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**EMPLOYER BRANDING – FASHION OR THE FUTURE? INVESTIGATION
INTO THE NECESSITY OF EMPLOYER BRANDING FOR ORGANISATIONS
TO ATTRACT TALENT**

– Case study Triodor Software

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis was to find out whether employer branding is a necessary action every organisation should take to attract more job applicants, or is it just a current fashion invented by the Human Resources professionals. Besides investigating the general necessity of the concept, this research also gives recommendations to a company called Triodor Software about needed actions to increase the quality and quantity of their job applicants.

The need for this research aroused when current literature did not show any empirical evidence about what is actually attracting job seekers to apply for work in certain companies. A company called Triodor Software needed advice in attracting more and more talented job applicants, and the research aimed to help to find out whether employer branding is the solution.

A critical review of the current literature was carried out and an online questionnaire was distributed to the job applicants of Triodor Software to answer the research questions.

The results revealed that a globally or nationally known company might have the potential to attract job applicants without any specific employer branding actions. In a case of a more unfamiliar company in the local labour market however employer branding can be the key action to attract more job applicants. However, the research showed that different people represents different opinions and desires, and therefore a combination of employer brand and companies' other brands can be the best solution to increase the quality and quantity of job applicants.

Keywords: Employer branding, strategic human resources management, branding

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämän lopputyön tarkoituksena oli selvittää, onko työnantajan brändäys tarpeellista yrityksille, jotka haluavat houkutella lisää mahdollisia työnhakijoita. Yleisen tutkimuksen lisäksi tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli myös antaa käytännönohjeita yritykselle nimeltä Triodor Software, joka tarvitsi ohjeita houkutellakseen lisää työnhakijoita.

Tarve tutkimukselle tuli ilmi, kun jo julkaisusta kirjallisuudesta ei löytynyt kokeellista näyttöä siitä, mitkä tekijät itseasiassa houkuttelevat työnhakijoita hakemaan töitä tietyistä yrityksistä. Triodor Software nimisellä yrityksellä oli suuri tarve houkutella lisää ja lahjakkaampia työntekijöitä, ja tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli selvittää, voisiko työnantajan brändäys olla ratkaisu.

Tutkimus toteutettiin sähköisellä kyselylomakkeella joka lähetettiin Triodor Software:in työnhakijoille.

Tutkimuksesta selvisi, että globaalisti tai kansallisesti tunnetuilla yrityksillä saattaa olla paremmat mahdollisuudet houkutella enemmän työnhakijoita ilman suurempia työnantajan brändäys aktiviteetteja. Tuntemattomille yrityksille paikallisilla työnhakumarkkinoilla työnantajan brändäys voi kuitenkin olla hyvin tehokas keino houkutella enemmän työnhakijoita. Tutkimus kuitenkin todisti, että eri ihmisillä on erilaiset halut ja mieltymykset. Sen vuoksi tehokas sekoitus työnantajan brändäystä yhdessä yrityksen muiden brändien kanssa saattaa olla paras keino houkutella lahjakkaita työnhakijoita yritykseen.

Avainsanat: Työnantajan brändäys, strateginen henkilöstöjohtaminen, brändäys

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept *employer branding* is relatively new to business practitioners, and, despite a few exceptions, academic research can mostly only be found from publications produced during the last decade (2000-2011). The main research and theoretical analysis is generated by Richard Mosley (1990), who originally created the concept (Suikkanen, 2010), but the topic has generated more rapid interest during the last ten years. Twenty years ago the term *employer branding* hardly even existed (Barrow, 2011), but nowadays the concept is getting even more popular among organisations and researchers. Facts such as the globalisation of competition, the tightening of skilled labour markets, advancements in technology, the growth of the knowledge economy, and the need of flexibility and expertise in the workplace have each presented strategic challenges to which organisations have had to respond (Barnett and McKendrick, 2004; Catteeuw, Flynn and Vonderhorst, 2007; Greenwood, Prakash and Deephouse, 2007 cited in Wickham and O'Donohue 2009). Organisations have had to find new ways to achieve competitive advantage and face the challenges in the constantly changing business environment. Achieving competitive edge through personnel management has shown increasing popularity, and *employer branding* has become a way for organisations to try to achieve differentiation from the competitors thus hoping to attract the best potential employees.

However, during the research about *employer branding* gaps could be found in the areas of what is actually attracting job applicants to seek employment from certain companies. No proper empirical research could be found stating whether job applicants appreciate certain kind of working conditions, or do they wish to work for known brands and successful companies. This aroused the objective for the research to find out whether *employer branding* is actually necessary, or are companies with known, strong and successful corporate brands attracting job applicants and new employees.

A company called Triodor Software was chosen as a case study for the research. Triodor Software is an international IT company providing outsourcing and nearshoring services in software development. The company has been operating since 2004 and is now employing approximately 150 people in Amsterdam and Istanbul. The company's headquarters is situated in Amsterdam where sales, marketing, new business developments, business consultancy and management are handled, and the development operations are conducted

in the development centre in Istanbul. The company is providing software solutions for other companies, and the clientele consist mostly of Dutch and other Western European customers (Triodor Software, 2011).

Because Triodor Software's customers are situated in Europe, the company is rather unknown in Turkey. However, the company is constantly growing and has a constant need for new employees possessing various different software development and engineering skills. Due to the unfamiliarity of the company in the Turkish labour market the company has difficulties in attracting and acquiring new employees to the development centre with the needed skills and talent. Therefore the company was considered as a suitable case study for the research to find out what can attract more job applicants for the company. It was also important to find out whether in a case where strong corporate brand do not exist can *employer branding* be the solution to attract the wanted talent.

It should be taken account that because the research is only studying the opinions and preferences of one company's job applicants in one country and one industry the results can be somewhat limited. However, because the goal of the research is not only to find answers on a general level but to give recommendations and advice for Triodor Software, the research perspective is justified.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Branding

Baukhaus and Tikoo (2004) say, that “brands are among a firm’s most valuable assets and as a result brand management is a key activity in many firms”. Branding has indeed taken its place in every organisation and has become one of the most important activities among companies. Companies go through considerable lengths to nurture their brands because they know the power of brands in attracting customers (Tsao and Leske, 2009), and therefore brands are considered critical in order to create value within an organisation (Miller and Muir, 2004). This chapter will present the definitions of branding and several concepts related with branding strategies.

2.1.1 Definitions

One can find numerous amounts of literature about branding, and the terms brand and branding have many definitions. In a simple way a brand can be defined only as a name and/or symbol used directly to sell products or services (Miller and Muir, 2004). Fill (2011, p. 141) defines branding more profoundly as promises which set up customer expectations and state that successful brands deliver their promises by meeting the customer expectations. He also defines that brands create strong, positive and lasting impressions and deliver value to those who consume the brand. Laforet (2010, p. 206) state that “Brands are not products, nor are they services. A brand represents a promise to fulfil a customer need”. Martin and Hetrick (2006, p. 47) further define brand as a promise made and kept in every activity from strategic, marketing and human resources actions to every corporate decision and customer and employee interaction. In other words, companies create brands in order to create value for the consumers thus encouraging them to purchase their branded product or service. Successful brands are argued to attract consumers to consume the products or services of a certain brand, or to consume product or services from a specific company which represents a certain brand.

Companies can differentiate themselves from their competitors with branding while promising to deliver value which competition cannot give. Branding is proved to be crucial for organisations when researches show that companies with strong brands consistently outperform those with weaker brands (Lindeman, 2003 cited in Martin and Hetrick 2006,

p. 49). This means that brands seem to have a great influence on customer behaviour when consumers tend to turn to strong and successful brands in their purchasing decisions.

2.1.2 Differentiation

Lynch (2009, p. 305) presents Michael Porter's ideas of competitive advantage: Porter (1985) introduced differentiation as a way for companies to gain competitive advantage where differentiation is done by offering something different from the competition to the consumers. Different authors have suggested several different ways for companies to differentiate themselves, which include product features, design, timing, location, service and support, product mix, linkage between functions, linkage with other companies, reputation and a combination of these (Afuah and Tucci, 2000; Caruana *et al.*, 2000; Kambil *et al.*, 1996; Trkman, 2010 cited in Lindic and Marques da Silva, 2011).

Differentiation as a way to seek competitive advantage seems very reasonable; a company offering something which its competitors do not offer is likely to drive consumers to purchase that company's product or service if it is offering something they value. In branding differentiation is considered as an essence (Aaker, 2003, cited in Davies 2007), and marketing campaigns seek to differentiate the brand by positioning it as superior compared to the competition (Pechmann and Ratneswhar, 1991, cited in Davies 2007) Differentiation is therefore important in branding, where a differentiated brand is likely to stand out from the competition.

2.1.3 Positioning and value proposition

Johansson (2009) defines positioning as "...activities undertaken by the marketer to communicate the features and the benefits of the product and the image of the brand to the actual and potential customer". In Laforet's definition of brand positioning (2010, p. 118) he states that in brand positioning a brand is perceived to occupy a certain 'market space' in the mind of the target audience. Therefore brand positioning is used by companies to create a certain perception of their brand(s) in the minds of their target customers. Laforet (2010, p.118) also argues, that a company will have a brand whether or not it is proactive, reactive or passive in the management of its brand(s). Laforet also suggests that companies can positively influence to the brand perception by undertaking some strategic actions.

