further, while brand associations and brand image are usually passive and look to the past since research on these takes time, brand identity should be active and look to the present and future reflecting enduring associations to maintain and future ones that the brand aspires to create. (Aaker 1996, 70.) The second point relates to words "imply a promise". This is not self-explanatory as Aaker doesn't further discuss promise in any context, even though it becomes obvious that promise refers to value proposition. Some additional research provides validation to assumption that promise in context of brands, or brand promise, equals value proposition as they both imply value to the customer (Daye 2010). In addition, Aaker further states in relation to brand identity and value proposition that: "Brand identity should help establish a relationship between the brand and the customer by generating value proposition involving functional, emotional or self-expressive benefit." (Aaker 1996, 68.)

As it became evident from the analysis of the definition, brand identity is driver of one of the four principal dimensions of brand equity; associations, which also include as a special case perceived quality — another principal dimension of brand equity (Aaker 1996, 68). Therefore, in order to enhance brand equity through associations, one must broaden the concept of the brand with brand identity system with its respective perspectives and dimensions (Aaker 1996, 76). Further, the ultimate goal of the brand identity system is to create strong brand-customer relationships (Aaker 1996, 77).

In order to build strong brand identity, Aaker introduces his brand identity system which suggests that there should be a broader view of the brand building activities, a shift from tactical to strategic and focus on both internal and external view of the brand (Aaker 1996, 69, 77). In itself, brand identity system includes core and extended identity and four perspectives with their respective dimensions. These perspectives are brand-as-product, brands-as-organization, brand-as-person and brand-as-symbol. However, even though each of these perspectives provides depth into the brand identity, only those that are viable and appropriate should be chosen to help articulate what the brand should stand for in the minds of the consumers. (Aaker 1996, 78.)
The first perspective, brand-as-product, bases on the fact that in most cases brand exists in relation to product(s) and/or service(s). Therefore, the product scope of these will have an impact on the type of associations that are desirable and feasible for the brand. (Aaker 1996, 78.) The product scope further links brand to a product class, or category, which means that in desirable situation customer will recall the brand when its product class, or category, is brought up. The strength of the recall whether there will determine whether there will be only recall, or alternately top of the mind or even dominant recall of the brand. (Aaker 1996, 80.) There are certain attributes of product(s) and service(s) which can directly provide functional or emotional benefits for customer. Attributes that relate to quality are important enough to consider separately. There can be further associations regarding use occasion, user and place of origin. (Aaker 1996, 80 – 82.)

The second perspective, brand-as-organization, bases on the fact that it takes an organization to produce and deliver a product or service, and thus brand can draw from the organization in order to differentiate. The basis for this premise is that each organization have its own unique set of values and beliefs, culture and other organizational characteristics. These organizational characteristics can provide, in addition to differentiation, a basis for value proposition and a customer relationship, and thus further enable to maintain competitive advantage. (Aaker 1996, 115.) This type of brand that draws from organizational characteristic is often corporate brand that represents the whole organization. For corporate brands it is inevitable to eventually make a fundamental decision whether to become a global brand with the accompanying prestige and credibility, or to try to connect with local market. (Aaker 1996, 116, 128.)

The third perspective, brand-as-person, bases on the fact that consumers want to see more humanity in organizations and brands they associate themselves with. "A brand personality can be defined as the set of human characteristics associated with a given brand." (Aaker 1996, 141). Thus, brand personality metaphor can help customers to connect on a more personal level with the brand and in turn it can help organization to gain in-depth understanding of customer perceptions and attitudes towards the brand. (Aaker 1996,
Strategically, a brand personality can serve as the foundation of meaningful differentiation, especially in contexts where brands are similar with respect to product attributes. However, in order to be effective, brand personality needs to be desirable and important enough to matter to the person using the brand. (Aaker 1996, 150 – 151, 158, 173 – 174.)

The fourth perspective, brand-as-symbol, bases on the fact that visual symbol or image supports brand by stimulating perceptions towards it and reinforcing brand attributes. Symbol or image further creates or cues brand personality as brand personality that lacks the symbol or image may be relatively ineffective and thus symbol or image is essential part of any brand personality. (Aaker 1996, 168 – 170.)

5 STRATEGY

In this chapter of the thesis was explored, presented and discussed strategy. The theoretical foundation of this chapter is fully based on theories and concepts by Richard Rumelt from his book Good Strategy Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters (2013). Rumelt explains strategy as it exists in today's world and the dramatic difference between good strategy and bad strategy; a term Rumelt coined in 2007 at Washington D.C. seminar on national security. In the parts below, was explored both these types of strategy. (Rumelt 2013, 7, 33.)

