

# Improving the Employer Brand of Finnish Gaming Industry

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<p>This Bachelor's thesis studies the importance and strategy behind an employer brand in the Finnish game industry, as well as millennials and their preferences as a target segment.</p> <p>The goal of the thesis is to unwrap the complexity of the employer brand, and to make recommendations on how it should be formed to be appealing for the wanted target segment. The recommendations are based on both primary and secondary data collected in the process of writing the thesis.</p> <p>The thesis consists of background information and justifications for the choice of topic, introduction of the commissioning company and the research questions and demarcation that were decided for this thesis.</p> <p>The employer brand as a concept is explained in a chapter creating the theoretical framework for the qualitative and quantitative research done for the thesis. The theoretical framework will also cover specifics of the industry and information of millennials as the largest segment of workforce.</p> <p>The research design and the results are presented in different chapters, and they share the insights based on the primary data that was collected. The results chapter includes a conclusion of the key findings in the study. The primary data in the thesis is collected through a survey and an interview with respondents currently working in the game industry.</p> <p>The last chapter will present the conclusions of the whole thesis, the key findings, and the recommendations made for further research about the topic as well as recommendations made for improving the employer brand in the industry. The key recommendations are personalized content through relevant communication channels and consistently working on creating authentic experiences and maintaining the company culture. The chapter also includes notes of personal learning and the feedback collected from the commissioning company.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Employer Brand, Game Industry, Millennials, Employer Value Proposition, Brand	

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# 1 Introduction

As the game industry might be viewed as the promised land of offices filled with ice cream and bean bags, the competition between employers is tough and open roles are generally hard to fill (MeetFrank 2020). The game industry, even though sought after, is experiencing difficulties when organizations are attempting to hire and retain talent. Strategic employer branding is one tool that might provide useful in the long term.

This chapter is going to present the background of the thesis, introduction of the commissioning company as well as the demarcation and research questions for the study. The chapter will also explain the international components and the benefits that the thesis might provide.

## 1.1 Background

In 2017 Finland was a country with the highest game industry revenue in relation to population (Kostner 2019) so there is no denying that it is one of the industries that should be keenly looked after. Neogames (2019) mentioned in their 2018 report of the industry that lack of employees is one of the big challenges in the industry.

In this thesis, the focus points are going to be the theory behind employer branding and to create suggestions on improving the attractiveness of the industry to employees. The industry is growing all the time (Valentine 2019) and to acquire the best talent, the importance of proper employer branding activities is increasing. Tech industry overall is having difficulties to find the right talent to come to work and usually the talent pool is quite small, so it is also important research for industry-wise, to figure out solutions to improve the attractiveness of the employers in the industry.

In order to study valid things and to create recommendations the thesis is also going to study millennials, their values as employees and how they tend to consume the content that is out there. As they are already the largest generation in the workforce (Fry 2018) and value personalized content (Abrahimovic 2019) it is important to look at the motivations of the targeted segment.

In this thesis the goal is to figure out concrete, industry-specific suggestions based on qualitative and quantitative research that could prove useful in bettering the employer image for future prospects.

## **1.2 Research Question**

This thesis aims to find out what the employees working in the game industry in Finland recognise as the most important aspects for them to think that an employer is appealing to them. The outcomes of the thesis will be to investigate the formulation of employer brand in the industry and have concrete suggestions that can be used by the commissioning company as well as other employers, to improve the attractiveness of the whole industry.

The research question (RQ) can be worded as “How can the gaming industry improve its’ employer image attractiveness?” RQ is divided into investigative questions (IQ) followingly:

IQ 1. What are the crucial aspects to building an employer brand in the gaming industry?

IQ 2. What employer image attributes attract employees the most?

IQ 3. How can an employer brand be improved?

## **1.3 Demarcation**

The demarcation of the thesis topic was started with the industry. Since Finland is rather small as a country, but the game industry here is growing with an average growth rate of 45% and is actually one of fastest growing on a global scale (Kostner 2019). Game industry seems like a reasonable scope for the thesis, since tech in general would be more work than what the scope of the thesis is instructed to be.

As aforementioned geographical measures were also used for defining the topic, and Finland was chosen as a region, even though most of the functions in the industry happen near the metropolitan area. Finland is widely known in the industry and possesses a lot of quality companies but one of the biggest issues in the industry is the lack of qualified talent pool, which is why the focus was chosen as improving the employer brand components in the local industry.

The theoretical research done for the thesis will focus on millennials, as they are most represented in the talent pool of different organizations’ in the game industry. The demarcation does not include gender as that would partly defeat the purpose of building a well-rounded employer brand. There is a need in the industry to try to get the employers to feel more approachable to a wider demographic than what currently is attracted to the employers on their own and to make the industry look more appealing to employees currently working in different industries.

## **1.4 International Aspect**

The required international aspect the thesis will come from the employees and the processes of the companies. Majority of the gaming companies in Finland have an international pool of employees (Neogames 2018) and they usually do a lot of co-operation with global companies, or even have offices globally.

The employer brand components that are being discussed in this thesis, and the recommendations given for the future are not strictly directed to Finnish employees but for people who already might be working in Finland, or ready to move here for work, so locally targeted but for an international crowd.

The secondary research of millennials, the war for talent and the components of employer brand is not based on only Finnish sources, but for international sources studying different populations and working with the employer brand in different cultures.

## **1.5 Benefits**

The topic of the thesis is very aligned with the goals that the contact person at Unity has (making the office the best one in the industry in Helsinki) so writing a thesis about employer branding is hopefully going to be really beneficial for the workplace. It would also give an opportunity to be more present in the job-searching environment in the metropolitan area and get more people to be interested in their products. Since the industry is rather new, there is not that much research yet done on it and the thesis could possibly provide some qualitative and quantitative data that could help with improving the employer branding processes industry wide. The data might also help to shed some light on the concrete values and preferences of the people currently employed in the industry.

For the end customer the benefits would not be direct and would take a longer time to be visible but would come in the terms of possibly more people working in the industry and for the commissioning company, which in turn would mean more quality products, shorter waits for bug fixes and a wider portfolio of products.

For my professional development, I see a lot of opportunities to connect with people who know a lot about how employer branding should be managed, and this would be a theoretical portfolio of my know-how with the employer branding components, and the target segment. It is also an opportunity to network with people working in the tech industry, which would be possibly more than helpful in the future when pursuing a different role.

## 1.6 Key concepts

The key concepts used in this thesis are employer image, employer branding, employer value proposition and millennials.

**Employer image** refers to the concept of individual people having an opinion of a company based on what they have experienced, seen, heard or assumed. Employer image is subjective and might fluctuate and change a lot based on different perceptions that people have. (Lievens, Slaughter 2016, 409.)

**Employer branding** on the other hand means the conscious efforts that company does to create an appealing workplace to potential employees. Employer branding is a company-driven effort to affect the employer image that individuals have of the company. (Schmidt & Mosley 2017.) Employer branding can be referred to as “EB” in the later parts of the thesis.

**Employer Value Proposition (EVP)** means the unique array of offerings and values that are used to attract the right kind of talent. It also means the benefits that the employer has to offer, and what the employee can expect from the company to get for themselves for their work. (Holmberg 2019.) Employer Value Proposition can be referred to as “EVP” in the later parts of the thesis.

**Millennials** are currently the largest generation in the workforce (Fry 2018). Millennials are defined to be the age group born from early 1980’s until mid 1990’s (Barr 2019).

## 1.7 Case Company

Unity Technologies is the creator of the world’s most widely used real time 3D development platform, which is their biggest product. The company was established in 2004 in Denmark but is currently run from the headquarters in San Francisco. The company employs around 2000 full time employees, which does not take into account interns nor contractors. They have 27 offices located around the globe. 5 of the offices are located in North America, one in the South America, 12 in Europe and 4 in Asia. (Unity Technologies 2020.)

In addition to the 3D-engine, their products also include cloud-based services for further improving the project created with the engine, related to running diagnostics, improving the visuals and saving some time. Unity's product site (Unity 2020) showcases nearly all of the products they offer, categorized in creating content, maintaining the content and then monetizing it when it is done. They have a wide advertisement network which is used to help independent game makers to monetize their products. The Helsinki office is mainly focused on the monetization and advertisement functions of the company.

Unity Technologies Finland entity employs around 150 people, and 2018 they had a revenue of over €144 Million (Asiakastieto 2018). The need for the thesis comes from the high turnover of employees that is often present in tech industry (Petrone 2018) and the emerging requirements for improving the retention and employer brand to attract more quality talent to the company.

## **2 Employer Brand Theory**

This chapter is providing answers to investigative question 2. about the crucial aspects to building an employer brand in the gaming industry. The chapter will go through the concepts of employer branding, employer brand management, employer image, industry specifics and how millennials might differ from the previous generations as employees.

### **2.1 Employer Branding**

Originally word brand has literally meant marking ownership and differentiating one's own from the rest (Keohane 2014, Chapter 2). As almost every brand is surrounded by alternatives, they need to get the message clearly across and emphasize what makes this brand the best at fulfilling the needs of the target group and how their offerings are better than anybody else's (Barrow & Mosley 2005, 63-65). The goal of employer branding is above everything else to attract talent, recruit talent, and retain talent. It is also used to help to create company culture or define it to the wanted direction, raise awareness of the employer within the targeted group, reduce the costs and the amount of work needed for marketing activities for both the primary brand (services and products) but also for the secondary (as an employer).

The employer brand can be distinguished into internal and external. Internal is the perception that employees have of the organization as an employer and external is the impression individuals not working for the company have. The internal perception is based on first-hand experiences within the organization and the employee experience as a whole. The external is a perception that varies from a person to person, it is to some degree based on the official communications from the organization, but also stories heard through word of mouth, pieces of news, mentions in social media and maybe even baseless prejudices based on industry or country of origin. (Vesanen & Varis 2014, Chapter 4.) The employees are crucial to building the employer brand as they are the ones to experience as it truly is and they can be an important aspect of enforcing the message delivered externally, or cripple the believability if it becomes public that there is a contradiction between the company-sponsored messages and the reality of the employer (Berthon, Ewing & Hah 2005, 152).

When first starting the employer branding processes, it is important to research the organization's brand personality, positioning and differentiating factors, channels and vision for the future (Barrow & Mosley 2005, 60-65). To attract talent these days, you need to offer something in return and this is where your employer value proposition (EVP) comes in, it is the unique composition of what the organization offers for their employees. EVP will be discussed more in detail later on. The brand personality demonstrates the

characteristics the organization wishes their brand to be associated to, these can be for example honesty, daringness or successfulness. (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, Chapter 2.) When thinking about brand positioning, one must take into consideration that benefits and values highlighted are only valuable to the target audience that give importance to those certain things (Barrow & Mosley 2005, 61). It is important to first research the target group of employees and after that custom the offerings to their preferences. As in any other business function, the goal needs to be articulated and measurable. Employer Branding goals can be measured through increased percentage in offer acceptances, increasing the score in employee surveys or increasing familiarity with the employer brand with key target groups (Lock 2013).

As brand positioning is extremely important for a company's marketing and sales operations to attract the people that would be interested in their services/products, it is also important for employer branding activities. As an employer it is impossible to be appealing for everyone, positioning the employer brand based on company values, company culture, EVP and other things is important in order to clarify the value created for the desired segment of workforce.

Petra Erkkilä mentioned in her Facebook post (13 March 2020) some concrete actions of brand positioning and employer branding that she works on with her customers. These included for example figuring out the mission critical talent pool, finding out by interviewing the employees about what works well in the organisation and what could work better, benchmarking the retention and commitment inside the company with a survey filled by employees, what is the vision that everyone should know about the company, and what is the EVP aimed for the mission critical workforce.