When companies have created brand positioning strategies they aim to establish a value proposition. Authors emphasize the importance of value proposition, and Drucker (1999) claims, that business success is based on creation of value and wealth (cited in Lindic and

Marques da Silva, 2011). The value proposition is defined to be the description of the customer need, and the solution that addresses the need that customers have (Lefrot, 2010, p. 63). Furthermore, it describes how a company's offer differs from those of its competitors and explains why customers should buy from that company and not from the competition (Lindic and Marques da Silva, 2011). Basically, since consumers are proven to be driven to buy brands instead of products, and benefits instead of product characteristics, value proposition is used by companies to deliver their message about their brand's value and benefits to the targeted consumers.

2.2 Corporate branding

As brands have been said to be among the most valuable assets of a company (see page 3), branding is also actively used in the corporate context. As consumers are constantly turning to brands in their purchasing decisions, it is important for companies to consider and improve their corporate brands and reputations (Laforet, 2010). This chapter presents definitions of corporate branding and its connection with *employer branding*.

2.2.1 Definitions

Laforet (2010) describes corporate branding as follows:

“[Corporate branding] often refers to the company as a brand. Corporate branding also gives a strategic direction for an organisation's activities, providing consistency through the connection between positioning, communication and staff working style/behaviour.”

Furthermore, Balmer (1998) says that corporate brand is a promise between organisation and its key stakeholders (cited in Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng, 2010), and Einwiller and Will (2002) state that “...corporate branding concerns the systematic planned management and behaviour, communication, and symbolism in order to attain a favourable and positive reputation with target audiences of an organisation” (cited in Foster *et al.* 2010). In other words, as branding is used in many contexts to create value and to meet the expectations of the target audiences, in corporate branding, instead of a product or service, a company is branded to seem different and more favourable compared to the competing organisations in the eyes of a company's key stakeholders. Besides including matters such as management, communication and working style of an organisation, the corporate brand is usually

considered to be built up from the corporate identity and its culture, where the corporate identity represents an organisation's aims and values (Foster *et al.* 2010).

2.2.2 Connection between corporate branding and employer branding in attracting talent

The importance of employees has been realised by authors in the corporate branding concept. Anixter (2003) and Hatch and Schultz (2001) say that the behaviour of employees has a major influence on how external stakeholders perceive the corporate brand and make sense of its identity and image (cited in Foster *et al.* 2010). This means the behaviour of current employees of an organisation mirror the corporate image and identity and plays an important role in attracting an organisation's key stakeholders which also include potential job applicants.

Some market researchers have also claimed that strong corporate brands have significant impact in creating positive consumer perceptions of existing products and new product extensions (Hatch and Schultz, 2001). Therefore corporate branding enables marketing to use the vision and culture of the company as part of its unique selling proposition (Ackerman, 1998; Balmer, 1995, 2001a; de Chernatony, 1999, 2001; Ind, 1997, cited in Hatch and Schultz, 2001). Besides using the corporate brand in creating positive consumer perceptions of existing products or services, it can most certainly also be used in attracting job applicants. Hatch and Schultz (2001) agree saying that "The corporate brand contributes not only to customer-based images of the organisation, but to the images formed and held by all its stakeholders [which include also potential employees]".

2.3 Employer branding

Companies have realised the power and importance of brands, and are now starting to increasingly nurture another vital brand; the employer brand (Tsao and Leske, 2009). The idea of the employer brand is still relatively young (Rosethorn, 2009), but nowadays it is considered, by several different authors, central to an organisation's long-term success (Tsao and Leske, 2009). This chapter presents the *employer branding* concept with definitions. The chapter will further get in more detail about external employer branding, and discuss its necessity for organisations.

2.3.1 Definitions

Since employer branding is one form of branding, it has similar characteristics as product or corporate branding. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2010) suggests the following definition for employer branding: "...a set of attributes and qualities – often intangible - that makes an organisation distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience, and appeals to those people who will thrive and perform best in its culture". This means that as marketers have created ways to attract customers, communicate with them and gain their loyalty, employer branding aims to market what an organisation has to offer to potential and existing employees while using the same marketing techniques. Different authors have the same approach. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) state in their research that branding can also be used in the area of human resource management; they give the following definition for employer branding: "Employer branding represents a firm's efforts to promote, both within and outside the firm, a clear view of what makes it different and desirable as an employer." From both of the definitions it can be clarified that employer branding and its related activities aim to distinguish an organisation from other companies as a better place to work and additionally to give a realistic image of an organisation as a workplace. This idea is similar to the strategy of differentiation in product, service or corporate branding. Authors state that when one organisation is considered to be a more attractive place to work than the others, potential candidates choose to apply for work for that company thus enabling the company to possibly acquire the people with the most talent and know-how related to the company's industry and operations. Authors refer to this strategy as *Employer of Choice*, where within a company's respective industry companies attempt to construct a unique *employer brand identity* based on an *employer value proposition* that is deliberately constructed to set an organisation apart from competitors in some meaningful way (Hegar, 2007; Herman and Gioia, 2001; Vogel, 2006 cited in Wickham and O'Donohue 2009).

According to research (Martin and Hetrick, 2006; Edwards, 2010) employer branding is the image the company has as a workplace as seen through the eyes of potential applicants, and is strongly linked with the concept of the *employer value proposition*, or *employment experience* or *employment offering*, as some authors call it. This means that when product or service branding aims to communicate what value their product or service can deliver to the consumers, employer branding is used to communicate what the organisation has to offer to its employees, thus what value the organisation promises to deliver to its

workforce. These include the tangible, such as salary, and intangible, such as company culture and values, features an organisation offers to its employees (Edwards, 2010). Authors suggest that companies should create their own unique employment experience which aligns with their operations and values and which they believe will attract the wanted recruits. Through the use of employer branding and its related activities companies should communicate the employment experience, or employer value proposition, to the potential and desirable applicants in order to attract them to apply and work for the company.

2.3.2 Relationship between internal and external employer branding

Employer branding activities are used to attract applicants and to retain acquired and existing employees. This can be understood from the HR equivalent for the *marketing mix* by Martin and Hetrick (2006) - attraction, recruitment, motivation and retention.

The aim of external employer branding is to create a realistic and attractive image of a company as a workplace to external audiences, particularly to potential applicants; internal employer branding is meant to target the existing employees to make them want to stay employed with the company, thereby reducing staff turnover (Kaliprasad, 2006). Internal branding thus means that the branding continues after recruitment to prove that a company is indeed a 'good place to work'. Many authors, such as St. Aubin and Carlsen (2008, p. 13), also emphasise the importance of transparency between the internal and external employer brands: They say that a company with an outstanding employer brand matches its internal brand with the external employer brand. This means that a company's value proposition should match with the actions of employees at all levels on a consistent basis. Jenner and Taylor (2007) also argue that the success of employer branding is based on its ability to provide the benefits it promises, and state that a potential pitfall for companies is over-branding, creation of unrealistic expectations of organisational life. The authors' claims are reasonable; a company which fails to deliver its employer brand promise will face employee dissatisfaction which is more likely to result in high staff turnover.

Companies are also advised by authors to use internal employer branding to make their staff spread good word about their organisation as a workplace. The famous employer branding consultant and CEO of Employer Branding International, Brett Minchington (2008), claims that current employees play a significant role in delivering the brand promise to external audiences. Minchington refers to the employees as *brand ambassadors*.

The brand ambassadors communicate to the potential hires what they can expect from joining the company and ensure the current employees that they have made the right decision in becoming a member of the organisation. St. Aubin and Carlsen (2008, p. 17) share the same opinion; they say that employees can impact and convey the brand values to various publics and the employees could be the determining factor in the brand's success or failure. The authors' arguments are likely to be correct since nowadays people are trusting of peer recommendations when it comes to considering the value of a brand.

2.3.3 Building and communicating the external employer brand

Different authors emphasise different points for building a company's employer value proposition and communicating it to the potential recruits in the form of employer branding. Rosenthorn, Hodes and Mensik (2007) say that organisations must look inside themselves and question what it really takes to find and recruit the talent they need. Martin and Hetrick, (2006, p. 279) cite MacKenzie and Glynn (2001) saying that companies must recognise what is compelling about their organisation. In other words, authors advise that companies must realise what the people they wish to acquire in their organisation look from their employers. Rosenthorn *et al.* (2007) also emphasise that "no organisation should be aiming to be all things to all people", which is reasonable since different people and people representing different industries, different positions, age, gender and experience levels presumably appreciate different things. Research by Wilden, Gudergan and Lings (2010) further emphasises this point; their research showed that more experienced applicants were likely to value a specific company's contribution to their career profile and chances for promotion, whilst less experienced applicants expressed greater interest towards short-term benefit such as income. This shows that companies should consider building up their employment experience from an array of different features depending on the target audience(s).