According to Rumelt, the most basic idea of strategy is the application of strength against weakness, or the most promising opportunity. Today, this idea has grown to include potential strengths, better known as "advantages". Strategy can have many different natural advantages from which the following two are most important. The first natural advantage is the strategy itself as most of the time there is no strategy at all. A strategy that is coherent coordinating policies, actions, and resources creates strength through coherence of its design. The second natural advantage is insight which arise from chosen perspective and those subtle shifts in viewpoint that it enables. This way of reframing the situation based on chosen perspective can create insight into new sources of strength and opportunity as well as weakness and threat. (Rumelt 2013, 9 – 11, 21.)
Rumelt further argues that strategy is a way through difficulty, an approach to overcoming an obstacle, a response to challenge. Thus, one must define a difficulty, an obstacle, or a challenge. Otherwise, it becomes difficult, if not impossible to assess the quality of the strategy, and if one cannot assess the quality of the strategy it is impossible to improve a good strategy or to discard a bad strategy. (Rumelt 2013, 41.) Hence, the essence of strategy is to discover the critical factors in a situation, figure out which purposes are both worth pursuing and capable of being accomplished, and design a way of coordinating and focusing actions to deal with those factors. In other words, a great deal of strategy work is trying to solve what is going on in order to fully comprehend the situation, and not only to decide what to do. (Rumelt 2013, 2 – 6, 66, 79.) In the words of Ries and Trout, when it comes to starting a positioning problem: "The temptation is to work on the solution without first thinking through the problem." (Ries & Trout 2001, 193).

Today, a good strategy that almost always looks at the simple and obvious is the exception. It has become an unfortunate tendency to equate strategy with factors such as success, ambition, vision, leadership, planning, or economic logic of competition. The words such as "strategy" and "strategic" has become buzzwords to mark decisions made by the highest-level officials. The gap between a good strategy and plethora of things people label "strategy" has only grown over the years. (Rumelt 2013, 1 – 6.)

5.1.1 Good strategy

According to Rumelt, a good strategy acknowledges the challenges and provides an approach to overcome them. Rumelt further presents an underlying logical structure in order to develop a good strategy which he calls the kernel. The kernel consists of three elements which are as follows:

1. A diagnosis that defines or explains the nature of the challenge. A good diagnosis simplifies the often overwhelming complexity of reality by identifying certain aspects of situation as critical
2. A guiding policy for dealing with the challenge. This is an overall approach chosen to cope with or overcome the obstacles identified in the diagnosis
3. A set of coherent actions that are designed to carry out the guiding policy. These are steps that are coordinated with one another to work together in accomplishing the guiding policy.

A good strategy may consist of more than the kernel. These supportive elements may include visions, hierarchies of goals and objectives, references to time span or scope, and ideas about adaptation and change. The understanding of the kernel enable to create, describe and evaluate a strategy. (Rumelt 2013, 4 – 7, 77 – 79.)

The first part of the kernel, a diagnosis, should replace the overwhelming complexity of reality with simplified model which allows to make sense of the situation and engage in further problem solving. In general, a diagnosis names of classifies the situation, links facts into patterns and suggests focusing attention to the critical aspects of the situation. Furthermore, insightful and thorough diagnosis identifies appropriate perspective which in turn expands and transforms understanding of the situation thus defining the domain of action. An explicit diagnosis permits one to evaluate the rest of the strategy and allows to revisit and change it as the circumstances change. (Rumelt 2013, 79 – 81.)

The second part of the kernel, the guiding policy, outlines an overall approach and defines a method to deal with the challenges identified in the diagnosis by creating or drawing from the source of advantage. Source of advantage is usually competitive advantage such as brand and the guiding policy itself can be a source of advantage. (Rumelt 2013, 84 – 87.)

The third part of the kernel, the coherent set of actions, are designed to carry out the guiding policy. A strategy that fails to define a variety of plausible and feasible actions is missing a critical component. In the end strategy is about doing something; an action. (Rumelt 2013, 6 – 7, 87.)

5.1.2 Bad strategy

According to Rumelt bad strategy is not the same as no strategy or strategy that fails rather than succeeds. Instead, it is an identifiable form of strategy
that is long on aspirations and goals, and short on policy or action. It has non-existent or insufficient analysis of obstacles and lack of coherent, practical and thus actionable strategic objectives. It grows out of misconceptions and leadership dysfunctions assuming that aspirations and goals are all that is needed. (Rumelt 2013, 7, 32 – 57.)

Several reasons underlie the existence of bad strategy which include but are not limited to pain or difficulty of hard choice to focus on single aspect in fear of offending anyone, template-style strategy which offers one-size-fits-all substitute for the hard work of analysis and coordination of action with slogans, values, goals, statements and belief that positive mental attitude alone is enough in order to succeed. (Rumelt 2013, 7, 58.)

There are four identifiable characteristics to bad strategy: fluff, the failure to face the challenge, mistaking goals for strategy, and bad strategic objectives (Rumelt 2013, 37). The first characteristic, fluff, is superficial restatement of the obvious typically together with buzzwords in disguise as expertise, thought, and/or analysis. It is unnecessary complexity with a purpose to hide the absence of substance in the matter — a complete opposite to insight and true expertise of making complex matters understandable. It has origins in the academic world, and more recently, in the information technology industry. (Rumelt 2013, 37, 40.) The second characteristic, failure to face the challenge, makes it difficult or impossible to assess the quality of the strategy. Thus, one cannot improve a good strategy or discard a bad one. In other words, if there is no identification or analysis of the obstacles, there is no strategy. Instead, it is a stretch goal, a budget, or a list of things that one would wish to happen. (Rumelt 2013, 41 – 44.) The third characteristic, mistaking goals for strategy, is to believe that setting goals and aspirations is all that is needed (Rumelt 2013, 45 – 51). The fourth characteristic, bad strategic objectives, is to pursue means to an end which are impracticable and therefore fail to address critical issues. It can also be objectives that while able to define a challenge, are unable to deal with them given current resources and competence. (Rumelt 2013, 51 – 57.)
5.2 Personal brand strategy framework