## **2.2 Employer Brand Management**

In commercial encounters the brand and the customer experience should be in agreement with each other, to create a unique experience for the customer in their concurrences with the brand's communication or services (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, Chapter 2). Earlier the branding activities of a company might have been used only as a marketing tool, now it is used more as a promise, that we'll be cashed in with the experience that the customer has. This also means that the promises made by the brand must be delivered by the actual experience that customers have. As employees can also be viewed as customers of an organization, the same ideology can be applied to the employer brand. If the promises that are included in the employer brand do not materialize for the employees,

the brand is not seen as credible. In the figure below is visualized the process of creating the brand and developing it to match the employee experience.

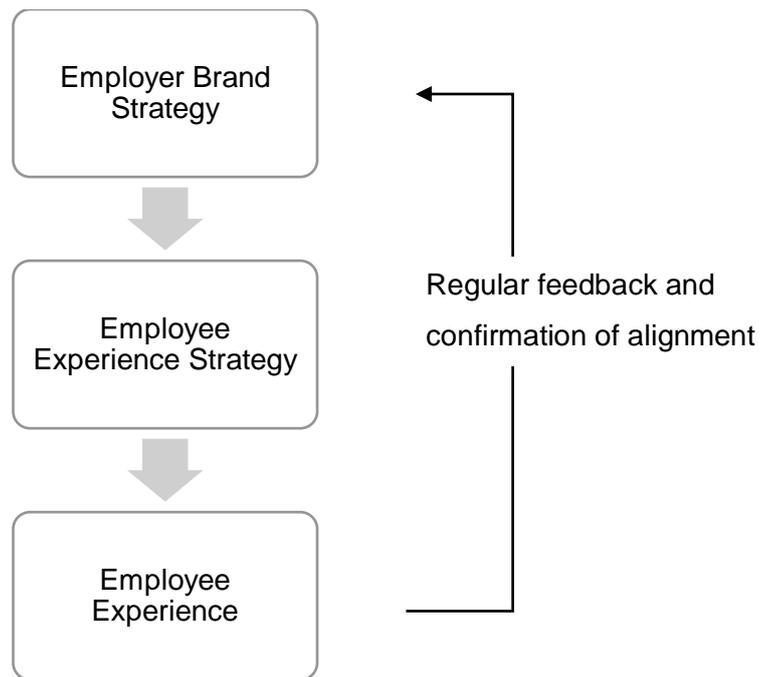


Figure 1. Employer brand strategy cycle (modified from Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016)

In the figure above it can be seen how the employer brand strategy and the plan for creating a good employee experience result to the subjective experience that the employees have of the organization. Feedback should be collected regularly from the employees to confirm that what is planned in the strategy is what takes place in the real-life situations as well. From the feedback it can also be noticed if the plan and reality do not seem to match and corrective actions need to be taken.

The employer brand strategy mentioned in the stage includes the activities that are necessary to make the organization a sought-after employer. Employer branding strategy is based on the core proposition of the organization, the mission and vision of the company, what values they emphasize and what are the personal and cultural attributes that are special to the organization and these should be aspects that are permanent and dependable throughout time. For customers and potential employees, the strategy changes depending on current trends, target audiences and goals. For both the employer and customer brand the segments need to be clear and targeted with different tools and the value proposition must be tailored to each segment based on what they value the most. (Barrow & Mosley 2005, 114.) As everything communicated internally cannot be informed outside of the company, the external proposition might differ from the internal

one and as the external one is targeted at people not yet working at the company, they might be composed differently to highlight the parts of the proposition that matter the most in those target groups.

The strategy for creating a positive employee experience is understanding the culture that is prevalent in the organization, the expectations that are set for current and future employees, and the expectations that both of those groups have for the organization as an employer. Employees experience the culture throughout their workday and the culture shows as the values, traditions and beliefs that affect every employees' experience. (O'Malley 2020.) When creating a strategy for employee experience, it is important to remember that the strategy needs to be constantly refreshed and refined based on feedback and observations. Some actions ought to be included in the employee experience plan, such as creating an astonishing onboarding experience for new employees, having good and open internal communication, asking feedback regularly thorough multiple channels and then acting on the feedback received from the employees (Kaemingk 2019).

Before creating an employer brand strategy, the employer needs to figure out their positioning as an employer. As for the consumer brand, the employer brand positioning is also the target state of how the organization wants the desired talent pool to view it as an employer. When evaluating the brand positioning, following components should be taken into account: Competitive context, target segment, key point of difference and reasons to believe the beforementioned (EquiBrand Consulting 2018). Competitive context means the point of reference for the brand as an employer, which are the employers that the organization wants to be grouped with. The competition is bold and there are examples of organizations with the most appealing employer brands and organizations that are globally known as not that great places to work at. One example from the game industry can be mentioned in Riot Games, when in 2018 they were mentioned as the defendant in a lawsuit by former employees who claimed to have routinely suffered from sexual harassment and gender discrimination (Dean 2019).

Target segment means identifying the wanted talent pool, and this might vary much between departments as the talent pool for C-level executives is far from the talent pool that is segmented for intern positions. Key point of difference refers to the distinctive features of the organization's employer brand, what does it stand for and what does it deliver for the employees. Reasons to believe is how the promises are shown to the employees and to the potential target group in everyday situations repeatedly and lastingly.

For managing the employer brand, it is crucial to pinpoint the areas that need to be improved and the areas in which the organization is succeeding. There are plenty of figures that can be used as tools when looking at how successful and employer branding strategy is and there is no need to work on assumptions only. Figure below is a visualisation of the HR and other metrics that can be used in tracking the success of employer branding.

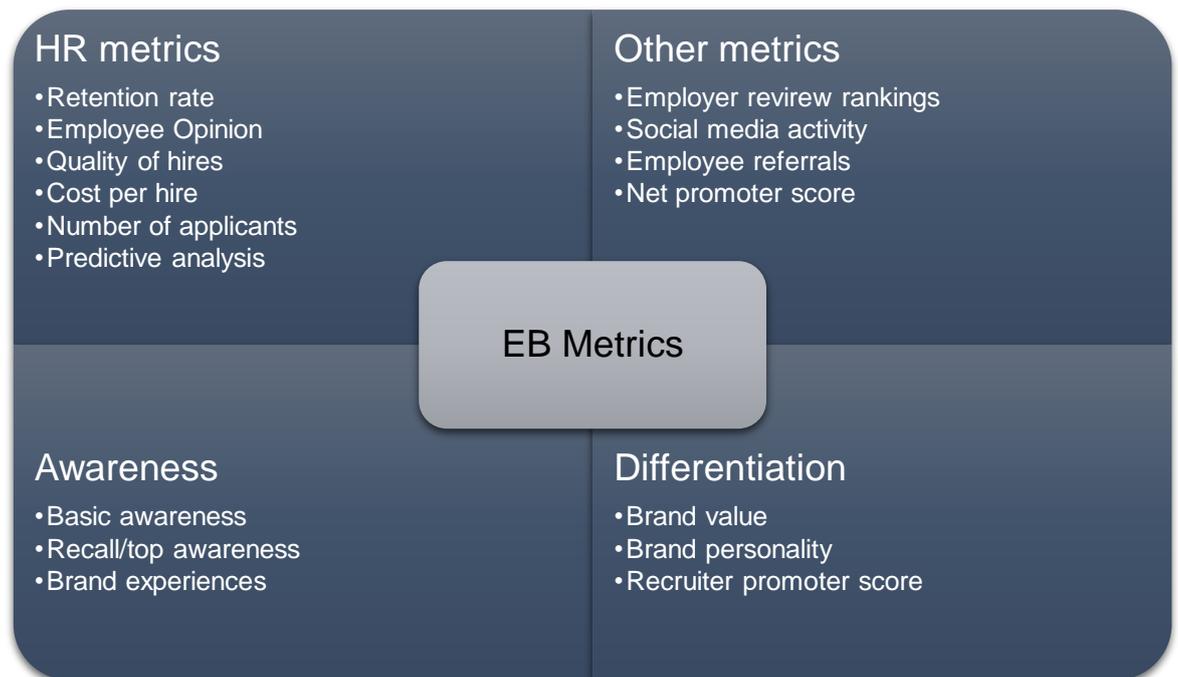


Figure 2. Employer Brand Metrics (modified from Mull 2016)

In figure 2. there are metrics that can be used to monitor the effect of employer branding strategy and also the overall statistics for brand awareness. Changes in, for example employee retention cannot be solely thought as cause-and-affect for improved employer branding strategies as there are many other things affecting (overall employment trends, big projects ending) but if improving employee retention is mentioned as a goal in EB strategies it might be worthwhile to include that metric. The same uncertainty goes for the other figures too as they cannot strictly be thought of as the result of EB activities, but the changes definitely correlate to the figures.

In the figure the HR metrics consist mainly of recruitment related data but can also be used to look at current employees' opinions. Retention rate refers to the amount of people leaving the organization yearly. Inevitably some employees will leave the organization but what can be looked from the metric is that do the leavers group together by age or skillset or are the leavers mainly from a same department in the organization. (Mull 2016.) If there

are issues regarding culture or employee experience in different departments of the company, that might come up in the retention numbers. For improving employee retention it is important to know why people are leaving which is why exit interviews should be a standard practise, to collect feedback on what can be improved and what should be improved to keep employees from leaving. It is also important to ask for feedback before it is time for an exit interview and employees should be given a chance to formally give feedback through surveys at least yearly. When it comes to recruitment there are plenty of metrics that can be used in order to manage and improve the employer brand. For example, tracking the applicants and hires. The number of applicants simply means the amount of people applying for jobs with the organization (Mull 2016). As this is not measuring the quality of the applicants increasing number does not necessarily mean that the right talent is hired for the right roles but it might indicate that the employer brand is beginning to be more widely known within people interested in the industry. Performance assessments done after a certain period could give a better indication of the quality of hires. Cost per hire means the combined costs of filling an open position (Mull 2016). With a working employer branding strategy, the average cost should see a decrease, as the right talent should be more aware of the employer brand of the hiring organization and more easily hired to a role. Predictive analysis as a part of the HR metrics means looking at the future of the industry and the talent segment as well as the trends that might affect the organization's workforce in the long run.

For the other metrics the organization needs to look more for external sources than internal ones. Employer review rankings should be looked from the same pages as the targeted talent pool will probably use, like Glassdoor and Best Places to Work. Depending on the talent segment it might be a good idea to also track the social media presence of the company as an employer. As for example millennials are very likely to be influenced by content in the social media (Content Science 2019) tracking what engages the target group and what does not could be connected to promoting the employer brand through content that is proven to be interesting to the target group. The net promoter score is a marketing metric measuring the likelihood of a person recommending products/services/organization as an employer to other people (Mull 2016).

Brand awareness metrics can be used for employer brand activities as their goal is to determine if the target group is hearing from your employer brand and if yes, to what extent. Basic awareness is the amount of people that are familiar with the organization (Mull 2016) and if the talent pool records high amount of answers that indicate that they have not heard from the organization the brand awareness should be prioritized in the EB activities. Brand familiarity is used to further research the people who are already aware of

the organization by figuring out their opinion and the encounters they have had with the brand in question. When basic awareness records that people are aware of the brand, recall awareness is used to find out the percentage of the target group that would name the organization in a wanted category and top-of-mind awareness refers to the amount of people that would mention the organization first (Mull 2019). The respondent can be asked to name companies in a certain industry, or companies that they perceive to be top of their field in innovation or other value. The components mentioned before should be studied through a research consultancy or a staffing firm, because some brands only come to mind when reminded of it (Mahmutovic 2020) and if the survey is sent out by a company researching their own brand the results might not be as reliable as their logo and name will be visible before the survey itself.