Besides thinking what the possible recruits actually seek from employers, companies are also advised to look inside their organisation to realise what value they currently deliver to their employees. St. Aubin and Carlsen (2008, p. 13) suggest this by saying that companies must understand what it is like to work for their organisation and what thrives their employees' desire to keep working for their company. That is reasonable since the only way to find out the current true employer brand is to learn it from the current employees. This way companies can ensure the transparency between their internal and external

brands, which importance is highly emphasised by different authors such as St. Aubin and Carlsen (2008) and Jenner and Taylor (2007) (see page 8). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) agree with the other authors and claim that inaccuracy between the internal and external employer brand is likely to result in more intentions to quit, reduced job satisfaction, reduced organisational trust and decreased job performance.

Another useful point in building and communicating the employer brand involves management and leadership. The topic has not yet aroused a vast amount of published literature; therefore, the amount of authors who research the topic appears to be limited. Davies (2007) asks a question in his research “who should be responsible for managing the employer brand?” and one answer option can be found from an article of Rosethorn *et al.* (2007); they say that employer branding is responsibility and opportunity of whole organisation and add, that the behaviours, and particularly the behaviours of leadership actually deliver the brand value to the employees. Mosley (2007) also says, that “If you fail to put in place the management systems and the senior management support for them [the care and coherence of the employer brand] then the whole employer brand initiative may wither and result in nothing more than some tinkering with recruitment advertising.” In other words, even though the planning and implementation of employer branding and all of its related activities would be the responsibility of for example the Human Resources and Marketing departments, the authors say that the success of everything depends whether the management is on board. Rosethorn *et al.* (2007) summarize this idea with a good sentence: “Success demands ‘glue’, sponsorship from the very top and an appreciation of the topic!”

The following figure demonstrates discussed matters involved in the creation of the employment experience:

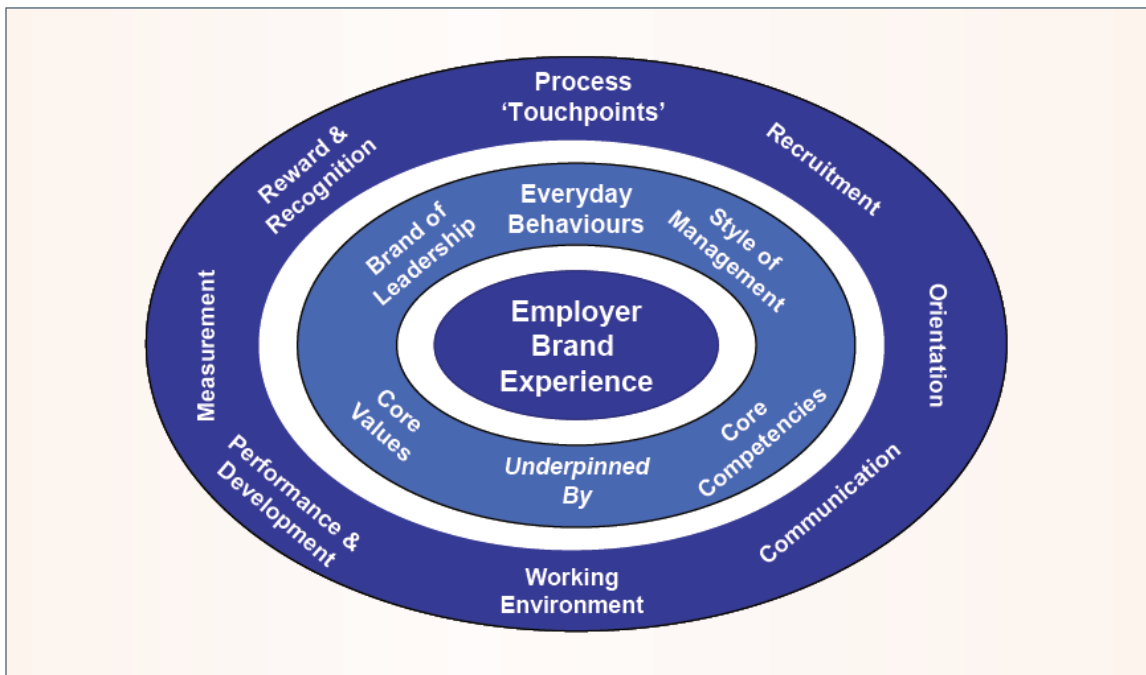


Figure 1 : Some of the most powerful employer brand 'touch-points' (Adopted from Mosley, 2009)

When companies manage to determine the kind of image that would be the most attractive for potential recruits, align it with the current brand inside their organisation, and get the management on board with the employer branding concept, the next step is to communicate the brand and employer value proposition externally to the target audiences to attract potential job applicants. According to a 2004 survey by The Conference Board (a New York non-profit research organisation), 81 % of marketing executives favoured traditional external-print-and-broadcast media, and 77 % favoured internal-print media in communicating the employer brand to employees and recruits (cited in Johnson and Roberts, 2006). However, Johnson and Roberts (2006) suggest that an employer brand program should include all media, and especially the Internet. St. Aubin and Carlsen (2008, p. 21) also say that the most important communication channel for the employer brand is the company website, although the branding can be accomplished through various channels such as direct mail, print advertising, radio, special events and internal communications. St. Aubin and Carlsen (2008, p. 21) also add that organisations with good recruiting websites have the most qualified applicants. Due to the high usage of the Internet for information searches (Internet World Stats, 2011) it seems reasonable to communicate the employer brand through a company website. However, no empirical

research could be found that states where the job applicants themselves would prefer to find information about a potential employer.

2.3.4 Necessity of employer branding for organisations to attract talent

Kaliprasad (2006) states, that in order for a company to remain competitive it needs to acquire capable people who will determine whether or not the company will be successful. It is true that a company cannot operate without people, and therefore attracting and retaining the best people to an organisation seems reasonable and even crucial. Due to the rise of increasingly competitive labour markets, where competition of good employees is strong (Wilden *et al.*, 2010), the importance of acquiring the best employees becomes even more significant; every company wants to have the best talent in the industry in their organisation to be more competitive. Employer branding has been introduced by many authors as a way to bring strategic advantage for companies, and Branham (2001), (cited in Wilden *et al.* 2010), suggest employer branding as a means of ensuring access to potential employees. Foster *et al.* (2010) cite Bauhaus and Tikoo (2004) saying, that “Employer branding allows the firm to differentiate itself from other employers competing for talent and to attract applicants to ideally possess similar, if not the same, values as the organisation”. Authors also claim, that employer branding results in increasing applicant quantity and quality (Collins and Han, 2004 cited in Foster *et al.*, 2010), and thus increases the organisational performance (Fulmet *et al.*, 2003 cited in Foster *et al.*, 2010). Baukhaus and Tikoo (2004) say that brands are one of the most valuable assets of an organisation and therefore brand management is a key activity in many firms. The authors reiterate that branding efforts are actively used in the development of product and corporate brands and they suggest that branding activities can also be used in the area of human resources management to attract and retain employees. But what actually attracts people to work for a certain company?

Since the concept *employer branding* is relatively new in the business and academic world, there is a limited amount of research available. The research available almost uniformly states that employer branding is ‘good’ and important for companies. However, since the concept is new and not so widely researched there is also a limited amount of information available about what exactly people are seeking from the experience of employment and why certain companies are more attractive to the eyes of recruits than the others. Martin (2007), shares this idea when saying that “employer branding has still not been subject to a

forensic examination of how it is supposed to work in theory, whether it works in practice, from an evidence-based perspective, and under what conditions it will work most effectively”. Moroko and Uncles (2008) also say, that the characteristics of successful or unsuccessful employer branding have not yet been examined.

An *employer brand* has been said to include features such as the organisation’s key values and how it generally operates (Edwards, 2010), functional benefits such as salary, benefits and leave allowances, symbolic benefits which relate to the perceptions about the prestige of the firm, and the social approval applicants imagine they will receive if they work for the firm (Baukhaus and Tikoo 2004). But when examining the definitions of a corporate brand one can realise that they seem to include terms like *corporate identity* and *corporate values* (Harris and Chernatony 2001), and Foster *et al.* (2010) say in their research that “corporate branding concerns the systematic planned management of behaviour, communication and symbolism in order to attain a favourable and positive reputation with target audience of an organisation”. Moroko and Uncles (2008) also say in their research, that employer branding shares theoretical foundations with both consumer and corporate branding, and impacts many of the same stakeholder groups which include staff, customers, distributors, shareholders, etc. This clearly shows that besides attracting potential and existing customers among the other company stakeholders, the corporate brand also has an important role in attracting recruits to apply for work, and the corporate brand has a strong influence in creating the employment experience. Is it necessary for companies to put extra effort in establishing an attractive employer brand, or would it be enough to pay more attention in creating the corporate brand equally attractive for all the stakeholders?