A *diagnosis* for the personal brand strategy framework comes directly from the research question of the thesis. If we look at the instructions and guidelines for writing a thesis, we see that there is a requirement for definition of the thesis statement, or the research question, to which the thesis then attempts to provide an answer. Thus, inherently, the structure and the research question of the thesis resemble the structure of the kernel of a good strategy. In other words, the research question of the thesis which defines or explains the nature of the challenge constitutes a diagnosis itself. A *guiding policy* to deal with the challenge outlined in the diagnosis is three-step personal brand strategy framework which will present each step in its own respective section. These sections together are also a direct answer to the research question of the thesis as they combine the fundamental components of any brand. The reason that there are four steps is simply an arbitrary decision made in order to keep the framework actionable. However, there is logic to it as well, as it is a fact that on average the human mind can only deal with seven units at the time and the most recent studies suggest that it is close to four rather than seven (Miller 1956; Ries & Trout 2001, 30 – 31; Kalakoski 2009). A *set of coherent actions* which are designed to carry out guiding policy will be represented by the study of the thesis, where we will apply this framework in order to create a personal brand strategy for a student of Information Technology at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. However, in order to abstain from characteristics of a bad strategy, especially template-style one-size-fits-all strategy, in each personal brand strategy there should be separate diagnosis which more precisely defines the nature of the challenge for that particular person.

Each step chosen in the personal brand strategy framework contributes to overall differentiation as the brand management itself is a management of differences as they exist in the minds of the people (Neumeier 2006, 3). Even though word "competition" is in frequent use throughout the thesis, today the competition comes from the clutter itself, or the endless choices each of us have, and thus the emphasis is to define oneself in clear and simple terms (Neumeier 2007, 6). Only when the message is clear, can there be a commu-
nication that cuts through the clutter. Further, though each step in this framework bases on sound theory from the theoretical framework of the thesis, it is only one way to construct personal brand strategy and that there is, depending on the situation, alternative and/or additional steps to consider. Moreover, the reason each step begins with the word "consider" reflects the fact that each step is optional, though in ideal situation they are all present and add to the whole resulting in more thorough differentiation overall.

5.2.1 Step one — purpose, cause, or belief and the underlying values

The first step of the personal brand strategy framework draws from the second chapter of the thesis. It bases on the fact that it is a reason WHY, or purpose, cause, or belief, that is the source of inspiration and passion, and results in deep personal motivation, or inner motivation, to act (Hardy 2010, 62; Sinek 2009, 6; Sinek et al. 2017, 6). The ability to know and articulate our WHY and HOW to bring it to life enables us to filter our decisions so that we can then create environment where we can thrive, or be at our natural best (Sinek et al. 2017, 6 – 9). There are vast amounts of references among thought leaders of today such as Hardy, Neumeier, and Sinek, who all suggest that everything we do should start with a purpose, cause, or belief (Hardy 2010, 61 – 63; Neumeier s.a.; Sinek 2009, 7).

In his latest book Find Your WHY: A Practical Guide for Discovering Purpose for Your and Your Team (2017), Sinek together with David Mead and Peter Docker present WHY discovery process, or how to discover a purpose, cause, or belief, for both individuals and teams and then put it into words. They state that at its core, the WHY discovery process is an origin story and thus everyone has one, though one WHY only. It is everlasting in both our personal and professional life, because we are who we are wherever we are. In other words, it is something that anyone can discover by identifying patterns and themes from defining memories and experiences both highs and lows and that expresses who we are at our natural best. (Sinek et al. 2017, 30 – 31, 36).

As was discussed in the second chapter of the thesis, there are three levels in The Golden Circle — WHY, HOW and WHAT. These three levels are equally important and once in balance, result in ability to perform at our natural best.
Regardless the articulation, other individuals may express their WHY similar to ours. Therefore, it is HOW we bring our WHY to life and the combination of these that makes us unique. (Sinek et al. 2017, 152.) Even though this unique combination adds by a large to overall differentiation, it is completely introspective and therefore one must not defeat its purpose by considering competition. The WHY discovery process is a two-phase process which begins with discovery of a purpose, cause, or belief, and continues with discovery of values and actions upon those values. In order to streamline the process, we will refer to the first phase as WHY discovery process and the second phase as HOW discovery process. On this account there are seven steps in the WHY discovery process and three steps in the HOW discovery process. (Sinek et al. 40, 169.)

The WHY discovery process

There are seven steps in the WHY discovery process (Figure 7) (Sinek et al. 2017, 40).

1. FIND YOUR PARTNER
2. GET YOUR PARTNER UP TO SPEED
3. PICK A TIME AND A PLACE
4. GATHER YOUR STORIES
5. SHARE YOUR STORIES
6. IDENTIFY YOUR THEMES
7. DRAFT YOUR WHY

Figure 7. The WHY discovery process (Sinek et al. 2017, 40).

The first step is to find a partner, or facilitator. The right partner will be hearing stories chosen by the prospect for the first time, is trustworthy but not too close to be able to provide objectivity, innately curious and eager to help, and thus great at listening. The purpose of the partner is to push the prospect beyond the surface level and out of the comfort zone, take notes of the stories and ask follow-up questions in order to discover emerging patterns and themes, and the underlying meaning of these. (Sinek et al. 2017, 37, 41 – 42.)
The second step is to get the partner up to speed of the process. The book presents an entire section entitled "Partner Section" which explains the role of the partner in-depth and provides further guiding regarding the process. There are instructions on how to be an active listener, ask follow-up questions and take notes to receive most out of the process. (Sinek et al. 2017, 42 – 53.)