Metrics for brand differentiation are used to learn if the target segment believes the employer brand of the organization in question to be different from the competing employer options. In EB strategy, the brand value is used to measure if the organization's EVP is seemed to be more attractive than competitors'. The brand personality is used to determine if the traits and values that are promoted by the organization itself are the same ones the target group recalls when asked. If the employer for example strives to be among top inclusive companies in the industry, they would want to rank high when the target group is asked about perceived inclusivity with the brand. Recruiter promoter score refers to the percentage of external recruiters that would recommend working and would promote the organization over competitors. (Mull 2019.)

### **2.3 Employer Image**

Employer image is the perception people have of the company at hand as an employer. The employer image is subjective and differs from person to another, it is to some degree based on the employer branding activities but also perceptions, rumours and first-hand experiences one has had with the company. (Rantanen 2019.) Employer image is not the same as the employer brand the organization is trying to build and if the experience with the employer is not aligned with the employer brand that is being promoted, people are more likely to trust their first-hand experiences or the experiences they have heard from other people. Enhancing the employer image is strongly connected to the strategic employer brand, the value proposition that the organization has for its' employees and then claiming those promises in everyday working life. If the value proposition and the employee experience are not as promised, there is going to be a contradiction between the employer brand and the employer image. As people put more weight on their own and other people's first-hand experiences, company advertisement will not trump personal

stories about a bad employer. And for example, millennials spend plenty of time browsing online content and they are also more likely to be influenced by blogs or social networking sites (Content Science 2019) resulting in one bad experience with an employer making negative waves in the wanted target segment.

## **2.4 Employer Value Proposition**

In addition to employer's brand proposition, EVP is a more concrete promise of the benefits offered to the target group. EVP is more than just financial rewards and it can be tailored for different functions in the company, meaning that the EVP can be worded differently for sales, programming and people functions. (Barrow & Mosley 2005, 125.) EVP is unique to every company and it is a blend of company culture, monetary incentives, opportunities to develop professionally among other things. To attract the best talent of the target group, employer's EVP should be among the best of those that are trying to approach the same talent.

EVP is a mix of tangible and intangible rewards offered to attract new employees but also to retain existing ones. Even with a competitive pay it will be hard to retain employees who feel that the culture in the workplace does not match their ideals, or that the workplace does not give them opportunities to develop themselves professionally. According to LinkedIn research (LinkedIn 2017, 24) 44% of the answerers changed their employer because they felt that they would be getting more opportunities for career advancement. The same research also shows that 45% changed their jobs in search of better compensation and benefits. And even though monetary incentive might not be the biggest reason for your talent group to switch jobs, if the employer does not stay competitive with the market price it will be a hard task to build an attractive EVP (Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod 2001, 56, 61). Some examples of the tangible rewards in addition to compensation are retirement-plan, flexibility of work, autonomy, social responsibility and feedback. Below is a visualisation of components the EVP can include.

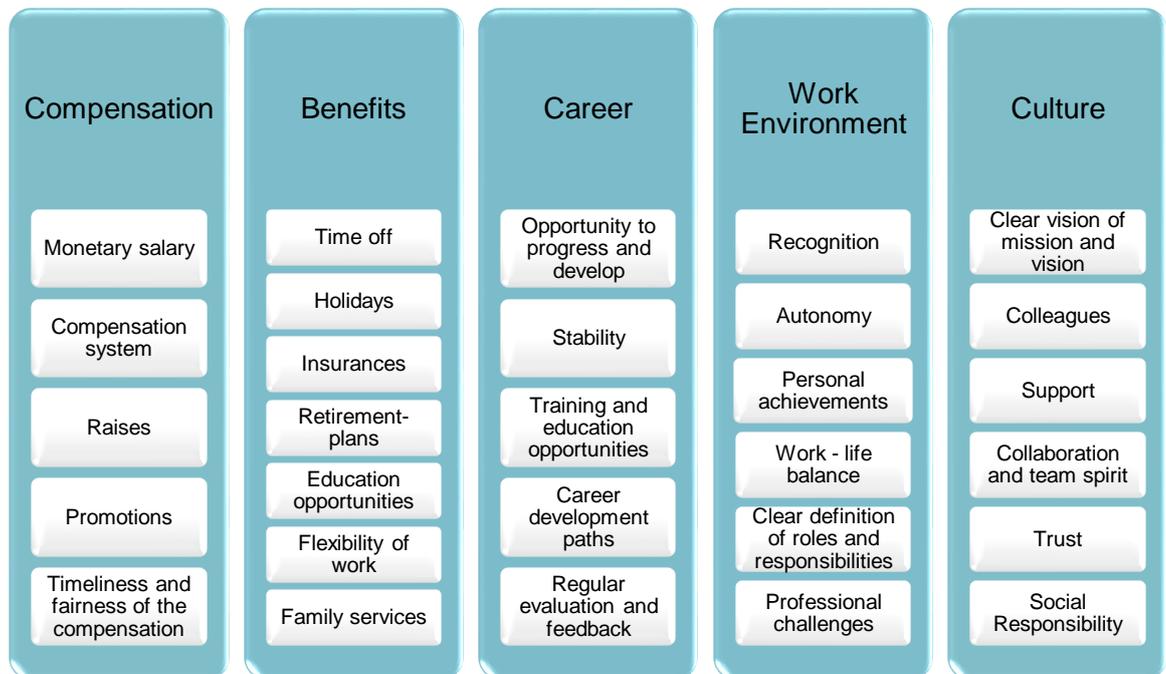


Figure 3. Visualisation of EVP components (modified from Zojceska 2018)

In the figure above there are example aspects and rewards which can be included in the EVP. How they are appreciated by the target group varies which is why an EVP should be tailored to the segment of talent the company is trying to poach.

In the compensation column there are things that affect the employee experience from the compensation point of view. It includes the monetary salary and bonuses, raises and promotions that might be available and the timeliness and fairness of the whole compensation system as a complex. Especially to millennials, the opportunities to develop in a job, time off and flexible schedules to work might have more importance than monetary incentives (Morrell & Abston 2018, 111). Even though the monetary bonuses and competitive salary would not be at the top of the list for millennials, if employees are paid less than what they assume they are worth to their employer, it is hard to feel valued at work (Morgan 2017, 97) which negatively affects employee retention.

Under the benefits column there are examples of the rewards that are not monetary in nature but might resonate with the target group. Defining the wanted talent pool is especially important when it comes to other benefits. Based on research millennials value paid time off and the balance between their work and personal time (Morrell & Abston 2018, 110) so they might not value benefits including retirement plans that might be valuable to more aging workforce, or solutions to day-care that might be important to people with kids. Flexibility mentioned as a benefit means that employees have the autonomy to design their workday as they see fit and the when and where are not

anymore mandated by the company. This can provide many benefits to the employer as well, like increased trust, cost savings and decreased absenteeism from the physical workplace. (Morgan 2017, 64-65.)

Morgan (2017, 91) presents a figure that spells out 10 attributes that companies should focus on to create a culture that enhances the employee experience at the company. Ability to learn new things with proper resources and a possibility to advance professionally are mentioned as important aspects. Training and development opportunities are important to people when considering changing jobs and should be included in the EVP. Morgan (2017) also mentions that executives and managers should be acting as coaches and mentors which increases the possibility of getting evaluated and given feedback to regularly.

For an employee to perform and excel at their work, they need to know the boundaries inside which they work. What is their job description, what are their responsibilities and to have autonomy over those. Employees who have more autonomy over their workplace (when, where, how) tend to score higher on innovation, job satisfaction and performance. To make employee experience pleasant, people like to feel valued at their place of work. They want their individually contributed work to be seen and appraised and to feel that their work makes a difference in the workplace. (Morgan 2017, 71, 95.)

To be able to mention culture as one benefit that a company can list in their value proposition for employees, it should really make them feel like they are welcome in the workplace, their work matters and they are doing great. To engage them in their work they need to understand what the vision for the company is and how they as individuals fit in to the puzzle that is the journey through the vision. A sense of purpose is something that not only makes the employees feel committed to their employer, but also ushers them to go for the extra mile in their work, because they feel valued and appreciated and want to showcase their best. (Morgan 2017, 100.)

## **2.5 Game Industry Specifics**

According to a report published by Neogames (2019, 15) even though some game studios in Finland have closed down after 2016, the industry still employs more people than during the times of higher number of studios and through 2019-2020 there are expected to be around 500 new positions open in Finland. The report also found out that the percentage of non-Finnish employees rose from 18% in 2016 to over 27% in 2018. These numbers prove that game industry in Finland is an attractive market to employees from

abroad. In the report it is also mentioned that one of the biggest issues that game industry has faced in Finland is the lack of professionals found locally. This is still one of the major issues that the industry is fighting, and systematic employer branding work could prove its' business case easily by saving a substantial amount of money when it comes to expenses in recruiting and relocation services. Research done by MeetFrank (2020) shows that in specialities related to the game industry (software engineering and IT) it is much harder for companies to find a talent, than what it is for example for marketing roles. The numbers are based on the amount of available job offers versus active job seekers and the scale varies numerically from 1 until 5, and descriptions vary from difficult to very easy, smaller number indicating a more difficult process.

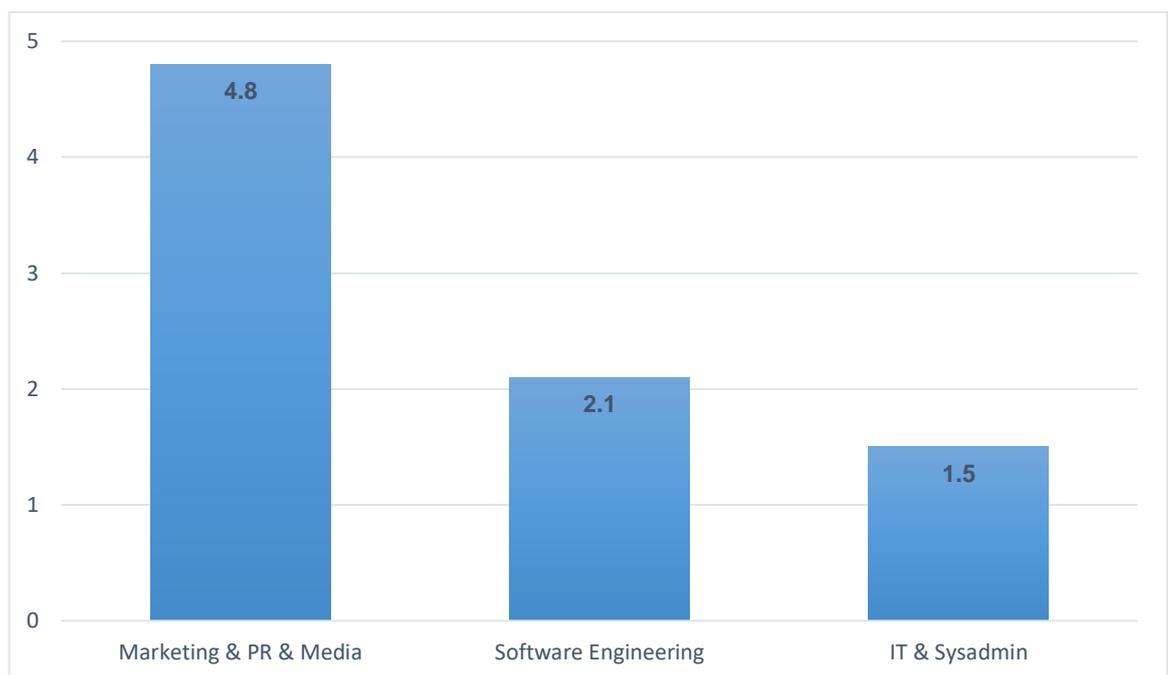


Figure 4. How easy it is to hire a person (modified from MeetFrank 2020)

In the above figure the difference between hiring a person for a technical role and a non-technical can be seen. The MeetFrank research did not include data from all the specialities but software engineering and IT functions are crucial in game industry organizations. As people applying for a marketing position report that they have a hard time getting an offer for a job, people applying for technical roles find it easy (MeetFrank 2020). As getting a job for a technical role is easier for an applicant, the employer brand of the organization starts to increase its importance since getting a job offer from another company will not be a difficult task.