Edwards (2010) says in his research, that job applicants are more likely to apply for a job at an organisation that has a positive company reputation. Edwards also mentions that socially responsible companies are generally seen as more attractive employers. The author also cites the research made by Cable and Turban (2003), which shows that there are two factors that predict positive job seeker reputations - the degree of familiarity with the organisations and external ratings of the company reputation. This clearly shows that globally or nationally well-known companies with good reputations seem to be attractive as employers to the eyes of potential applicants. Familiar brand name and good reputation are not usually the result of employer branding but the result of successful corporate and product or service branding.

Besides clearly employment related features like salary, leave allowances and career development, the employment experience or employment value proposition communicated by *employer branding* often seems to include many of the same features like the corporate brand. However, there are moments when attributes such as salary, career development and working environment have a crucial effect on applicants' decisions to apply and work for a certain company. Wilden *et al.* (2010), found out in their research that companies do not provide enough information regarding the employment itself, which had been seen as negative by some of the respondents who they had interviewed for their research. The question again arises, what is actually attracting people to seek employment from a certain company? Do applicants prefer the functional benefits organisations can offer to them or are recruits more interested in applying for a company which has a known brand name and good reputation?

The following figure clearly demonstrates everything what actually contributes in creating the employer brand of an organisation:

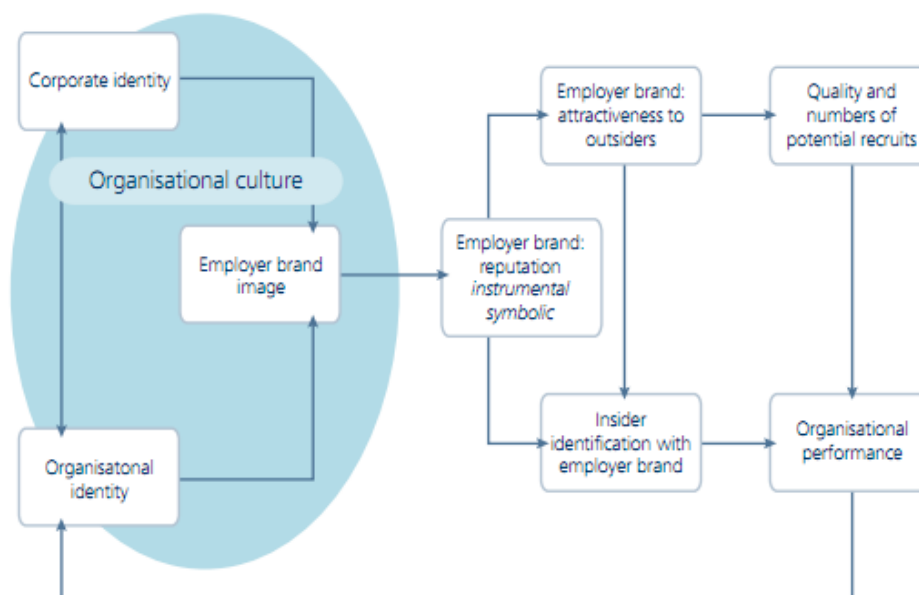


Figure 2 : Storyline to capture the process of employer branding (adopted from Martin, 2007)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research objectives

The aim of this research was to investigate the necessity of *employer branding* and its related activities for organisations to realise whether *employer branding* is necessary in increasing the quantity and quality of job applicants. A company called Triodor Software was used as a case study to find out how the company could attract more talented applicants. Therefore the research aims to answer to the general question 1) whether *employer branding* is needed in attracting talent, and 2) to give practical guidelines for Triodor Software in its *employer branding* activities.

After a critical review of the literature the following arisen questions will be addressed in the study:

- What is actually attracting job seekers to apply for work in a certain company?
- Is effective corporate branding enough to attract more job applicants?
- Can effective *employer branding* attract applicants to a company with an unknown company brand name?
- Should companies use different *employer branding* communications for audiences representing different segments?
- Which channels should organisations mainly use to communicate their employer brand?

3.2 Research method

The research is identified as a case study because it concentrates on one particular company. A case study involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p. 588), which in this case are the job applicants of Triodor Software.

3.2.1 Data collection

A questionnaire was chosen as the data collection method for the research because a questionnaire provides an efficient way to collect responses from a larger sample (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, p. 361). Online distribution of the survey was considered as the best

possible way to collect the data. Other options could have been distributing the survey in a paper form among applicants who had arrived for an interview, or to conduct phone interviews among job applicants. However, it was very important that all the respondents would stay completely anonymous for the questionnaire. Not only because of ethical issues, but because the questionnaire and answers given could not affect to the company's recruitment processes. Lack of anonymity could have caused more cautious answers when respondents would had thought that the answers can have an effect to their employment possibilities. Therefore online questionnaire was considered as the only option for data collection to ensure complete anonymity. This was considered very important in order to gain as accurate answers as possible for the research.

An online questionnaire was also considered to have more advantages considered to a paper questionnaire; an online system enables an easy and quick distribution of the survey to a larger sample, and gives an access for the researcher to easily follow the amount of answers and analyse the results. Besides strengthening the anonymity of the respondents since the researcher does not need to collect the answers in person, in an online questionnaire there is also a less likelihood for the answers to be misinterpreted by the researcher, thus a lower likelihood of contamination or distortion of the answers, since the answers are not handwritten (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, p. 364).

When conducting a questionnaire one should ensure that it will collect the precise data which is required to answer to the research questions (Sanders *et al.*, 2009, p. 361). That is why when creating the survey careful thought was given for the questions, structure and the overall design of the questionnaire to get the necessary data for the research. The survey was created by an online survey tool called Survey Monkey (surveymonkey.com). After applying for a job at Triodor Software in a Turkish job portal (kariyer.net), the applicants received an automatic message to their personal profile with a thank you for applying -text and a request to answer the survey with a link leading directly to the questionnaire. This was considered as the best option since it could be ensured that the link was accessible only for the job applicants of Triodor Software.

When building up the survey it was considered important not to make it too long. As the questionnaire was available online, it would have been easy for a respondent to leave the survey and leave it unfinished if considered too long or time consuming. Therefore the survey was build up from only eleven carefully considered questions to ensure that

respondents would have time and interest to finish it all. The questions in the survey were built up mostly from closed questions. This kind of pre-coded approach is thought to be better when a researcher wants to compare the ideas and experiences of many people (Fisher, Colin & Bulgear, 2009). Closed questions are also quicker to answer, and responses are easier to compare and analyse (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Four types of closed questions were included:

- List, where respondents could choose multiple answers,
- category, where only one answer could be chosen from the given options,
- ranking, where respondents were asked to put given options in order, and
- matrix, where responses to multiple questions were asked using by the same grid (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Two open ended questions were included in the end of the questionnaire. Open approach is good if the researcher is looking for new ideas or does not know what kind of answers to get from the respondents (Fisher *et al.*, 2009). In this case the respondents own opinion was wanted, and closed questions with options to choose from could have been leading the answers to a certain direction.

3.2.2 Sampling

Probability sampling was used to choose the sample group for this research. In probability sampling a researcher chooses the sample group, based on own judgement, which will best support meeting the research objectives and finding the answers to the research questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, p. 214). In this case the sample group was chosen to be all job applicants of Triodor Software during a certain period of time and the survey link was given to applicants of all positions. Since for example one objective was to find possible differences between applicants representing different work experience levels, it was reasonable to include all job applicants to the sample group. There was also no reason to choose respondents from certain age or gender groups, because employers are often seeking for talented applicants without looking to age or gender.

The survey was distributed to all of the company's job applicants which included applications to altogether 14 positions. Of those positions 12 were IT and software development related positions, and two were Human Resources related positions. Almost 50 % of all job applications were submitted to the Human Resources related positions, and

the other little more than 50 % of applications were submitted to the IT and software development related positions.

3.2.3 Limitations

During the research three possible limitations could be identified; sample group, language and questionnaire design.

Sample Group

Because the survey was distributed to all the job applicants of Triodor Software, answers came from applicants representing different knowledge areas. Almost 50 % of the job applicants who received the link to the survey represented job applicants applying for Human Resources related positions. This can lead the results to resemble the preferences of the professionals in this area. However, Triodor Software is mostly looking for software and engineering professionals, so it might have been more useful for the company to find out the desires and preferences of only engineering and software development professionals.

Language

One definite limitation recognized was the language of the survey used to collect the data. The company's office among which applicants the survey was distributed is situated in Turkey, and therefore majority of the applicants were Turkish, and English was not their mother tongue. Although all the company's job applicants are required to know English, the fact that the questionnaire was not in the native language of the respondents had a chance to cause some inaccuracy in the data when some of the respondents may not have been able to understand all the questions correctly. Answering to open ended questions in English can also be challenging for those respondents who do not know English well, which has a possibility to cause bias when the researcher is analysing the answers. However, regardless of this limitation the survey had to be in English because if it had been translated into Turkish and presented in two languages respondents might have answered to the open ended questions in Turkish. This would have been problematic for the researcher who would have been unable to understand and thus analyse the answers.