The third step is to pick a time and place. There should be at least three uninterrupted hours to work with though the duration of the entire process is highly individual. However, it should not be more than six hours. The place should be away from noise and distractions, because the information will be personal and therefore confidential. The meeting should be in person, and while a phone call or video conference can work, it is not ideal as it will be harder to interpret body language. (Sinek et al. 2017, 54 – 55.)

The fourth step is to gather stories. These stories should be standout memories, the defining moments that made the most significant difference in our lives. The quantity and the quality of these memories is important and while the amount of data to compile and draw upon help establish recurring patterns and themes, they should include feelings, conversations, and life lessons. There should be about ten stories from which to share about five. (Sinek et al. 2017, 31 – 33, 58.) The book presents two methods to help gather stories — "Peaks and Valleys" and "The Memory Prompt". In "Peaks and Valleys" one is to draw a horizontal line across the middle of the paper and position stories accordingly either above or below the line and choose the highest of the highs and lowest of the lows (Figure 8). In "The Memory Prompt" one is to consider prompt questions in order to recollect stories from the memory (Figure 9). (Sinek et al. 2017, 59 – 62.)
The fifth step is to share stories. These stories should be specific and in details in order to make progress. They will provide ideas and insights from feelings, conversations, and life lessons which will reveal the underlying values and beliefs. (Sinek et al. 2017, 34.)

The sixth step is to identify themes. An idea becomes a theme when it reoccurs in more than a single story. There is no right number of themes. As the process unfolds, one or two themes will begin to stand out and feel more important, the ones that inspire and seem defining. Together with the partner, one is to choose one theme as *contribution* and one as *impact*. The contribution is the matter around which everything we do aligns to bring out the impact...
we envision. These themes will serve as a foundation to WHY statement and the remaining themes as a foundation to establish HOWs. (Sinek et al. 2017, 34 – 35, 70 – 72.)

The seventh step is to draft WHY statement. The book presents format for the WHY statement which is one sentence long (Figure 10). There are two blanks in this format. The first blank represents the contribution one makes to the lives of others. The second blank represents the impact of that contribution. The sentence itself should be simple, clear, and actionable, written in such affirmative language that it resonates on a personal level. That is, it must *feel* right rather than look right. The purpose is not perfection and there is little value in overthinking, as it is more of an art than science. The reason one should aspire to keep the WHY statement one sentence long is because it is easy to remember and therefore act upon. Both the prospect and the partner should write their own independent WHY statements as there is value in comparing and combining these afterwards. (Sinek et al. 2017, 35 – 38, 73 – 75.)

![Figure 10. The WHY statement (Sinek et al. 2017, 35, 37).](image)

**The HOW discovery process**

There are three steps in the HOW discovery process (Figure 11) (Sinek et al. 2017, 169).
The first step is to narrow the remaining themes. These themes derive from the WHY discovery process and consist of those themes that were not chosen as either contribution or impact in the WHY statement. The purpose is to look for themes that express similar ideas and either discard the other of the overlapping themes or combine them to form a new theme that captures the idea which exists in both. This should be done until there are no more than five themes left. (Sinek et al. 2017, 152, 170 – 171.)

The second step is to state HOWs. The remaining themes that derive from the WHY discovery process are often written as traits, attributes, or adjectives. To turn a theme into HOW is to express it as a verb or action which one can act upon to bring WHY to life. In situations when it is hard to express theme as a verb or action, one should refer to the original stories in order to identify its context and further determine the appropriate verb or action. (Sinek et al. 2017, 174 – 176).

The third step is to provide context. Once all the maximum of five themes have been turned into actionable HOWs in order to strengthen the personal relationships with these guiding principles, one should provide a short description that gives each HOW context and suggests what it might look like in practice (Sinek et al. 2017, 178).

**Validate and/or refine WHY statement**

Finally, there is an ongoing step, or stage, which is to test, validate and/or refine the WHY statement. The reason for this is that the initial draft of the WHY statement may, and often does, feel generic regarding certain words. Hence, the purpose of testing, validating and/or refining the WHY statement is to find such a language that will *feel* better. (Sinek et al. 2017, 79 – 82.)
The book presents "Friends Exercise" to test, validate and/or refine the WHY statement. The exercise requires one to make a list of closest friends — those one can count on. The exercise should be done in person; one on one. The question to ask each friend is "Why are you friends with me?" Friendships, like any other relationships, are based on feelings. Thus, even though difficult to answer, it will provide ideas and insight which one might then incorporate to refine the initial WHY statement. (Sinek et al. 2017, 76 – 82.)

5.2.2 Step two — name and category

The second step of the personal brand strategy framework is to consider name and category. This step draws from the second chapter of the thesis and bases on the fact that the single most important positioning decision that anyone can make is to choose a name, and only then a category one aspires to occupy with it. The reason for this is that it is the name that occupies a category, or a step in the mental ladder in the minds of the people, and not a product, service, organization, institution or even the person themselves. The name then acts as a hook to which each person hangs attributes and associations. (Neumeier 2007, 82; Ries & Trout 2001, 71 – 72, 103.)