As majority of the tech industries, game industry is volatile and lives with the market changes. Companies producing games for consoles instead of mobile usually have it

worse as it takes significantly more hours and manpower to create a working game for a console platform. The budgets also vary enormously between these, as a mobile game might have a budget less than 100,000\$ and the budget for conventional games might land in between 1.5\$ million and 5\$ million. (Stack Tips 2012.) Before launching a game for consoles, employees are often experiencing the “crunch” period when they are expected to put in as much work as is needed to get the game ready for the launch date. Employees have reportedly had to put in 100-hour work weeks with no extra pay because of last minute fixes. (Semuels 2019.) It is safe to say that the game industry can be extremely stressful, and this can be considered to be one of the factors to affect the employee turnover rate which is quite high.

## **2.6 Millennials as a Workforce**

As the market for employers has changed along with the industries, the target group has also changed. Now millennials are entering and already populating the job market and they have different skills than the generations before them, they value things that the previous target groups necessarily did not think as important, and their attention needs to be caught in a different way. The clarification for the age group of millennials is not set in stone, as differing from the source millennials are said to be the age group born from early 1980's until mid 1990's and generation z being the cohort born after that. According to some sources generation z starts from people born in 1997 and later and according to some the year is 1994. (Barr 2019.) As a workforce, millennials tend to value transparency in the company to a whole different level than the generations before them and they tend to care more about companies which value solving issues with the environment and social structures instead of just their bottom line. (Kurter 2018.)

It has been studied that millennials value frequent and open communication with their manager (Kapoor & Solomon 2011, 313) and as they have grown up with digital tools, they feel that email and text messages are also a valid way to handle communication. As they value open communication in the organizations they are employed by, they expect honest communication from the top-level and tend to dislike company cultures that work with “need-to-know” – basis. Regardless of their possibly lower level positions in the company millennials feel that they deserve to be kept in loop. Millennials tend to expect close relationships with their supervisors resulting in frequent feedback and push to excel at work. They also feel that strong relationship with management is both a key issue when negotiating the preliminary terms of employment but also foundational for their long-term contentment at the organization. (Myers & Sadaghiani 2010, 229.)

As every generation is affected by the norms and issues present at their time the cohorts usually have different values they feel to be most important when looking forward. Based on research millennials value diversity, accountability, issues regarding sustainability and corporate responsibility very highly (Kapoor & Solomon 2011, 313). As millennials are already the largest generation in the workforce (Fry 2018) these are aspects that their potential employers must take into consideration. According to a survey done by Deloitte (2019, 5-6) the top aspirations for millennials were seeing the world, being wealthy and making a positive impact on society. The concern that topped the list for both millennials and generation Z was climate change. For millennials the list of concerns in order of importance was the following: unequal distribution of wealth, unemployment and corruption within business. When it comes to having the responsibility to tackle these issues and the importance of social responsibility millennials feel that governments have the biggest responsibility for solving these issues, but also 66% of the respondents feel that businesses have a high-to-moderate priority as well (Deloitte 2019, 11). As these are issues that the ever-growing workforce feels strongly about, employers should take these into consideration when working on employer branding strategies for millennials as the target group, since value alignment has been proven to improve employee productivity and engagement and decrease employee turnover (Grossmann 2020).

### **2.6.1 Millennials and Content**

When looking at millennials as content consumers it is rather obvious that majority of the sources will be digital, since millennials are the first generation to grow up in a digital and media-soaked world (Moran 2016). These digital natives are used to consuming content in different forms than the generations before them and millennials on average tend to spend 10.9 hours a day browsing digital content. The how has also changed, as the content is browsed more than ever with mobile devices and with more than one device simultaneously. (Abramovich 2019.) Beforementioned affects the content itself considerably, as the message trying to be delivered through the content might be competing with multiple other signals. As millennials have grown up with technology, they are used to having information available constantly and use different platforms to find info about subjects that interest them. As they are used to gathering information by themselves, they might sometimes find commercial messages and encouragements too forceful and according to one study 57% of millennials block ad-content for being 'too pushy' (Content Science 2019). The best way for employers to get their message across is to create engaging and personalized content for potential employees. According to Abramovich (2019) more than half of consumers say that personalized content would positively affect the likelihood of making a purchase and 49% say the same about

becoming loyal to a brand. In addition to personalized content, engagement is one key factor to the emerging generations of workforce since if they do not find the content engaging, they already have the next one they can immerse in. 62% of millennials say that they would be more likely to continue as loyal customers if the brand delivers consistent engagement (Content Science 2019). To a degree this can also be generalized to employers, as they are also competing for the attention of their employees as well as their time, productivity and future plans.

## **2.6.2 War for Talent**

According to Josh Bersin “The war for talent is over, and talent won.” (Mosley 2014, Chapter 1). The setting of the labour market has turned upside down from the times when companies chose the employees they wanted to work for them, to more and more to employees choosing the companies they want to work for. War for talent refers to the scene of recruiting and retaining employees, which is constantly getting more difficult (Morgan 2017, 26). Some changes in the recent past that have made recruiting and retaining employees more difficult are for example the growing amount of data and information available to everybody, shortness of skilled staff, growth through mergers, globalization, changes in the workforce demographics and the need to cut from support functions (Boudreau & Ramstad 2008, 19).

Because of the change in the difficulty of recruiting and retaining employees, the HR processes are guided to be more “outside-in” so that individuals who are not working for the company can be made aware of the performance management options, staffing and culture possibilities with a specific employer. The employer brand is catching up to the value of financial results, and market value is considered to consist of also intangible factors (such as the employer brand) as well as the financial results. The financial result is also looked more as the result of efforts made in the areas of intangible factors. (Ulrich, Ulrich, Brockbank & Kryscynski 2017, Chapter 1.)

To effectively fight the increasing challenge of hiring new employees and trying to lose as few of the old ones as possible, the employer brand that is refined and advertised can prove to be an effective tool for the process. According to a study (McAuley 2018) companies with a negative reputation or a poor employer brand might have to use 10% more in expenses per one new hire in relation to companies hiring with better employer brand. They might also struggle with even getting the quality of talent they would want for their organization.

### 3 Research Methods

This chapter will cover the practicalities of the data collected. The plan for collecting the data will be explained as well as the justifications for the chosen tools and methods. The chapter ends with a conclusion that winds up the findings presented in the chapter.

#### 3.1 Research Design

Research question for the thesis was worded as "How can the gaming industry improve its' employer image attractiveness?" and that was split into three different investigative questions aiming to find answers and solutions to the research questions.

To best answer the research question that was set for the thesis, a mixed method approach was chosen. The different investigative questions were researched with qualitative and quantitative solutions and secondary data was used to create a theoretical framework. The created survey and interview were the methods that provided primary data for this thesis. The quantitative survey was created based on the results from the descriptive data analysis done for IQ 1.

Using secondary data means utilizing already existing information that is collected by someone else, such as market research reports and government statistics. Primary data is information that is new and collected directly by the person reporting. (Wolf 2016.)

Table 1. Research design matrix.

Investigative question	Data collected from	Data Collection Method	Data analysis
IQ 1. What are the crucial aspects to building an employer brand in the gaming industry?	Different sources of professional literature and online sources.	Documents, literature, previous research	Qualitative data written in descriptive format

IQ 2. What employer brand attributes attract employees the most?	Interviewing the employees and the commissioning company, survey for an extended group	Survey about employer branding components in the industry, interview about most valued things at their workplace	Quantitative and qualitative data
IQ 3. How can an employer brand be improved?	Answers of the survey and utilizing the data from IQ 1	Survey and interview results, documents, literature and previous research	Qualitative data

IQ 1. Is created to uncover the crucial aspects of an employer brand and more specifically one for companies in the game industry. The first IQ is worded as following: “What are the crucial aspects to building an employer brand in the gaming industry?” To answer the first investigate question secondary data that has been available through printed and online sources has been researched. The question is given answers to in chapter 2, which creates the theoretical framework for the thesis.

IQ 2. Is worded as “What employer brand attributes attract employees the most?”. As secondary research did not provide results for the aspects that people in the game industry value the most in an employer this was researched in a quantitative survey and a qualitative interview. The answers were collected as a primary data from employees of Unity Technologies and from an extended group of people who have worked there in the past. The interview was conducted with current employees only. The results for the IQ 2 can be found in chapter 4.

IQ 3. Aims to fill the last part of the research question, and to look how the employer image can be improved. To answer this question the results from the survey will be utilized as well as the secondary data collection that was used to answer IQ 1. The results are written in chapter 4 and in the conclusion chapter as recommendations.

The data collection methods were chosen based on the perceived accuracy of answers and the effort needed to collect relevant amount of data. For the theoretical framework the data collection from previously written sources seemed to be the only viable option as it is by far the most comprehensive way to be able to transform a lot of existing info to support and explain the topic being discussed. For the second and third IQ primary research had

to be done as the secondary research did not present viable options to base conclusions on. When examining the attributes affecting the observed employer brand, a decision was made that qualitative data would provide more insight in volume than what qualitative would in descriptive answers. Surveys tend to be a decent balance between the amount of work needed to construct the collection method, the accuracy of the answers and the amount of people willing to spend their time in answering anything for a thesis. The interview was chosen to give people an option to expand their answers from the limited options they had in the survey and to bring out points that might not have been included in the survey in the first place. As the interview required the participants to complete more work and thought processes than what clicking through the survey did, the number of respondents dropped significantly.

### **3.2 Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collected for the first IQ for the thesis was from secondary sources that were available in both online sources and from professional printed literature. The secondary data is analysed as qualitative data and written into a descriptive format. The data for the second IQ was collected as primary data through a survey and an interview that was conducted with the employees of the commissioning company. The survey was created based on the theoretical framework that provided information about the things that are important for employer branding activities and what data an employer should have to effectively craft their EB strategy. The survey produced quantitative data that was then analysed and presented as both figures and text to highlight the key findings. The survey was sent to the current employees of the commissioning company via internal Slack-channel and to former employees through an alumni chat. The interview was conducted virtually because of current conditions of working from home. The Interview was not structured and the questions that were presented were "What makes working at Unity good for you?" and "What aspects would you highlight to others" and the employees could answer the questions how they best saw fit. The data from the group interview is analysed as qualitative data and presented in descriptive format highlighting the things employees felt to be most important.

The data for the last investigative question combines the qualitative results of the first questions since to answer the question it must be pointed out what needs to be improved, referring to the key findings from both the survey and the interview, and what are the crucial aspects that need to be taken into consideration when making recommendations for that. The data is collected from both primary and secondary sources and it combines the quantitative and qualitative data received from the employees.

## **4 Results**

This chapter will present the findings from the primary data that was collected. The chapter includes a hypothesis that was created prior to analyzing the results. The results and sampling are shown with visuals for better insight.

### **4.1 Hypothesis**

Based on the theoretical framework, there were certain assumptions that were expected to be seen from the primary data. As the sampling that answered the questions consists mainly of millennials, it was assumed that they would appreciate the aspects previous research has shown millennials to value in working life. Because of the previous knowledge of the industry and based on the secondary data there were assumptions that might show up in the survey or interview.