Questionnaire design

Another limitation of the research can arise from the questionnaire design. Although online survey tools give an opportunity for the user to enable settings which prevent a participant

to submit the survey without answering to all of the questions, it is not hundred percent proof. In a ranking style closed end question respondents can rank only part of the options, and leave some of the options unranked. This leads to some inaccuracy when calculating the percentages of each answer when all options have not received the same amount of answers. Open ended questions can be skipped over too by writing something irrelevant. Respondents can find open ended questions time consuming (Saunders *et al.*, 2009) and therefore some participants can leave them unanswered or write something irrelevant.

3.2.4 Timing

The survey was available to be taken for one month from 13th December 2011 to 13th January 2012. After one month the link was removed from the auto response job applicants received after submitting an application, and it was not possible to enter the survey anymore through the link given. This way only the responses from the certain time period were used in the analysis of the results.

3.3 Ethical issues

Ethical issues may arise in every stage of the research starting from deciding the topic to research design and data access, data collection, storing the data and analysing and reporting the data (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). This means that the researcher must take ethics into consideration during all stages of the research. Certain ethical issues arise during a research process, which include privacy of applicants, voluntary nature of participation and possibility to withdraw, confidentiality of data provided by participants, and full objectivity of the researcher (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). These issues will be taken into consideration related to the nature of the research.

As Triodor Software was used as a case study in this research, the topic was discussed with a representative of the company. Although the research was primary done for a Bachelor's thesis, the topic was decided in a way that it would be beneficial also for the company in question. The research did not contain any confidential information of the company and all data used was collected externally, so no ethical issues was raised from the cooperation with Triodor Software.

The data collection was done by using an online questionnaire. Self-completion questionnaires in a survey form may not seem to raise any serious ethical issues when there

is no personal contact between the researcher and respondent, but there are still some potential areas of concern (Oliver, 2010, p. 57). These mostly concern anonymity of applicants and voluntary participation. During the survey the researcher had an access to see all job applications Triodor Software had received during the time period the questionnaire was available. However, since the questionnaire included only one demographical question, it would have been impossible for the researcher to recognize any participants of the survey. This ensured complete anonymity of the respondents. The participants were also informed before entering to the survey where the responses will be used. Online questionnaire also enabled respondents to leave the survey whenever they wanted, and answering to the survey was voluntary. It was also made clear for the participants that answering to the survey would not affect negatively or positively to their employment possibilities at Triodor Software. All the data was treated as confidential and only the researcher had an access to the data in the online survey tool profile which was secured with a specific username and password.

Maintenance of objectivity is vital during an analysis stage to make sure that data collected is not misinterpreted and to diminish all selectivity of what data to report (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). During the research the researcher was employed by the organisation used as a case study. Therefore it was important for the researcher to pay attention to be objective when reporting the results of the research.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the research, which were collected by distributing a survey among Triodor Software’s job applicants. The survey reached 218 people of whom 35 answered. This makes the response rate 16 %.

The first question asked the respondents’ experience level in years. The aim of the question was to see from which experience level groups Triodor Software gets applications, and to understand differences of opinions between the members representing different work experience levels. The participants of the survey represented all experience level groups, but majority of the respondents (51, 4 %) were inexperienced with one year of work experience the most. Twenty percent of the participants had 2-5 years of work experience, and 28, 6 % of the respondents were on a more senior level with more than 5 years of work experience (Figure 3).

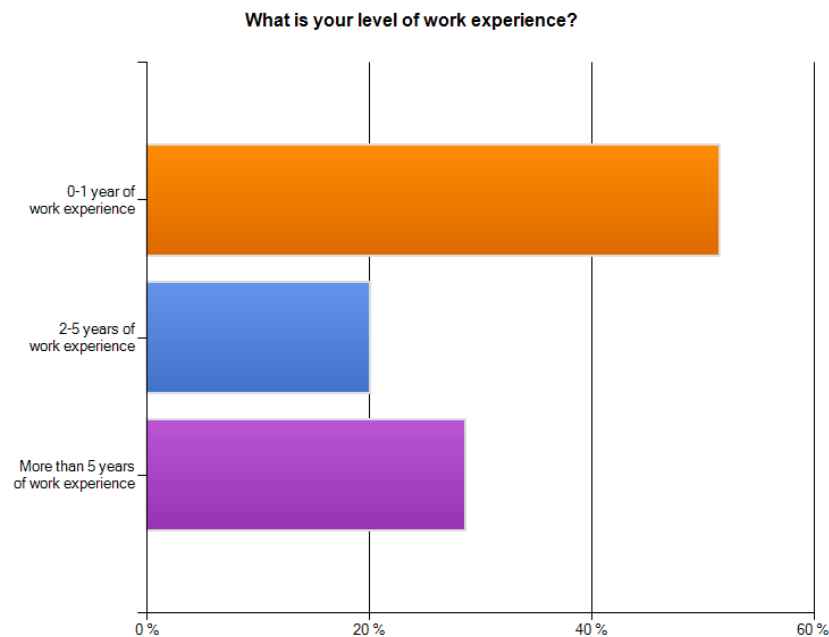


Figure 3 : Level of work experience

The next question asked where the respondents preferred to find information about a company they are planning to apply for a job. This question was asked to understand where companies should emphasise their *employer branding* communication activities. All options got some answers, but clearly the most popular options were company’s corporate website and dedicated career website/career part of a corporate website. Almost half of the

respondents (45, 7 %) chose company career website as the first place they prefer to find information about a potential employer. Company’s corporate website was not far behind; 34, 3 % chose it as the first preferred place to find information about a company before applying. Figure 4 presents clearly the division of all the answers.

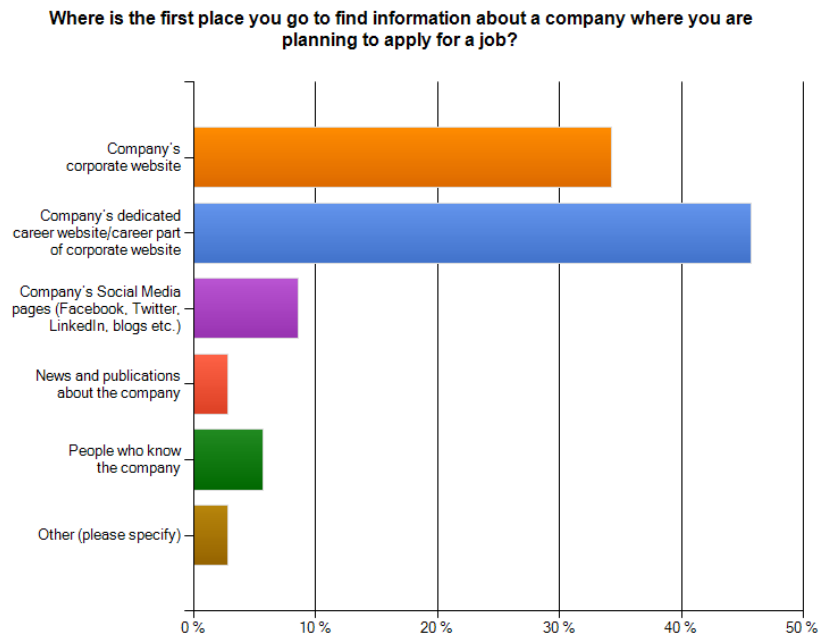


Figure 4 : Preferred information source about a company before applying

The respondents were also asked to share their opinion about statements regarding finding information about a company’s operations and possible success, possible information regarding a company as a workplace, and stating the importance of a friend’s opinion about a company as a good place to work before considering to submit an application. The aim of this question was to find out what kind of information job applicants are looking for when considering applying for a job in a company. Almost thirty-five percent (34, 3 %) of the respondents strongly agreed that they want to find information about a company, its operations and possible success before applying, 45, 7 % agreed, 17, 1 % partly agreed and only 2, 9 % strongly disagreed. Most of the respondents also wanted to find information about company as a workplace before applying, when 85, 8 % of respondents chose either the ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ option. Friend’s recommendation of a company was not considered as important as the previous statements; 14, 3 % strongly agreed with the statement that friend’s recommendation of a company is important, 37, 1 % agreed, 25, 7 % partly agreed and 22, 8 % of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The division of all answers can be seen from Figure 5.