Today, as the barriers to competition have become the walls of indifference that each of us creates in our minds, there is need to define our category as clearly as possible. Thus, in our own careers, it is best to establish position of specialist, or expert, with narrow focus. (Ries & Trout 2001, 195.) In general, focus is difficult to achieve because it runs counter to our instincts in ways which mean giving something up and is thus often seen as an overwhelming task by most people (Neumeier 2006, 44 – 45; Ries & Trout 2001, 183). However, by trying to appeal to everyone we risk appealing to no one. Inability to establish focus poses risk of achieving weak position in the wrong category. It must also be taken into account if there is a lot of competition in the chosen category because then, depending on the situation, to establish competent positioning becomes much more difficult. (Ries & Trout 2001, 195 – 197.) Further, eventually one must also match the claim for the chosen position. In other words, have something to support the claim. (Ries & Trout 2001, 198.)
Regardless of the common belief that the name is "only a name" there is increasing amount of evidence of the importance that the name has and the role it plays in a life of a person (Ries & Trout 2001, 77 – 80). This role, however, often depends upon personal attitude and perception towards the name itself as it often becomes self-fulfilling prophecy due to psychological reasons.

Though there are historical and cultural implications regarding names, in general, in the absence of other information it is the name that creates first impression and further generates expectations through stereotypes. (Nakahara 1981.) Neumeier presents seven criteria for a good name regarding brands which allow for easy identification, drive differentiation and speed acceptance (Figure 12) (Neumeier 2006, 82, 85). These are also applicable for personal brands as is and offer broad perspective of things to consider such as is the name available for web use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. DISTINCTIVENESS</th>
<th>Does it stand out from the crowd, especially from the other names in its class? Does it separate well from ordinary text and speech? The best brand names have the &quot;presence&quot; of a proper noun.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. BREVITY</td>
<td>Is it short enough to be easily recalled and used? Will it resist being reduced to a nickname? Long multi-word names will be quickly shortened to non-communicating initials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. APPROPRIATENESS</td>
<td>Is there a reasonable fit with the business purpose of the entity? If it would work just as well — or better — for another entity, keep looking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. EASY SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION</td>
<td>Will most people be able to spell the name after hearing it spoken? Will they be able to pronounce it after seeing it written? A name shouldn’t turn into a spelling test or make people feel ignorant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. LIKABILITY</td>
<td>Will people enjoy using it? Names that are intellectually stimulating, or provide a good &quot;mouth feel&quot;, have a headstart over those that don’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. EXTENDABILITY</td>
<td>Does it have &quot;legs&quot;? Does it suggest a visual interpretation or lend itself to a number of creative executions? Great names provide endless opportunities for brand play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. PROTECTABILITY</td>
<td>Can it be trademarked? Is it available for web use? While many names can be trademarked, some names are more defensible than others, making them safer and more valuable in the long run.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12. The 7 Criteria for A Good Name (Neumeier 2006, 85).

In alignment with these criteria as they relate specifically to people and thus personal brands, Ries and Trout agree and add regarding phonetics that when it comes to names in addition to visual orientation, or how the name looks, greater emphasis should be made to make sure that the name sounds right (Ries & Trout 2001, 86). Further, when people have a choice between a word and a set of initials both equal in phonetic length, they will invariably choose to use the word (Ries & Trout 2001, 86 – 88).
As an example, to illustrate the point with the students of Information Technology at South-Eastern University of Applied Sciences, let us assume that each student develops a certain point of interest during their studies to which they then choose to specialize in, or become experts. Let us also assume that these students all aim to employ in organizations. In situations where certain students are less conscious and assertive of their interests and expertise categories such as "Game Programmer", Java Developer" or "Web Designer" provide employing organizations with a glimpse of these students' interests and expertise. In situations where certain students are more conscious and assertive of their interests and expertise categories such as "Application Support Analyst", Cloud Consultant" or "Help Desk Specialist" provide employing organizations with more accurate understanding of these students' interests and expertise. However, in both situations focus on certain category improves students' possibilities to employ according to their interests and expertise rather than risk the chance to employ in organizations to positions which has nothing to do with these.

5.2.3 Step three — association of perceived quality

The third step of the personal brand strategy framework draws from the second and fourth chapters of the thesis. It is based on the fact that in addition to a name and a category, it is associations that influence positioning, especially that of perceived quality (Aaker 1991, 109 – 129; Ries & Trout 2001, 53 – 69). There are different associations to consider and not all associations appropriate for product, service or organization will be adequate for person. There will further vary depending on the positioning problem in question. Thus, it is important to consider which associations will be appropriate and for which purpose because many times, the right associations might be definitive (Aaker 1991, 114).

As an example, to illustrate the point with the students of Information Technology at South-Eastern University of Applied Sciences, let us assume that there are two groups of students. The first group of students aim to employ in organizations. The second group of students aim to work as small business owners. Thus, there is difference in who these two groups of students are targeting.
This difference will influence their association of perceived quality to the target. To the first group, some of the factors that will influence their perceived quality will be the factors that their potential employers will be looking at when hiring new employees. Thus, factors such as their educational background, portfolio of personal projects and their ability to produce code that is easy to understand and maintain will influence perception of quality. In other words, it is about their process as in most cases they will be working in an environment with other experts in the same technical areas. To the second group, some of the factors that will influence their perceived quality will be the factors that their potential customers will be looking at when contracting for business. Thus, factors such as their pricing, recommendations and testimonials, and impact their solutions have on the business will influence perception of quality. In other words, it is about the results of their process, as in most cases the customers will not be the experts to understand all the technical details of the work they hire them to do.