Hypothesis that was created based on the sampling was that since it has been researched that millennials aspire to be wealthy (Deloitte 2019, 5-6) monetary bonuses would show up close to the top when listing the most important benefits of an employer. Due to another study showing millennials also value frequent feedback of their work performances and look for the opportunities to excel at work (Myers & Sadaghiani 2010, 229) they would rate the opportunity to educate and develop professionally to a high degree when choosing from the most important benefits.

A hypothesis that was based on the research done in the industry was that people employed in technical roles rarely have to do personal research or visit job advertising sites to get an offer and that this would be significantly different to people working in non-technical roles. Recent research done in software engineering industry shows that companies find it much harder to hire people for technical roles and for example people looking to be hired for PR or marketing jobs find it certainly much harder to get an offer (MeetFrank 2020).

### **4.2 Survey**

The survey (Appendix 1) was used to look for the most important employer branding components according to the employees and to provide answers for IQ 2. And to find out what are the most appealing attributes to the employees when comparing different employers. The survey provided quantitative data (Appendix 2) to enhance the level of

reliability as the results to the investigative question could not only be based on the qualitative answers.

The survey was conducted through Webropol, and in total had seven questions for the participants to answer. The first two questions were about the industry of their employer and about their role, to provide background and ensure that the research was done with people currently employed in the game industry. In total the survey there were 45 answers and out of those, 41 reported to be working for an employer in games and services field. Four answerers reported to be working for an employer in a software field. The software industry answers will be included in the research as comments were received that instead of "Games and services" three answerers from the commissioning organization had chosen the software-option as they thought that it was suitable as well. In addition to the industry question as the background the answerers were also asked to select if their role would be described as "Technical" or "Non-Technical". The reason for this question was to be able to compare the answers and the perceptions of the employer brand between groups that are targeted very differently and might value different things in their work. Based on the research done on secondary data there are significant differences when regarding the difficulty of hiring, which is why sperate data might help target the wanted talent pool better. Of the total sampling 35 answerers reported to work in technical roles and 10 in non-technical roles. The inequality in these answers was not surprising as majority of the roles in the game industry consist of technical ones.

The next two questions presented to the participants were about brand awareness and from where they had gotten information about the brand. These results are utilized in the recommendations found later in the thesis and also when answering IQ 3. About how the employer brand can be improved. First of these questions was asked to record the awareness with the brand itself and the differences between awareness of the employer and the company brand. The question was asked as "How familiar were you with your current employer before starting?" and the employees answered with picking the option most fitting from a scale of "Not at all familiar" to "Very familiar". They chose answers to the question regarding to their familiarity with the company's products/services and with their employer brand.

Table 2. Answers (n=45) to question about employer’s products familiarity

With products /services	Not at all familiar	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	Very familiar
Technical	11,4%	45,7%	31,4%	11,4%
Non-technical	20%	40%	30%	10%

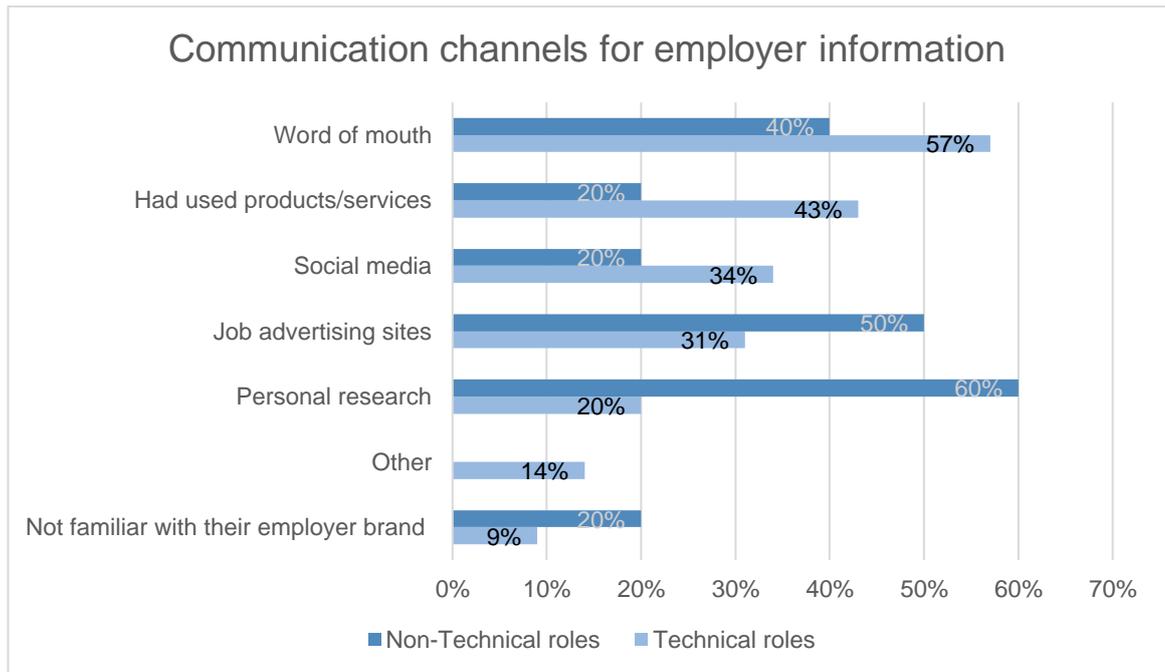
Table 3. Answers (n=45) to question about the employed brand familiarity

With employer brand	Not at all familiar	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	Very familiar
Technical	37,1%	34,3%	25,7%	2,9%
Non-technical	30%	30%	30%	10%

When looking at the familiarity with the organization’s products/services the perceived familiarity was somewhat higher than what the answers regarding the employer brand show. The majority of both technical and non-technical groups mentioned that they were at least somewhat familiar with the products/services of their current employer, the technical group ranking a bit higher answer. When it came to the employer brand “Not at all familiar” was the most selected answer to the technical group whereas the non-technical group reported only somewhat lower numbers indicating familiarity. Number of respondents who reported to be not at all familiar rose significantly in the technical group when comparing the employer brand to the familiarity with the products and services. This might partly be explained by the possibly not being familiar with the concept of employer brand and what it entails. The differences in the familiarity with the products/services might be explained by the division of roles as people working in technical roles are more likely to have to interact with the actual product or service or work directly with it than what people in non-technical roles.

The following questions were asked to map the communication channels that are the most relevant for this target group by asking them from where they had obtained information about their current employer.

Chart 4. Where employees (n=45) had gotten information of their employer



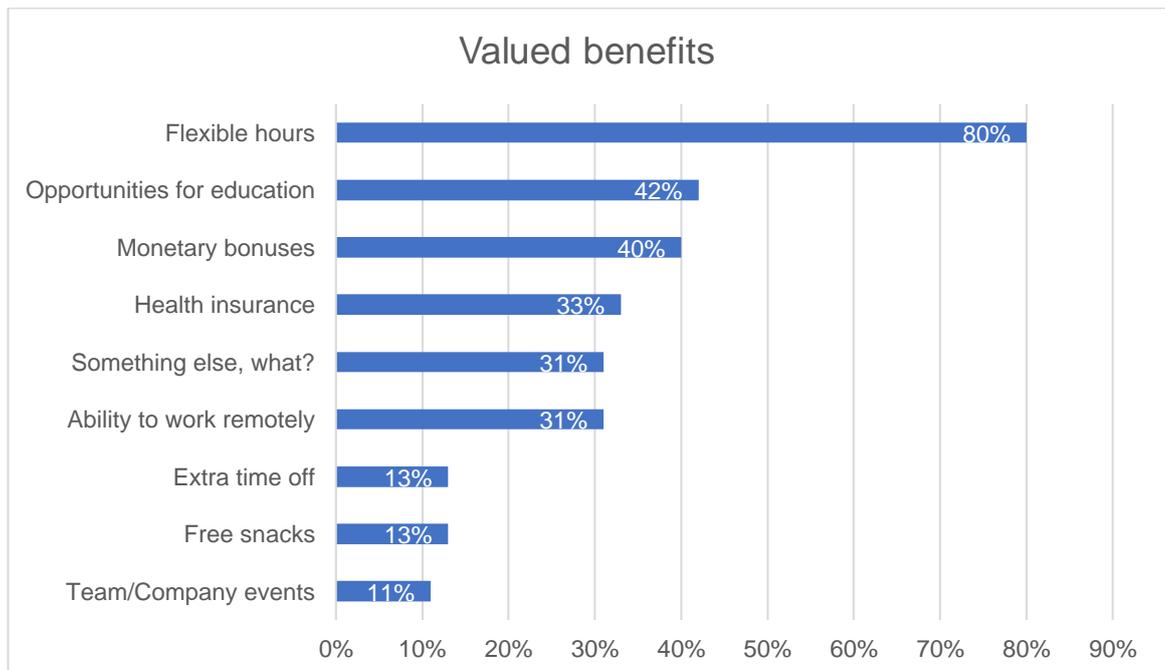
As mentioned in the hypothesis chapter, based on the theoretical framework gathered to respond to IQ 1. It was assumed that people working in technical roles would not have to visit job advertising sites and they would hear from potential employers through other channels and people who are employed in non-technical roles might have to go through more effort when looking for an employer and potential roles. In chart 4. There are visualizations for both technical and non-technical groups' answers. The answers mentioned in the figure are the ones that were given to the employees and by clicking other, they were able to write their own answer. The option "Other" received five answers of which three mentioned hearing about the company from a friend and they will be counted in to the "Word of mouth" – option, unfortunately there is no way of distinguishing the groups in free text answers. Two of the other answers said they had heard from the employer through a recruiting event.

When looking at the group working in technical roles the most popular answer was through word of mouth, which more than half the group responded. That was followed with being familiar with their products/services and the third most popular option was through their social media presence. Job advertising sites were the fourth most popular option when mapping the channels. With this question it must be kept in mind that the options do not limit each other, and the answerers could choose multiple options. The results followed the hypothesis to some degree, as the non-technical group presented different results to the question and their channels of information in order of most answers were personal research, job-advertising sites and word of mouth. There are significant

differences between the reported channels of information, and these correlate to the previous research done about the job market insights and differences (MeetFrank 2020). Though the sampling for the non-technical roles is very small (n=10) the results differ much from the answers of the technical group, meaning that to a degree it is safe to assume that how the groups receive information from a potential employer differ from each other.

To receive some quantitative data to be more accurately investigative question 2. The fifth question in the survey was created to get a better idea of the employer brand attributes that the respondents value. They were asked to pick the top three benefits they value the most in any employer as the previous questions have asked them about their current employer. They were given a list of options to choose from and had the ability to choose "Other" and specify their answer if the wanted things could not be found from there.

Chart 5. Respondents (n=45) most valued benefits in an employer.