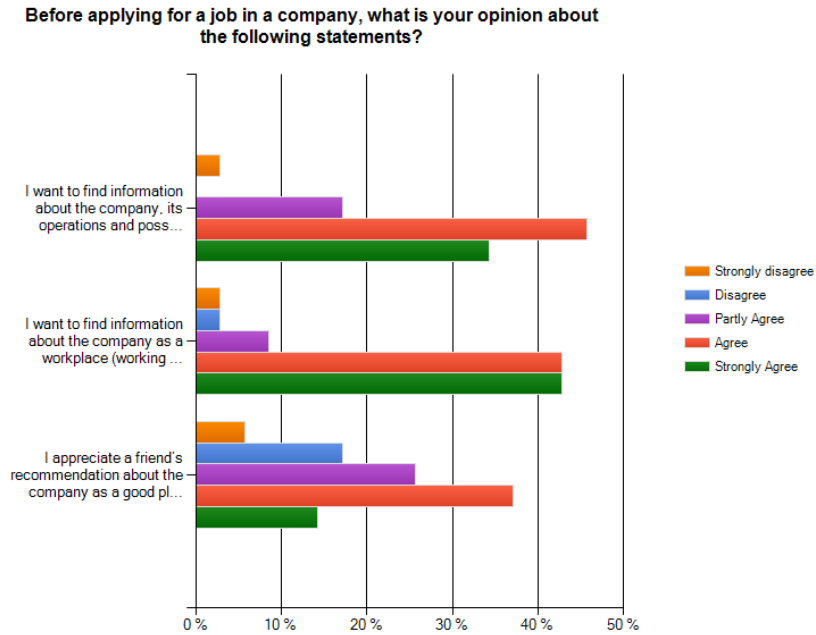


Figure 5 : Opinion about getting certain information before applying

In the next question respondents were asked to rank company characteristics in order stating which characteristics they consider most attractive in a potential employer. This question was important to understand what exactly is attracting job applicants when they consider applying for a job in a company. As can be seen from Table 1, answers varied greatly, and there was no characteristic which would have been clearly more attractive among all the participants. Although globally known brand name and a company offering products/services the participants would like to purchase were chosen as the most attractive characteristic of a potential employing company more than the others, both options were also chosen by some other respondents as the least attractive characteristics. This same variety appeared in all the characteristics.

What is the most attractive characteristic of a company as an employer? Rank the following characteristics on a scale 1-8 (1 = Most attractive, 8 = Least attractive).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Globally known brand name	21,9 %	3,1 %	15,6 %	3,1 %	12,5 %	12,5 %	15,6 %	15,6 %
Chances for career development	7,1 %	17,9 %	10,7 %	14,3 %	17,9 %	10,7 %	10,7 %	10,7 %
Socially responsible company	7,4 %	18,5 %	14,8 %	14,8 %	7,4 %	7,4 %	11,1 %	18,5 %
High salary and good benefits	10,3 %	24,1 %	20,7 %	3,4 %	10,3 %	3,4 %	13,8 %	13,8 %
High growth and high profit rates	3,7 %	11,1 %	11,1 %	14,8 %	18,5 %	29,6 %	11,1 %	0,0 %
Flexible and enjoyable working environment	13,3 %	16,7 %	6,7 %	16,7 %	23,3 %	13,3 %	3,3 %	6,7 %
Training, learning, and development opportunities	15,2 %	6,1 %	21,2 %	24,2 %	6,1 %	12,1 %	12,1 %	3,0 %
Offering products/services I would like to purchase	27,3 %	3,0 %	9,1 %	6,1 %	3,0 %	12,1 %	18,2 %	21,2 %

Table 1 : Attractive characteristics of a company as an employer

As majority of the respondents (51, 4 %) represented job applicants with not at all or very little of work experience, the total results might show more the results of this group. Therefore it is necessary to look at the results separately from each experience group to understand whether there are some significant differences in opinions between applicants representing different level of work experience. Twenty percent of the respondents had 2-5 years of work experience, and 28 % had more than 5 years of work experience.

When the answers were divided according to the respondents' work experience levels, a clearer separation could be seen, though there were differences in opinions as well among the applicants representing different experience levels. For example among applicants with little or none work experience a company offering products/services the participants would like to purchase seemed to be considered as attractive, whereas globally known brand name was not considered to be so attractive. However, also in this case answers vary and all characteristics seem to be attractive in the eyes by some respondents and not attractive in the eyes of others as can be seen from Table 2.

0-1 year of working experience: What is the most attractive characteristic of a company as an employer?

Rank the following characteristics on a scale 1-8 (1 = Most attractive, 8 = Least attractive).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Globally known brand name	20,0 %	0,0 %	6,7 %	0,0 %	13,3 %	26,7 %	13,3 %	20,0 %
Chances for career development	7,7 %	23,1 %	15,4 %	7,7 %	23,1 %	15,4 %	7,7 %	0,0 %
Socially responsible company	0,0 %	14,3 %	28,6 %	14,3 %	7,1 %	14,3 %	14,3 %	7,1 %
High salary and good benefits	7,7 %	15,4 %	23,1 %	7,7 %	15,4 %	0,0 %	15,4 %	15,4 %
High growth and high profit rates	0,0 %	15,4 %	7,7 %	23,1 %	15,4 %	23,1 %	15,4 %	0,0 %
Flexible and enjoyable working environment	13,3 %	20,0 %	6,7 %	20,0 %	13,3 %	6,7 %	6,7 %	13,3 %
Training, learning, and development opportunities	17,6 %	11,8 %	17,6 %	17,6 %	0,0 %	17,6 %	11,8 %	5,9 %
Offering products/services I would like to purchase	35,3 %	5,9 %	11,8 %	0,0 %	5,9 %	5,9 %	11,8 %	23,5 %

Table 2 : Attractive characteristics of a company as an employer (0-1 year work experience)

After looking at the answers from the second group with 2-5 years of work experience some differences can again be seen, although also in this case answers are varying depending on the individual participants' opinions. From Table 3 it can be seen, that among this group globally known brand name seems to be even less attractive characteristic compared to the previous group. High salary and good benefits, flexible and enjoyable working environment, and training, learning and development opportunities were ranked as rather attractive by majority of the participants. A company offering products or services the respondents would like to purchase was also considered as an attractive characteristics by this group, but it was ranked as less important too by many participants representing this group.

2-5 years of work experience: What is the most attractive characteristic of a company as an employer? Rank the following characteristics on a scale 1-8 (1 = Most attractive, 8 = Least attractive).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Globally known brand name	14,3 %	0,0 %	14,3 %	14,3 %	14,3 %	0,0 %	14,3 %	28,6 %
Chances for career development	20,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	40,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	40,0 %
Socially responsible company	20,0 %	20,0 %	0,0 %	20,0 %	20,0 %	0,0 %	20,0 %	0,0 %
High salary and good benefits	16,7 %	33,3 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	16,7 %	16,7 %	16,7 %
High growth and high profit rates	0,0 %	0,0 %	20,0 %	0,0 %	60,0 %	20,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Flexible and enjoyable working environment	16,7 %	33,3 %	0,0 %	16,7 %	16,7 %	16,7 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Training, learning, and development opportunities	0,0 %	0,0 %	50,0 %	16,7 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	33,3 %	0,0 %
Offering products/services I would like to purchase	33,3 %	0,0 %	16,7 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	33,3 %	16,7 %	0,0 %

Table 3 : Attractive characteristics of a company as an employer (2-5 years work experience)

The last group to look at are the more senior level applicants with more than 5 years of work experience. Table 4 shows that in this group globally known brand name was considered as clearly more attractive company characteristic than in the previous groups, and also high salary and good benefits was considered attractive. In this group socially responsible company and company offering products/services the respondents would like to purchase was clearly considered less attractive characteristics than the other groups. It seems that the more work experience the respondents had, the similar their opinion was about the attractive company characteristics when answers did not vary as much as in the previous groups.

More than 5 years of work experience: What is the most attractive characteristic of a company as an employer? Rank the following characteristics on a scale 1-8 (1 = Most attractive, 8 = Least attractive).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Globally known brand name	30,0 %	10,0 %	30,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	0,0 %	20,0 %	0,0 %
Chances for career development	0,0 %	20,0 %	10,0 %	10,0 %	20,0 %	10,0 %	20,0 %	10,0 %
Socially responsible company	12,5 %	25,0 %	0,0 %	12,5 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	50,0 %
High salary and good benefits	10,0 %	30,0 %	30,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	10,0 %
High growth and high profit rates	11,1 %	11,1 %	11,1 %	11,1 %	0,0 %	44,4 %	11,1 %	0,0 %
Flexible and enjoyable working environment	11,1 %	0,0 %	11,1 %	11,1 %	44,4 %	22,2 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Training, learning, and development opportunities	20,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	40,0 %	20,0 %	10,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Offering products/services I would like to purchase	10,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	20,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	30,0 %	30,0 %

Table 4 : Attractive characteristics of a company as an employer (Over 5 years work experience)

When the respondents were asked whether they would hesitate to apply for work in a company they are not familiar with, roughly 50 % said yes and 50 % no. Hundred percent of those respondents who had admitted to hesitate applying to a company they are not familiar with, answered that they would consider applying for work in an unfamiliar company if it offered working environment and conditions fitting to their desires. These questions were asked to see whether job applicants rather apply for work in a company with a known brand, and whether attractive working conditions can change their minds.

When the respondents were asked whether they were familiar with Triodor Software as a company before applying, 74, 3 % of the participants had not heard of the company before. This question was asked to find out whether Triodor Software is known as a company in the Turkish labour market. Figure 6 presents the percentages.

Were you familiar with Triodor Software as a company before applying? If the answer is 'No', move to question 9. If 'Yes', continue to question 8.