6 STUDY

In this chapter of the thesis was conducted a qualitative study for a student of Information Technology at South-Eastern University of Applied Sciences. In the study, was defined a personal brand of Matvei Kinner using the personal brand strategy framework. According to the definition of a brand and further personal brand as it was established in the fourth chapter of the thesis, each one of us has one. Thus, the only question for those aware of it becomes if we choose to manage it. That is, the perception of us in the minds of others.

6.1 Step one — purpose, cause, or belief, and the underlying values

In accordance to the first step of the personal brand strategy framework, in this part of the chapter, was discovered the purpose, cause, or belief, and the values of the personal brand of Matvei Kinner. This will be completed in three stages. In the first stage, was conducted the WHY discovery process. In the second stage, was conducted the HOW discovery process. In the third stage, was conducted validation and refinement of the WHY statement.

As an important background information regarding this part of the study, and this part only, the first and the third stages were conducted prior to the thesis
plan, as early as summer 2017. This was done in order to prototype the core ideas regarding the premise of the thesis. Thus, the first and the third stages will serve as reviews of the former work (there are separate notions regarding these differences in the study). Further, there might be obscurities in the information below and the process may differ from that of personal brand strategy framework. The reason for this is that at the time of conducting the first and the third stages of this part of the study, the book *Find Your WHY: A Practical Guide for Discovering Purpose for You and Your Team (2017)* upon which this part of the framework builds upon was unavailable due to first release in late 2017.

The WHY discovery process

The WHY discovery process took place on 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} of July in 2017. The partner chosen for the process was at the time a new acquaintance, whose name is to remain confidential. Prior to beginning the process, Matvei was able to recollect eight stories, some of which with the help of prompt questions. Then, from these stories five were chosen to be shared with the partner. Founding on these stories, the partner was able to identify eight distinct themes in form of traits (Figure 13).

Two themes were then chosen by both Matvei and the partner (according to the framework the prospect and partner both choose the same two themes). Matvei chose "overachiever" as contribution and "responsible" as impact, whereas the partner chose "expressive" as contribution and "responsible" as

![Figure 13. Themes.](image-url)
impact. On these grounds, both wrote their independent drafts of the WHY statement. Much to a surprise, the draft written by the partner was chosen in its whole due to strong emotional response from Matvei, in comparison to that written by Matvei himself (Figure 14).

![Figure 14. The WHY statement.](image)

Though the WHY statement managed to capture the underlying essence and resonate on a personal level with Matvei, he felt that it had its implications on rational basis, especially with the word "perfection" which is highly dependent on the use occasion and can mean very different things to different people. Further, the word "affect" is the one that feels to be out of place being too broad for the purpose. Regardless, the WHY statement was left as is due to the fact that there was little value in overthinking the statement at that point.

### The HOW discovery process

The HOW discovery process took place on 16th of April in 2018. Almost a year after the WHY discovery process, the decision was made by Matvei to refer to the original stories in order to get up to speed of the HOW discovery process. The decision was also made to first state HOWs in order to narrow down the remaining six themes, rather than compare them as traits without any context. Thus, referring to the original stories, Matvei was able to turn all the remaining six themes written as traits, into actions (Figure 15).
In further comparison of these HOWs, it became obvious that they were overlapping in pairs. These pairs were then combined with each other in order to form three new HOWs. "Display perseverance to motivate others" and "Push others to overcome themselves" became "Never settle". "Lead by an example to encourage others" and "Take a stand in the times of uncertainty" became "Lead by an example". "Arouse interest to the details and practices" and "Bring raw truth to the world" became "Question".

Following the process, the context to each HOW was then provided to strengthen personal relationship with these actions to bring the WHY to life (Figure 16).

**Figure 15. HOWs.**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>DISPLAY PERSEVERANCE TO MOTIVATE OTHERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>RESPONSIBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>LEAD BY AN EXAMPLE TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>TAKE A STAND IN THE TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>PUSH OTHERS TO OVERCOME THEMSELVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>AROUSE INTEREST TO THE DETAILS AND PRACTICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>BRING RAW TRUTH TO THE WORLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>EXPRESSIVE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 16. HOWs context.**

- **1. NEVER SETTLE.**
  - 1. Strive to set personal standards that exceed those others set for you.
  - 2. Reframe adversities to challenges.
  - 3. Do everything that you do with everything that you have.
  - 4. Learn something new every day.

- **2. LEAD BY AN EXAMPLE**
  - 1. Say what you mean — mean what you say.
  - 2. Refuse to give up on the things you love and are passionate about.
  - 3. Finish what you start.
  - 4. Think before you act or strategy before action.

- **3. QUESTION**
  - 1. Ask questions to discover underlying reasons and further decide course of actions.
  - 2. Seek alternative options and solutions even when the answer seems obvious.

**Validate and/or refine WHY statement**
In the following months, after the WHY discovery process in 2017, Matvei made up list of his closest friends from which he then chose two for interview to ask: "Why are you friends with me?" in order to dig deeper into the WHY statement and refine it if found appropriate. The names of these friends are to remain confidential. The ideas and insights from these interviews mainly verified former understanding of the underlying values and beliefs that drive Matvei. Even though these ideas and insights were able to clarify certain aspects, they did not result in the refinement of the WHY statement — for now.