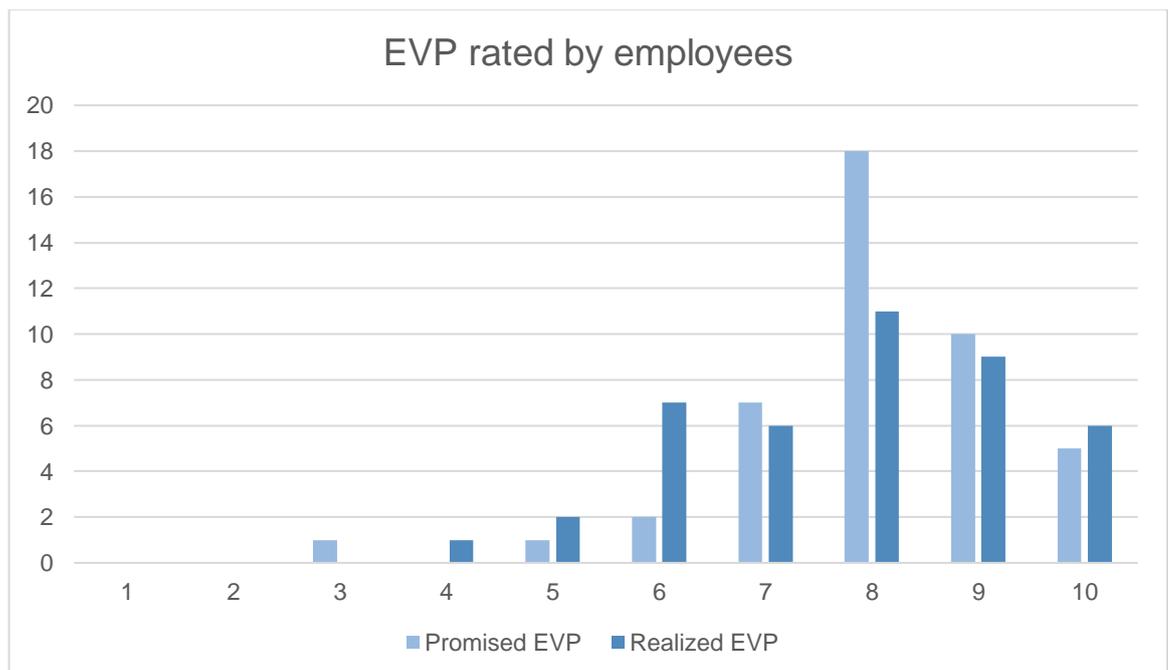
In the above figure is a visualization of the answers that were received from the respondents. As there were no significant differences between the different groups that was not emphasized in presenting of the answer. The most popular answer with a clear difference to any other was the option to have flexible hours of working. Autonomy over the schedule and ways of working is also an answer that was presented in the interview by the employees. Based on the appreciation of flexible hours it can also be interpreted that these employees value autonomy over their own working hours to a high degree. In the hypothesis chapter it was mentioned that based on the theoretical framework

millennials tend to value opportunities to grow and develop themselves professionally, as well as being wealthy. The top three benefits were exactly the same for non-technical and technical. Based on this survey the employees value the thing millennials tend to hold in high value. The free text answers also ranked up quite many answers, which lead to the realization that the options could have been better worded. "Monetary bonuses" was meant to imply also a competitive salary but as this wasn't specifically mentioned this came up repeatedly in the free text field. This means that the monetary aspect might have been valued higher in the ready-made fields had it been worded differently.

The last three questions focused on answering both IQ 2. And IQ 3. By mapping the employer value proposition components that this target group values and by attempting to inspect the correlation between the promised value proposition and how that was perceived to come about in real life situations.

The employees were asked how they would grade the appeal of their current employer's EVP prior to starting and how would they rate it now that they have some experience of working for the employer. For the first claim the answers were given on a scale of 0-10 with the answer "0" having a description of "Didn't appeal to me at all" and the answer "10" having a description of "It was very appealing to me". The second claim about the realized EVP also had a scale of 0-10, the answer "0" being described as "Very far from the promise" and answer "10" being described as "exactly what promised".

Chart 6. How employees view employer's EVP before and after starting (n=44 for promised, n=42 for realized)



In the chart above the results of the two last questions in the survey are combined to highlight the possible differences between the promised and the delivered EVP. The employers were asked to rate their current employer so not all of the answers describe the same value proposition. The appeal of the promised employer value proposition was asked first and the average rating was 8,02. In this question there were no significant differences when looking at whether the employees worked in technical roles or not. When asked about how truthful the value proposition was, the average was slightly lower 7,78. In this question there was a slight difference between the groups as the people in technical roles responded with answers three tenths lower than the average of the non-technical group.

As can be seen from the figure when looking at the higher ratings the answers for the promised value proposition outrank the perceived reality of it after rating "6". It is impossible to pinpoint the source of the difference as the survey did not include an open field for the answerers to describe what they felt was not as promised and resulted in lower grade. The EVPs are still ranked rather highly which indicates that employers in the game industry are aware that this is something that needs to be taken into account. If there seems to be a contradiction with the value that the employer promises and the value that they deliver regular feedback from the employees about the employee experience might help align the two. As mentioned in Figure 1. Regular feedback and confirmation of alignment are the corner stones of keeping the employee experience in line with the employer brand and employee experience strategy that has been planned. If they do not seem to be aligned the strategies can be corrected based on the gathered feedback.

### **4.3 Interview**

The purpose of the interview was to give more insight to answering IQ 2. About the attributes that employees feel are the most important part of an employer brand and the value proposition. The interview provided qualitative data to help point out the most important employer branding components in addition to the results that were received from the survey.

The interview was conducted virtually through an internal Slack-channel, as there currently was no option to conduct it in person. The interview was open in structure and allowed the interviewees to answer when they felt like it and how they deemed fit. The interview was open to be answered to by anyone who wanted to participate.

The interview was conducted with the employees of Unity Technologies and the number of responses received to the questions was 10 different individual answers resulting in qualitative data to be used in the thesis.

The questions that were asked from the employees were the following:

1. What makes working at Unity great for you?
2. What are the things you enjoy and would highlight to others?

The things that came up in six of the ten different answers was a mention of colleagues. The answers highlighted the importance of working with talented and dedicated people, who are also culturally great fit to the company. Diversity was also mentioned to be an important factor, and some had only learned to appreciate it in organizations that it was not paid that much attention to. As people were the only aspect that majority of the answers mentioned it would highlight the culture aspect of the EVP (Zojceska 2018) to possibly be the most important one when looking at employee engagement and retention.

Answers mentioning something other than the culture and colleagues were split very evenly between other aspects that were deemed important. Based on the research done with millennials and their preferences on the workplace the answers gave similar results as the employees themselves got to voice the things that they felt were the most important. Opportunities to grow professionally and challenging work were both mentioned by a couple of people, as well as open communication. Open and honest communication has been studied to be important for millennials and even a key element affecting their future at company (Kapoor & Solomon 2011, 313) and they are also thought to value close relationships with their managers to grow professionally and be able to excel at work (Myers & Sadaghiani 2010, 229).

Work-life – balance was a component that was mentioned as a priority after the cultural aspects. As the work-life balance can sometimes be disproportioned in the game industry (Semuels 2019) because of the volatility of the industry and periods of significant overtime at work the respondents seem to appreciate that the issue is being addressed by the upper management and it is being paid attention to in the company.

Creating a change was an aspect that got the equal amount of answers as the other components did, after the leading culture factor. People expressed that the thought of enabling creators and maybe helping someone to make their passion and dream come true by making games where things that people found meaningful. In the Helsinki office they employees work a lot with an advertising network which helps game developers

monetize their games and have said, that getting messages from game developers for example in third world countries explaining that they have been able to make money for their family by making games has engaged people with the purpose of their work and how their work might really make a change in someone's life. Social responsibility has been studied to be an important aspect for millennials (Kurter 2018) and not taking into account the actual corporate social responsibilities that the employer completes the respondents seem to find this a way of finding their work important and meaningful to also something else than just the company's bottom line.

#### **4.4 Conclusions of the Data**

Due to the small sampling population the study would need to be repeated with a larger and more diverse sampling with participants from multiple different organizations before the results can be generalized to the whole industry. The answers do highlight the points that employers should focus in their branding activities and how they might want to modify their value proposition.

What can be gathered from the survey is that respondents were on average more familiar with their employers' products/services and less familiar with their employer brand (Table 2 & 3). When asked about the channels through which they had obtained information about the employer brand, word of mouth was the most popular option by far (Chart 4.) The options that were selected most after that (personal research, had used products/services, job advertising sites) show that not many of the participants had probably not been reached by their employer's brand message as those are usually communicated through company websites and social media channels. This indicated that the basic awareness (Figure 2) should be taken as a goal to improve to reach more potential employees.

The most attractable and maybe even tangible part of the employed brand are the benefits that are offered to employees. The participants' answers in the survey follow the trend that the research done on secondary data showed and the most important components based on this survey are flexible hours, opportunities for education and professional development and competitive salary and monetary bonuses. The answerers want to be in charge of their own working hours and be able to decide the best for them to do their work, they are looking to excel at work and improving their skills with an employer. They also value financial security and feel that competitive salary is an important aspect of employer value proposition when considered any employer.

When asked about the value proposition that the employer had promised, and how they would assess it after seeing it in real life the answers showed a discrepancy between the two. If the promised and the real-life version of the value proposition are not aligned it will defeat the purpose of creating an appealing EVP. The easiest fix to the issue is to gather more feedback about the components that participants feel that are not delivered as mentioned, and address that, or modify the EVP so that it is realistic about what is delivered.

When the current employees were asked about the things they would highlight to other and what they feel makes working at the organization great, more than anything they responded with "colleagues". Nearly all respondents mentioned that to be the best thing with their employer, followed with opportunities to develop and create a change. The focus of the answers was very different from the survey where flexible hours and monetary bonuses were selected much more than they came up in the interview. The format of the interview might have an effect as people can be less likely to show their appreciation to the monetary aspect when others are present and as the culture was not a pre-made choice in the survey since it focused more in tangible benefits. Good company culture and hiring people who fit and develop the culture is likely to have a positive effect to employee retention, as the answerers were all people who had worked in the organization some time, and when they answered "the most valued benefits" – question in the survey they were thinking of any employer they might work for in the future.

## 5 Conclusions

The following chapter will provide insight to the key findings from the thesis. It will assess the validity, reliability and relevance of the study and make recommendations based on the findings presented earlier but also suggestions for further research to be done. The chapter ends with personal insights of learning with the process.

### 5.1 Key Findings

Key findings in this thesis were diverse. One of those was that there is not much relevant previous research that could be utilized when aiming to improve the employer brand of an organization working in the game industry. What can be regarded as one key finding from the primary data, is that the employees reported very similar answers as those that were discovered when looking at secondary data about millennials and their preferences in their workplace. The respondents valued flexible hours (autonomy over their working), opportunities to develop themselves professionally and competitive salary and monetary bonuses. The results are very similar to what the Deloitte (2019) research shows. The key findings from the interview highlight different things and could be an indicator of the differences people value in their own organization after having spent certain amount of time there versus if they would get to choose their own benefits. The interview highlighted the importance of culture in the workplace and culturally fit hires making the workplace enjoyable and worth committing to.

The survey shows that the biggest differences between the group of people working in technical roles and the group working in non-technical roles where the information channels through which they heard from an employer's brand and the perceived difficulty to get an offer for a role. As people working in technical roles mentioned that their primary channel of employer brand information was their social network (Chart 4), followed with their first-hand experiences of the employer's products/services and social media, the people working in non-technical roles reported very different findings. For them the most used information channel was their personal research, followed with information obtained from job-advertising sites and social networks. According to MeetFrank research (2020) hiring a person for a technical role is a much more difficult task than hiring someone into a non-technical position, for example in a marketing team.

From the quantitative data obtained from the survey it can also be seen that the respondents felt that the EVP promoted to them before starting in a workplace did not exactly match the reality they experienced after starting. Generally, the participants rated the EVP of their current employer to a high degree (most answers 7 or above in a 0-10

scale) but answered the realized EVP to rate slightly lower grades (Chart 6.) Both groups answered very similarly to the rating of the EVP.

When looking at the rate of familiarity with an employer there were certain differences between people in technical roles and people in non-technical roles as the latter group reported to be more familiar with their current organization's employer brand, and the technical group reported being more familiar with their products/services.