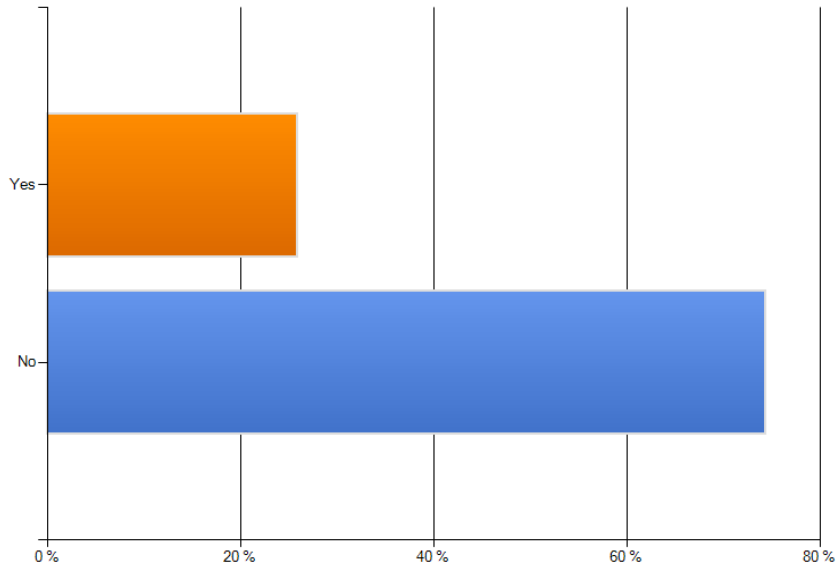


Figure 6 : Familiarity with Triodor

When the respondents were asked from where they had searched information about Triodor Software before applying, 51, 4 % had learned about the company from the company's corporate website. 14, 3 % had looked the company's career website, and 17, 1 % of the respondents had visited the company's career Facebook page for information about the company. 25, 7 % of the participants chose the 'other' option, and all of those had used the Turkish career portal kariyer.net as their information source of Triodor Software. The aim of this question was to understand from where the job applicants look information of Triodor Software most actively. Division of the answers can be seen from Figure 7.

**Before applying for a job at Triodor, where did you find information about the company?
(You may select all that apply)**

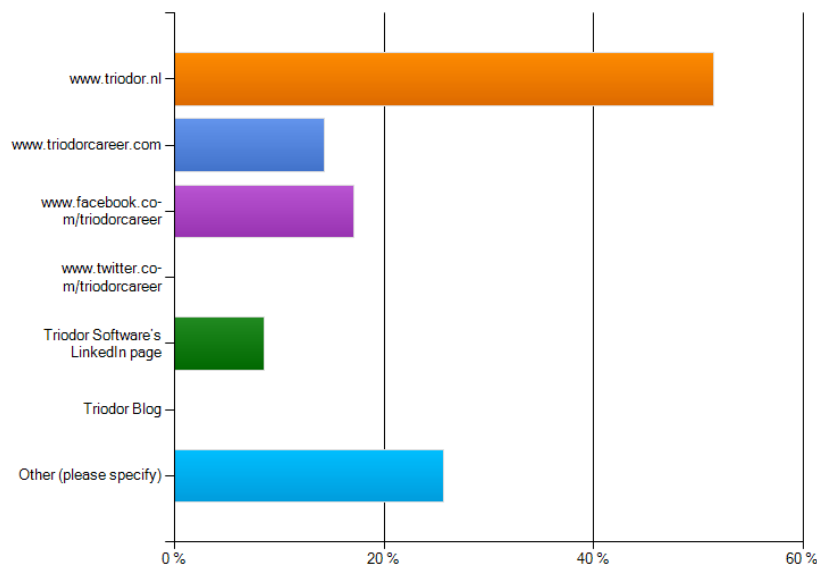


Figure 7 : Information source of Triodor before applying

The last two questions of the survey were open ended enabling the respondents to give their own opinion about the given subject. In the first question of the two the participants were asked to tell what kind of an image they had of Triodor Software as a company. This question was asked to understand how Triodor Software is currently seen from outside. Although respondents gave different kinds of answers, some answers had similarities and five different groups could be identified: international, opportunities for growth and development, professional, attractive working environment and other. About twenty-five percent (25, 7 %) of the respondents answered that the image they got of Triodor Software was global and international company. Here are few examples of the answers:

“International software company creating lots of projects in different areas”

“Big and international company”

Almost fifteen percent (14, 3 %) of the respondents stated in their answers that they saw Triodor Software as a company where they see opportunities for growth and development. Respondents gave answers such as “Global brand and good for personal improvements” and “Triodor looks like a creative and innovative company and I believe I can improve my skills in this company”. Triodor Software was also seen as a professional company, and 20, 0 % of the respondents stated this in their answers saying for example that Triodor Software is a “professional software company which is growing” and that it is a “formal and improved company”.

Almost fifteen percent (14,3 %) of the respondents saw Triodor Software as a company with attractive working environment and gave answers such as “attractive and enjoyable” and “social and enjoyable working conditions”. Last group which could be identified from the answers was the ‘other’ group, which consisted of answers which could not be identified as part of any of the groups above, or did not give an understandable answer. About thirty-five percent (34,3 %) of the answers belonged to this group. Division of answers can be seen from Figure 8.

What kind of image did you get of Triodor as a company?

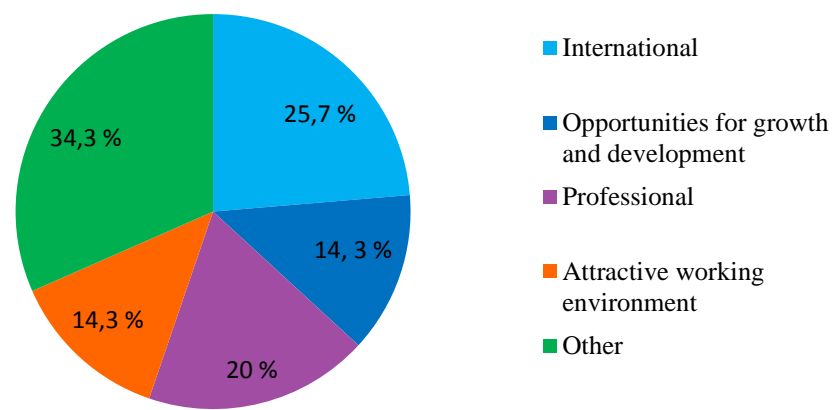


Figure 8 : Image of Triodor Software

The second open ended question asked the respondents to clarify why they decided to apply for work in Triodor Software. This question was asked to understand what factor had actually attracted the applicant to submit an application for Triodor Software. In this question the respondents gave again answers were similarities could be identified, and answers could be divided in to four different groups: international, opportunities for growth and development, job specific reasons and other.

The word ‘international’ and ‘global’ came up also in the answers to the question asking reasons why respondents had applied for work in Triodor Software. Nearly twenty-three percent (22,9 %) of the respondents answered that they applied to Triodor Software because the company was international. Respondents gave answers such as “I want to work in an international company such as Triodor” and “It’s a global company where I have to use my experiences”.

Little over thirty percent (31, 4 %) of the respondents stated that the reason they applied for work in Triodor Software is because the company has opportunities for growth and development. “I want to improve myself and Triodor can be a good way to do so”, “I think I can reach my goals in this company” and “I think Triodor is the place for me to develop” are some examples of answers given by the respondents.

About seventeen percent (17, 1 %) of the respondents answered a job specific reason supporting their decision to apply for work in Triodor Software. Those respondents either stated that the reason for applying was the need for a new job, or they became interested in the job they had applied for. The ‘other’ section included again answers which could not be identified as part of any of the groups above, or were not given in an understandable manner. Almost twenty-nine percent (28, 6 %) of the answers belonged to this group. The division of answers can be seen from Figure 9.

Why did you decide to apply for work in Triodor?

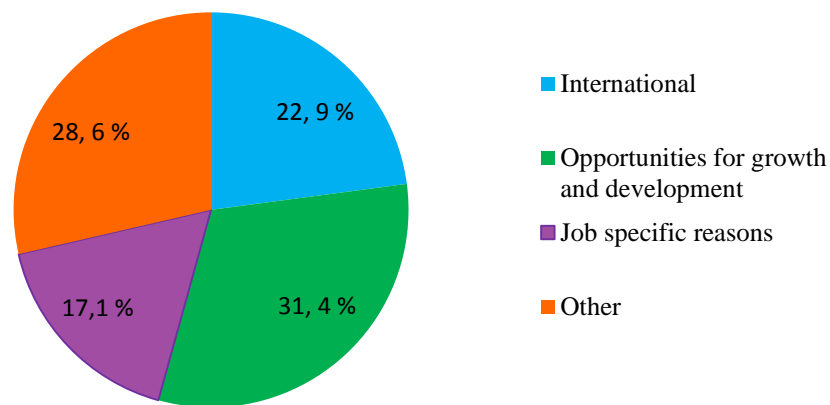


Figure 9 : Reason to apply for work in Triodor Software

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

During the survey the respondents were asked what characteristics of a company are attractive in a potential employer. This question was important to find out what actually attracts job applicants to seek employment from certain companies. Although the answers varied greatly, characteristics such as globally known brand name, high salary and good benefits, and a company offering products/services the respondents would like to purchase were generally considered attractive. This shows that a known brand name and companies with a positive reputation might have greater potential in attracting job applicants.