The refinement of the WHY statement continues to be an ongoing process to this day. Even though certain words in the WHY statement fail to resonate, In general Matvei feels confident using it which is not always the case as it can be difficult to commit to something so personal not to mention using it. In the end, it is not about using personal WHY statement word for word, but to be able to share who we are and what we stand for. Further, once we know our WHY and HOWs the question becomes if we are we willing to live our WHY and act upon our HOWs every single day. (Sinek et al. 2017, 186 – 187.)

6.2 Step two – name and category

In accordance to the second step of the personal brand strategy, in this part of the chapter, was analyzed the given name and defined a category for personal brand of Matvei Kinner. This will be done in three stages. In the first stage, was explored and discussed the name in its historical and cultural context. In the second stage, was analyzed the name using the seven criteria of a good name set forth by Neumeier. In the third stage, was defined a category according to interests and expertise.

The first name of the given name "Matvei" traces back to and was given after his grandfather whose name was "Matti". According to Finnish Population Center, the name "Matti" appears to be inherently a Finnish name, as it is currently the third most common name in Finland with 44733 males carrying the name, and the eighth most common name throughout recorded Finnish history with 130165 names in the register of Population Information System. (Avoindata 2018; Väestörekisterikeskus 2018.) However, it is due to a personal historical context of being born in Leningrad, Russia, that the first name
of the given name was entered in the register as "Matvei" and not "Matti" by the Russian officials, as it was more suitable in cultural context to fit into the existing society at the time. In other words, whereas "Matti" was considered unusual or even peculiar name in Russia, "Matvei" was relatively more common name. In comparison, according to the search in Name Service of the Population Information System, throughout recorded Finnish history there has been only 183 males carrying the name "Matvei" which makes it in turn, unusual or even peculiar name in the cultural context of Finland. Thus, to conclude, the name to consider in further analysis is the official name "Matvei Kin-ner".

For the reasons presented above, in its current environmental context, or Finnish society, the name "Matvei" is extremely rare and therefore distinctive. It further separates well from ordinary text and speech which makes it stand out in all use occasions, especially as a proper noun which begins with a capital letter. Both the first name and the last name consist of six letters and two syllables, which means that the brevity of it prevents it being reduced to non-communicational initials. This, together with its distinctiveness, contributes to its awareness once the exposure to the name has taken place. Even though the name "Matvei" is a low-imagery name, unlike some high-imagery Finnish names such as "VIlja", "Pyry", or "Kirsikka" which are usually easier to remem-ber, the brevity and distinctiveness of it compensates this fact and further the structure of the name itself lends it to a number of visual executions. As for the easiness of spelling and pronunciation as well as likability of the name, it falls under speculation, the only references being anecdotal examples by Matvei himself. However, the overall conception is encouraging with the exception that there seems to be tendency to misspell letter "v" as "w" if the name is only heard spoken.

In relation to online presence, Matvei has already been able to secure the do-main of matveikinner.com as well as Instagram and Twitter accounts under the username of matveikinner in addition to Facebook, under his own name. However, at the moment there is no presence in LinkedIn and there is need to explore and secure additional social media platforms as well which can all add to the presence and coherence of the personal brand of Matvei. The ability to secure and thus protect the coherent online presence makes the personal
brand of Matvei more valuable over time and adds to the awareness of it. In general, the name "Matvei Kinner" seems to be adequate for various uses of the name and therefore there is no need to consider changing the name.

The primary goal of Matvei is to become employed in an organization. Even though it is of interest to one day become a small business owner, in the current situation this is not seen as viable option without prior hands-on experience in work life in relation to his current studies. Thus, in alignment with his primary goal, the aim is to define a category which will establish him as a professional and reflect his current area(s) of expertise. As a student, relevant expertise derives from his educational background, especially as it relates to his ongoing studies of Information Technology at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. Thus, we must first create in-depth understanding concerning these studies in order to be able to define an appropriate category.

In broader perspective regarding his educational background, after finishing upper secondary school, the appeal to pursue career in technology was stronger than that of other viable options. Thus, he began his studies in the fall of 2014 at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. At the end of the first year of studies which were mostly orientation, students were to choose one of two alternatives to specialize in — either game programming or networking technologies. The appeal to specialize in software rather than hardware was seen as more interesting option and thus decision to specialize in former became self-evident.

However, it also became soon evident that the game development is an extremely large discipline to manage for any one person as it contains so much more than mere programming. As an independent individual, eventually it became difficult for Matvei to perceive game development meaningful absent proper team and knowledge in other necessary disciplines, especially in design. It became increasingly frustrating that even the most brilliant blocks of code were insignificant if the game’s visual appearance made the experience of playing the game itself unpleasant. As a result, together with the fact that there were little to no design education, Matvei took it to the heart to develop himself as a designer in order for the gaming experiences to appeal to the senses of the players. It later became obsession as he spent several years of
his studies learning everything related to design. This personal quest to understand the role of design in game development and eventually what separates any one game from another lead him to the premise of brands and this thesis.

Furthermore, during the second year of studies, there was a single course on web basic. However, it was enough to permanently reignite the passion for web technologies which is something that traces back to elementary school. In comparison to game development, web development was much more manageable for a single person and was therefore seen as a more viable option to specialize in. Thus, Matvei began his exploration in modern web technologies with intention to specialize in these in addition to his game development studies.