Key findings from the secondary data were the differences that millennials have as employees compared to the previous generations. Millennials value open communication very highly and might find companies working on a "need-to-know" – basis disengaging. They also value diversity, sustainability and think that that companies have a great responsibility and should engage in solving social issues. (Kapoor & Solomon 2011, 313.) They consume content in various forms and crave personalized content in order to be engaged to the message (Abramovich 2019).

When looking at the IQs that were set for the thesis, the data gathered does provide some answers. For the first IQ about crucial aspects of building an employer brand positioning, differentiation and clear value proposition can be mentioned as the key issues. Without brand positioning the employer does not have a clear segment of talent they are trying to appeal to, and without a strategy for differentiation and value proposition they will not have a way of proving themselves better from the other available employers. The answers for the second IQ asking about the most appealing attributes is covered with the answers from the primary data and can be concluded as: culture, autonomy over work, opportunities to develop professionally and competitive monetary remuneration. The third IQ of how an employer image can be improved is through research of the talent (what do they want) and through regular feedback and alignment of processes. Improving the employer brand also means committing to creating authentic and consistent experiences to employees.

## **5.2 Recommendation**

The biggest recommendation that has arisen from this thesis is to do more research on the industry and especially locally. To get reliable and consistent data of the employee preferences and of the communication channels that are most effective with the target group a larger study of the current situation would need to be completed in the industry.

Based on the findings in this thesis, the key recommendations would be creating authentic and consistent experiences with the brand, consistently working on improving company

culture and creating personalized brand messages to target segments through relevant channels.

As people working in the technical roles (majority of the people employed in the industry) mentioned that most of them had obtained information of their current employer through their social networks and word of mouth it is crucial to create experiences that are consistent and authentic, as those will be told forward in social networks. The inconsistent and negative experiences will be too and as millennials tend to trust information circulated in social media highly (Content Science 2019) negative experiences will most likely come to the attention of the target group. Creating authentic experiences with the brand means that the core of the company, the values and ways of working are present in every function. Consistency might mean answering every inquiry received through an email or sending the "Thank you for your application" message to all of the applicants.

Consistently working on the company culture might seem a bit harder task. That goal is reachable through regular collection of feedback from the employees pinpointing the components that make the company culture valued and nurturing those. If the employees value the laid-back feel and real interest in employees as people, those are things that the management should acknowledge and keep in mind when creating plans for communication and changes.

Finding out the relevant communication channels for the target segment needs more extensive research than what this thesis can provide and if that is not done yet it is an aspect that will considerably improve the results of brand awareness, as the target segment is reached through the channels they prefer to use. Personalized content is very much valued by millennials (Content Science 2019) and has studied to improve their engagement rates with a brand. Personalized content differs much from the target group but based on the primary data collected in this thesis the most important benefits for employees are flexible hours and opportunities to develop professionally and when talking personalized content regarding employer brand those are aspects that should be mentioned. When trying to attract a segment it makes the most sense to advertise the things they are interested in, instead of writing chapters about the company and how it has grown and what is the history of it.

### **5.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

When conducting further research about employer branding components in the game industry, it would be important to try to get answers from multiple organizations and to try to gather quantitative data from a larger sampling. To get information about the current

trends of the industry in a branding sense, qualitative interviews with people who work with improving the employer brand in the game industry or tech in general might provide useful information as they have seen the how the preferences and methods of communication have changed. Further research about the differences on how the employees perceive that EVP that was promised to them and how they feel about the reality of it might prove to be a useful tool in aligning the employee experience with the strategic approach.

The research would need to make the participants to point out the components of the EVP that they feel are not as promised and how does the conflict present itself.

As there is already an extensive amount of research made regarding millennials and their preferences as employees and content consumers studying the local population might help point out differences that are relevant to the industry in Finland, as opposed to millennials and their preferences globally. Based on the results obtained in this thesis it might be beneficial to improve the criterion validity of the data by studying the correlation between the scores of how well the promised EVP is fulfilled in reality and whether or not that has an effect on employees' motivation or productivity at work. As there now is some data of the employee preferences' and the motivations and values of the generation that fulfils majority of the roles in the industry the actual effect on the employer branding activities to employees would need to be researched.

#### **5.4 Validity, Reliability, Relevance**

The reliability of the primary data collected is difficult to determine as the survey was only conducted once and the secondary research did not deliver results that could have been utilized as a benchmark for the results received from this survey. The sampling population is also small for a quantitative survey (n=45) and the results might present differently if repeated with a larger sampling. When taking into account the universe (n=153) the answer rate is 29,41%. What could be considered to have a positive effect on reliability is that this a subject that the employees feel strongly about as they have personally been in the position to judge the EVP of their current company and that might make them answer more accurately to the questions. They were also aware that the results are anonymous and that the survey was not created by the employer itself, which might enhance the reliability of the answers. For the secondary data the reliability was aimed to be improved by using multiple sources and by trying to pick credible and trustworthy sources. When presenting trends or figures multiple sources were checked to ensure that even if the exact figures would vary the main trends stayed the same. As the industry is changing rapidly and not all of the sources are research done recently, when repeating researching the theoretical framework in couple of years' time the results might be different as there

would be new data available that might point out things that are not known based on the references that were used in this thesis.

When assessing the validity of the study it must be taken into account that if results are generalized for the whole industry majority of the answerers work for the same employer and this might affect the validity of the result. Though the perception of an organization's employer brand is subjective which means that a mostly homogenous group of answerers might still feel differently about it. The primary data collected is perceived to have a high degree of content validity and to measure aspects that are important when creating strategies for employer branding and implementing them. As the survey was sent for the people to answer virtually there is no way of knowing if people responded truthfully to the background questions, which would reduce the validity of the answers as they would measure components of EB from another industry.

For the relevance of the thesis it can be said that as the game industry is not showing signs of slowing down it is important to gather data and intel about the industry and employees' preferences so that they can be matched when trying to attract talent from other industries. The game industry in Finland is viable and there are already industry giants with their hundreds of millions of euros worth of sales (Mäntylä 2020). As according to MeetFrank (2020) the most wanted skills in the job market in Finland are currently: full stack development, backend and frontend development, Javascript and React, it can be assumed that the game industry and tech industry in general are going to be hiring extensive amount of talent in the future and to be able to attract the best talent they need, employer branding strategies will only increase their importance within the industry.

## **5.5 Commissioning Company Feedback**

Commissioning company feedback shared some insights on how the data collected for this thesis is valuable for them and how they can utilize it and also some aspects that if done differently, could have helped even more.

The contact person said that knowledge about the channels through which employees hear from the employer brand is very valuable to them and said that the results will be passed over to their recruitment team. There has been discussion about the relevance of attending recruiting events and as that was also mentioned in the free text field of the survey it might help to prove that appearance in those events is valuable. They also mentioned that the information of the most valued benefits might prove to be useful in future, when the EVP of the company might be revisited. As a global company they cannot make radical changes to the branding strategies or value proposals but said that

knowing what the employees might value the highest helps to focus on that when discussing the value proposition. The results of the interview were seen as a positive feedback that the work done for improving the culture in the office and trying to make culturally fit hires is paying off. It also highlighted the fact that the culture in the office is something that must be kept a finger on and nurtured to the wanted direction.

The results from the questions pointing out the difference between the promised and the realized EVP were something that they were interested in but would have wanted to know more specifically about the components that the answerers felt were not matching the promised. This is something that should be considered for future research to find out the specific components, that might cause the contradiction in the EVP in real life. They mentioned that to try to even the results the communication about the value proposition will be cleared and when employees are onboarded to the company they will be walked through the tangible benefits to avoid any misunderstandings that might lead the employees to feel that what was delivered is not the same as what was promised.

## **5.6 Reflection on Learning**

Writing this thesis has given much clarification to the actual meaning of the employer brand and the effects of it as well as how my generation views issues such as diversity, sustainability, opportunity develop professionally and salaries in a work context. The process of writing thesis has taught much about managing personal projects professionally.

The biggest learning experience I had when my understanding of the complexity of the employee experience increased and how the social culture, generation, social structures and values are all connected to each other and how difficult it is to make changes with the components that one can affect. I feel like I still have a lot to learn about the topic and especially how to handle the practicalities of employer branding activities, as some of them (like targeting wanted segment) reach more to the marketing side than what I currently have understanding of. Writing about this topic has also made me think more about the employee experience we provide at Unity, how we all affect the culture and how we can sustain the ideal state and scale operations at the same time.

Countless hours of research with the topics have also shown the undocumented side of the industry and the difficulty of finding reliable and current data that can be utilized or even generalized to the whole industry. I have learned that the industry is still in progress and there are a lot of aspects that need to be taken into account when going forward, but

also that there is a chance for everybody currently employed in the industry to start acting and creating a better environment and highlight the joys of working to others.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. A survey about employer branding attributes

### Employer Brand

#### 1. In what industry does your organization work?

- Games and services
- Software
- Hardware and equipment
- Technology consultancy
- Other, what?

#### 2. Which of these describes your role better?

- Technical
- Non-technical

#### 3. How familiar were you with your current employer before starting?

	Not at all familiar	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	Very familiar
With products and/or services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With their employer brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### 4. From where had you gotten information about your employer

- Word of mouth
- Social media
- Job advertising sites
- Had used the products/services
- Personal research
- Other, what?
- I was not familiar with their employer brand

**5. What are the top 3 benefits you value the most in any employer?**

- Flexible hours
- Free snacks
- Team/company events
- Ability to work remotely
- Health insurance
- Extra time off
- Monetary bonuses
- Opportunities for education
- Something else, what?

Please select maximum 3 options

Selected options: 0

Seuraava

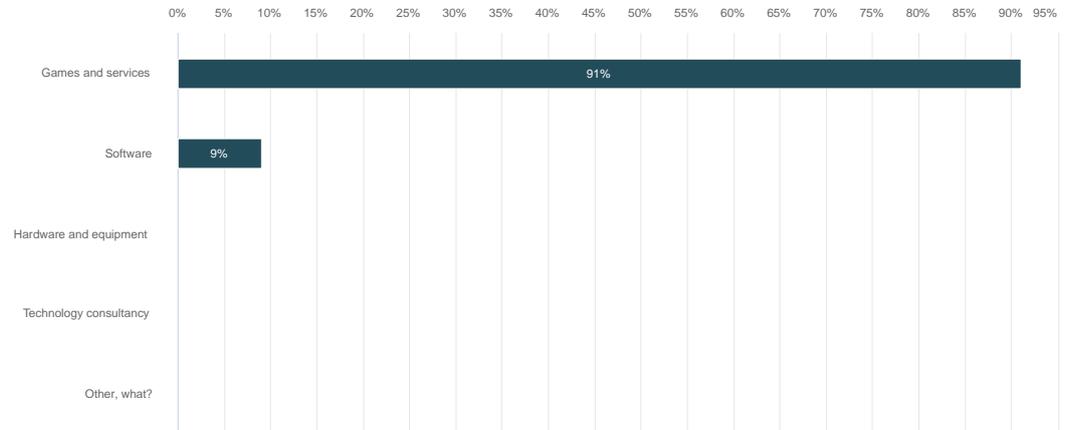
## Appendix 2. Survey results

### Perusraportti Employer Brand

Total number of respondents: 45

#### 1. In what industry does your organization work?

Number of respondents: 45



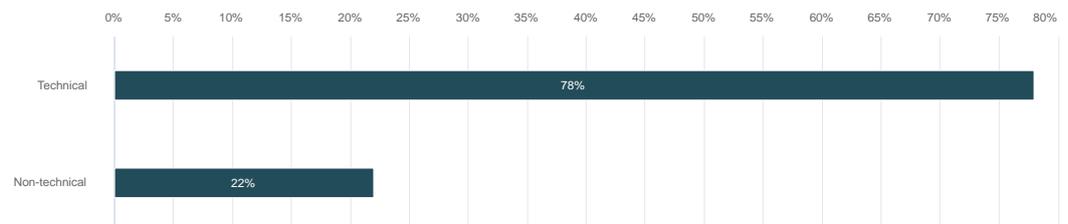
	n	Percent
Games and services	41	91,11%
Software	4	8,89%
Hardware and equipment	0	0%
Technology consultancy	0	0%
Other, what?	0	0%

#### Answers given into free text field

Option names	Text
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#### 2. Which of these describes your role better?