When the answers were divided according to respondents work experience levels in years, some differences could be seen. Among the respondents with very little or no work experience a company offering products/services the respondents would like to purchase was considered as most attractive by many respondents, but globally known brand name was clearly considered as less attractive by many respondents. Other characteristics were ranked both attractive and less attractive. Among the respondents with some work experience globally known brand name was also considered as less attractive by clearly many respondents, and characteristics such as company offering products/services the respondents would like to purchase was considered more attractive. Among this group also high salary and good benefits, enjoyable and flexible working environment, and training and development opportunities was considered somewhat attractive among many of the respondents. In the last group with respondents with more than five years of work experience globally known brand name, and high salary and good benefits were considered as more attractive characteristics of a company, when other options were considered less attractive.

Although some differences between the three groups can be recognized and certain characteristics were seen as more attractive than the others, in all groups answers varied according to the respondent. This result acted against the fact that job applicants representing different experience levels would generally possess similar desires. The research shows that despite the demographical group a job applicant represents, an individual person has his or her own desires. Although it seems that companies with globally known brand names and positive reputations with possibilities to offer a high salary and good benefits have potential in attracting more job applicants, the research results support the fact that no company should be aiming to be all things to all people.

Different people appreciate different characteristics and therefore a company representing certain characteristics is likely to attract job applicants appreciating those characteristics despite their experience levels. The results may just give a direction of what job applicants generally or job applicants from different experience level groups might appreciate in an employer. However, they are not hundred percent accurate since answers vary greatly based on individual job applicants' desires. Therefore there is no need for companies to establish different *employer branding* communication strategies for job applicants representing different work experience levels.

However, one clear difference could be identified among the respondents representing different work experience levels; the more work experience the respondents had, the more unified their answers were. Among the respondents with no or very little work experience the answers varied a lot, whereas among the respondents with more work experience the answers were more similar. This shows that more experienced job applicants have clearly identified what they are looking from their employers and what is important, whereas younger job applicants with very little or none work experience do not actually know what makes a company a good place to work. This can make attracting younger job applicants easier for a company. Job applicants with more work experience might have stricter requirements for their employers and prefer to work only for companies which fill their requirements.

The research shows that companies with a known corporate brand, or those which offer products/services the job applicants would like to purchase, are characteristics which job applicants appreciate in a potential employer. However, job applicants also clearly appreciate functional features such as salary and work benefits, with a flexible and enjoyable working environment. In the survey the respondents were also asked whether they find it important to find information about a company both as a workplace and about its operations and possible success before applying. Clear majority of the respondents wanted to find information about a potential employer both as a company and as a workplace. This shows that although job applicants appreciate a successful corporate brand when considering a company as an employer, they also wish to find out employment related information about a company before applying.

In a case where a company has an unknown corporate brand in the local labour market *employer branding* can be a preferable solution. In the survey roughly fifty percent of all

the respondents admitted that they hesitate applying for work in a company they are unfamiliar with. However, total hundred percent of those said that they would consider working for an unfamiliar company if it offered working environment and conditions fitting to their desires. This shows that *employer branding* should definitely be used by companies who wish to acquire more work force but do not possess a strong corporate brands in the markets they are operating in. Especially in cases where companies do not wish to build a strong corporate brand in certain markets due to lack of operations *employer branding* can be used to gain visibility.

When it comes to communicating the employer brand the Internet seems to be the best place. Eighty percent of the respondents of the survey chose either the company's corporate website or dedicated career website as the main source to look for information of a potential employer. This means that the corporate website and career part of the website/dedicated career website should be considered as the most important channels to communicate the employer brand by companies.

Based on the information acquired from the research, it is possible to give recommendations and suggestions for Triodor Software for its *employer branding* activities. Since the company does not have a known corporate brand in Turkey, it is also not a known company in the Turkish labour market. Slightly more than seventy-four percent (74, 3 %) of the survey respondents were not familiar with the company prior to applying, which further supports the fact. Therefore in this case *employer branding* can be considered as necessary for Triodor Software in order to attract and acquire new employees.

As the results showed, job applicants could consider applying for work in a company they are unfamiliar with if it offered working environment and conditions fitting to their desires. This can be a key for Triodor Software to attract more job applicants. If the company manages to acquire and show a favourable image as an employer in the eyes of potential job applicants, it can have the potential to attract more recruits.

However, it seems that employer brand is a part and supporting the corporate brand. The research showed that facts such as globally known brand name and a company offering products/services the job applicants would desire to purchase are major factors attracting job applicants. Therefore to attract more job applicants Triodor Software should effectively

include the corporate brand to the employment branding activities. When the survey respondents were asked why they decided to apply for work in Triodor Software, many participants stated that they wanted to work for an international company such as Triodor. However, many respondents also stated that they saw that Triodor Software could offer chances for personal growth and development. This shows that in order to attract talented job applicants Triodor Software should be found desirable both as a company and as an employer by the job applicants.

6. CONCLUSION

The main goal for this research was to find out whether *employer branding* is actually something companies should establish to stay competitive and acquire more job applicants. The aim was to learn if *employer branding* is just a current fashion among business practitioners, or is it actually something every company should take in to consideration now and in the future. Since brands are among a company's most valuable assets (Baukhaus and Tikoo, 2004), it was important to find out whether *employer branding* should be one among those brands, or whether companies' existing brands can be the ones attracting talented job applicants.

After a critical literature review about the topic only a general image and definitions of *employer branding* could be acquired. However, the definitions were overlapping with companies' other brands, such as the corporate brand, and it was not clear what is actually attracting job applicants to certain companies. After a research made among Triodor Software's job applicants some information of this could be acquired. The research showed that known companies with good reputations generally attract job applicants. However, the research also clarified that different people appreciate different characteristics in their employers. There are no certain company characteristics which would attract everyone. This shows that companies should look inside themselves to find out what kind of work place they are and decide what they want to be. This real *employer brand* should be communicated outside to attract those people who appreciate those specific characteristics and thus who would best fit to work in those conditions. Since companies' other brands, such as the corporate brand, also have a great influence in attracting job applicants, it can and should be used together with *employer branding* to get the best results.

In the case of Triodor Software when strong corporate brand does not exist in the local labour market, *employer branding* is crucial to increase the quantity and quality of job applicants. The *employer brand* actually fulfils the corporate brand and therefore a proper mix of the corporate culture and identity together with employment conditions can be the best solution to attract more job applicants with the required talent. However, during the review of existing literature research could be found about the importance of *internal employer branding*. Various authors suggested companies to examine what value they are currently delivering to their employees. This was proven to help in the creation of transparency between an organisations internal and external employer brands. Therefore

before starting *employer branding* activities externally Triodor Software should first properly examine its current working conditions to be able to build a strong and effective *employer brand*.

As this research was made by using one company in one country and operating in one industry as a case study, the results can be somewhat limited. Therefore a wider range of results can be achieved by making a similar research in different industries and different countries. As *employer branding* is getting more popular among business practitioners, it can be also useful to examine its effect on other company operations besides only employment. It could be interesting to find out whether a known and good *employer brand* can have a positive effect to relationships with other company stakeholders such as customers and suppliers.

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9. APPENDICES

9.1 APPENDIX 1 – Questionnaire

1. What is your level of work experience?

- 0-1 year of work experience
- 2-5 years of work experience
- More than 5 years of work experience

2. Where is the first place you go to find information about a company where you are planning to apply for a job?

- Company's corporate website
- Company's dedicated career website/career part of corporate website
- Company's Social Media pages (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs etc.)
- News and publications about the company
- People who know the company
- Other (please specify)

3. Before applying for a job in a company, what is your opinion about the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I want to find information about the company, its operations and possible success.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to find information about the company as a workplace (working environment, career development etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I appreciate a friend's recommendation about the company as a good place to work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What is the most attractive characteristic of a company as an employer? Rank the following characteristics on a scale 1-8 (1 = Most attractive, 8 = Least attractive).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Globally known brand name	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chances for career development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Socially responsible company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High salary and good benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High growth and high profit rates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexible and enjoyable working environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Training, learning and development opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offering products/services I would like to purchase	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Do you hesitate to apply to a company which you are unfamiliar with? If the answer is 'No', move to question 7. If 'Yes', continue to question 6.

- Yes
- No

6. Would you consider working for a company you are unfamiliar with if it offers a working environment and conditions fitting to your desires?

- Yes
- No

7. Were you familiar with Triodor Software as a company before applying? If the answer is 'No', move to question 9. If 'Yes', continue to question 8.

- Yes
- No

8. If you were familiar with Triodor Software before applying, from where you had heard of the company before?

- From a friend
- I had come across with Triodor Software's website
- I had read news and publications about Triodor
- Other (please specify)

9. Before applying for a job at Triodor, where did you find information about the company? (You may select all that apply)

- www.triodor.nl
- www.triodorcareer.com
- www.facebook.com/triodorcareer
- www.twitter.com/triodorcareer
- Triodor Software's LinkedIn page
- Triodor Blog
- Other (please specify)

10. What kind of image did you get of Triodor as a company?

11. Why did you decide to apply for work in Triodor?