In short, during his studies Matvei grew interest in two disciplines he then chose to specialize in besides his compulsory studies in game development — design and web development. Both game development and web development have strong emphasis on programming. Hence, there are two distinct themes to consider — design and programming, or code. These themes capture both interests and expertise of Matvei and form basis on which to establish his positioning regarding category. Thus, the question becomes how to merge these themes in a cohesive manner such that it makes sense as an existing category that is relevant to career he has chosen to pursue.

In order to explore and discover viable options regarding categories that combine themes of design and code, the Internet was searched via Google search using keywords such as: "Designer", "Developer" and "Programmer". The search results provided several considerable options such as: "Web Developer", "Front End Developer" and "UX Designer" and while all these seemed relevant, especially as open positions in organizations to apply to, it was "Designer Developer" that stood out from the rest and seemed fresh as a potential category. Even though it appeared counterintuitive at first, it managed to capture the essence of both themes and implied broader expertise than traditional I–model, as we recall from the Introduction chapter of the thesis. (Martinez 2014; Reaves 2017.) Further encouragement came from the fact that in only recent advertisement by prominent Finnish news agency Helsingin Sanomat there was an open position for "Designer-Developer" which demonstrates the
existence of such category (Oikotie 2017). In addition to the above, Matvei has clear future plans to apply to Helsinki Design School to study graphic design in order to improve his expertise as a designer and to establish his credibility as such. Thus, overall, the positioning category "Designer Developer" was chosen for Matvei.

6.3 Step three — association of perceived quality

In accordance to the third step of the personal brand strategy framework, in this part of the chapter, was defined association of perceived quality for personal brand of Matvei Kinner. This will be completed in two stages. In the first stage, was explored what quality means to organizations that Matvei is targeting. In the second step, was discussed which of these qualities are present, and how to further improve the perceived quality.

The perceived quality is often the defining factor and forms the basis on which organizations decide to employ one person over another. Thus, in order to achieve a high level of perceived quality requires underlying substance to support the claim of quality together with in-depth understanding of what the quality means for the employing organizations; primarily those in the area of technology. A small-scale research via Google search together with insights from the personal experience of Matvei from applying to multiple Finnish technology organizations suggest that this substance consist of but is not limited to relevant educational background, core competencies in programming, prior work experience, portfolio, interpersonal and co-operation skills, attitude for continuous self-improvement and understanding of business (Korpimies 2015; Block 2016; Remes 2017; West s.a.). Furthermore, there is the aspect of the perception itself in relation to which it was found important to invest in each individual application and CV as there are significant differences between organizations, and social media presence, especially that of LinkedIn (Lapin Ylioppilaslehti s.a.; Oikotie s.a.). Also, participation in the events was seen invaluable way to create and enhance overall perception and further reinforce all the above.
In relation to these, Matvei has relevant educational background, interpersonal and co-operational skills, attitude of continuous self-improvement and understanding of business. Further, he invests a great amount of time and effort to individualize each application and CV which can be seen by the design and context in them. However, generally in his case there is not much to gain with the association of perceived quality. The reasons for this are that while there is prior experience, there is none that is relevant to his current studies and areas of expertise. This lack of hands-on experience together with the lack of portfolio to showcase it is quite a challenge to support the claim of adequate core competencies of programming on coding exercise required by the organizations alone. This, together with non-existent social media presence where it matters the most, results in overall deficient differentiation which in turn dilutes his competitive advantage in comparison to those of other applicants.

In order to improve his association of perceived quality, after graduation, Matvei plans to begin establishing his portfolio by launching several personal projects. Further, he has plans to create and actively manage his social media presence in order to connect and present his work and explore, discover and attend events.

7 CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, the purpose of the thesis was to provide an actionable deliverable in the form of personal brand strategy framework for students at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, especially those in the degree programme of Information Technology.

The thesis went to explore brands beyond their conventional perspective of traditional marketing, especially the theories and concepts put forth by Aaker which seem to be de facto standard when it comes to brands. The thesis also provides more thorough understanding of brands with additional theories and concepts which explain many underlying biological and psychological reasons behind them. To some degree this extensive and unorthodox approach attests to poor framing of the thesis and therefore partially stump chapters, parts, sections and paragraphs. Nevertheless, the thesis went to become unique both in its approach as well as its results.
The results of the thesis prove that the definition of the brand is inherently the same for all types of brands including personal brands. It was found that there are underlying connections across theories and concepts which provide a strong argument for the universal personal brand strategy framework to be built upon. The results also suggest that different brands can be built for different purposes and therefore different steps in their respective brand strategies should be considered.

The only limitations regarding the methods relate to the amount of data to draw and compile from. However, even to this day, brands are by no means an exact science as it is difficult to measure factors such as loyalty, and therefore the amount of data is not directly proportional to the reliability of the results. In addition to this, considering that the scope of the thesis is as extensive as is, it falls completely under speculation whether more or less data would be sufficient in order to improve the reliability of the results.

Finally, it is important to understand that strategy without actions upon it is useless. Even though the personal brand strategy framework defines a set of coherent actions, one must distinguish that these relate to the personal brand strategy itself, and that there is no context of communication. However, brands do not exist in a vacuum, or on a piece of paper. They exist in the minds of the people, as a part of their perception of reality, and therefore it requires communication to bring them to life.
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