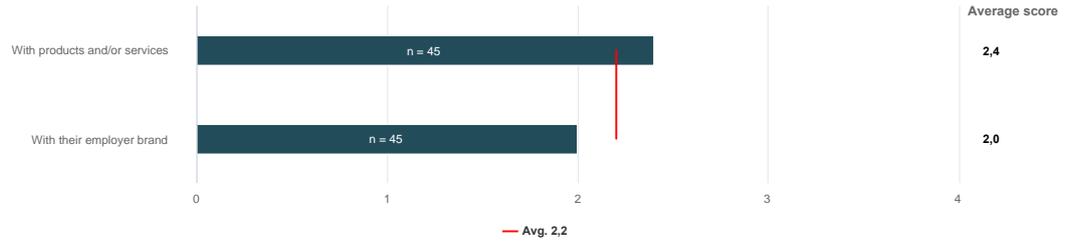
Number of respondents: 45



	n	Percent
Technical	35	77,78%
Non-technical	10	22,22%

### 3. How familiar were you with your current employer before starting?

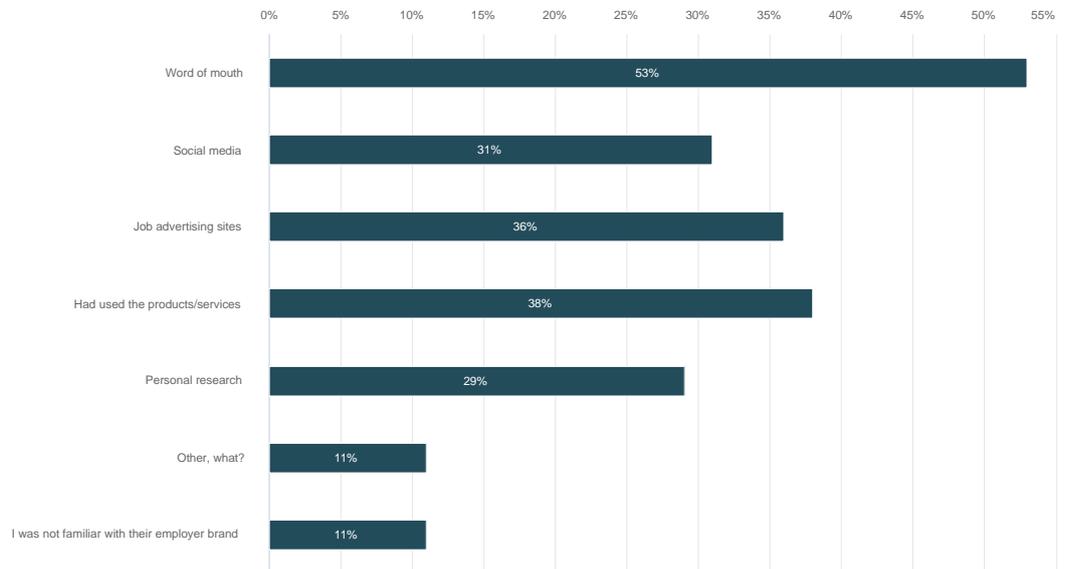
Number of respondents: 45



	Not at all familiar	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	Very familiar	Average	Median
With products and/or services	13,33%	44,45%	31,11%	11,11%	2,4	2
With their employer brand	35,56%	33,33%	26,67%	4,44%	2	2

### 4. From where had you gotten information about your employer

Number of respondents: 45 , selected answers: 94



	n	Percent
Word of mouth	24	53,33%
Social media	14	31,11%
Job advertising sites	16	35,56%
Had used the products/services	17	37,78%
Personal research	13	28,89%
Other, what?	5	11,11%
I was not familiar with their employer brand	5	11,11%

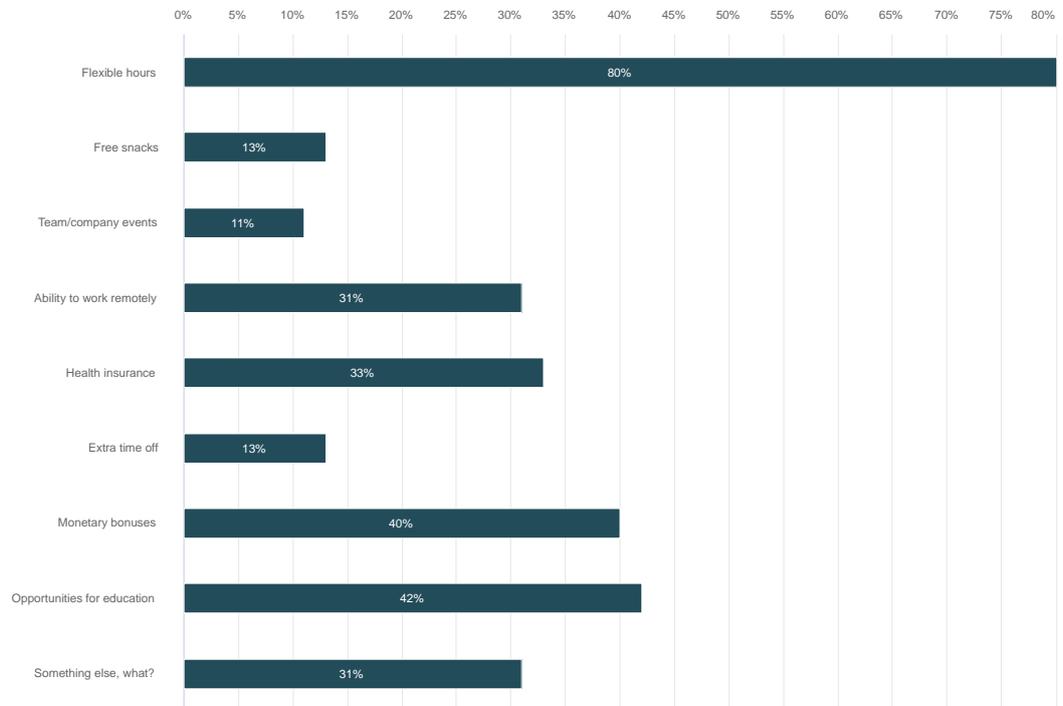
### Answers given into free text field

Option names	Text
Other, what?	Recruitment party that the employer had.
Other, what?	From a friend working already there.

Option names	Text
Other, what?	recruiters / friends working there
Other, what?	from a friend who was working for the company
Other, what?	Events

### 5. What are the top 3 benefits you value the most in any employer?

Number of respondents: 45 , selected answers: 133



	n	Percent
Flexible hours	36	80%
Free snacks	6	13,33%
Team/company events	5	11,11%
Ability to work remotely	14	31,11%
Health insurance	15	33,33%
Extra time off	6	13,33%
Monetary bonuses	18	40%
Opportunities for education	19	42,22%
Something else, what?	14	31,11%

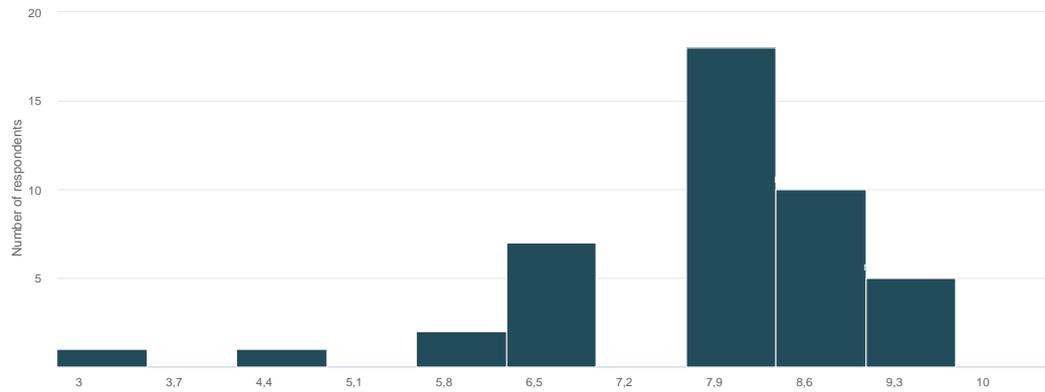
### Answers given into free text field

Option names	Text
Something else, what?	Indepence for technical staff to make their own decisions on tech
Something else, what?	Challenging work and really nice co-workers that I also can learn a lot from.
Something else, what?	No micro-management
Something else, what?	opportunities to travel
Something else, what?	global team, global job opportunities, if wanted

Option names	Text
Something else, what?	Pension contributions
Something else, what?	Massage
Something else, what?	Possibility to grow (=education, possibility to hop out-of-my-comfort-zone etc.)
Something else, what?	no nonsense culture
Something else, what?	Culture
Something else, what?	Interesting things to work on, culture of empowerment
Something else, what?	professional development
Something else, what?	Salary
Something else, what?	Competitive salaty

**6. Based on the visualization, how appealing was the promised EVP of your current employer?**

Number of respondents: 44

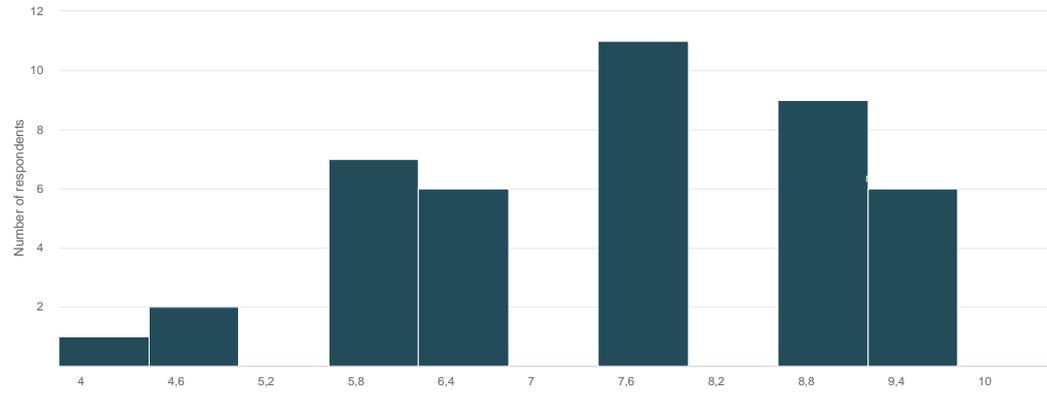


Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Sum	Standard Deviation
3	10	8,02	8	353	1,36

Slider value quantity	n	Percent
0	0	0%
1	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	1	2,27%
4	0	0%
5	1	2,27%
6	2	4,55%
7	7	15,91%
8	18	40,91%
9	10	22,73%
10	5	11,36%

**7. Based on the promised EVP, how would you assess the realized EVP?**

Number of respondents: 42



Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Sum	Standard Deviation
4	10	7,79	8	327	1,55

Slider value quantity	n	Percent
0	0	0%
1	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	0	0%
4	1	2,38%
5	2	4,76%
6	7	16,67%
7	6	14,28%
8	11	26,19%
9	9	21,43%
10	6	14,29%