

**BRANDING YOUR BRAIN: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL
BRANDING AND NEURODIVERSITY**



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Kalle Viljakainen

Tekijä Kalle Viljakainen

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Ohjaaja Ricardo Galiot

Opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli tutustua henkilöbrändäyksen ja neurodiversiteetin suhteeseen. Opinnäytetyössä oli toiminnallinen osuus ja sen lopputuloksena tuotettiin henkilöbrändiä tukeva verkkosivusto. Autoetnografiaa käytettiin tutkimaan henkilöbrändin ja neurodiversiteetin yhtäläisyyksiä.

Tietopohja perustuu alan kirjallisuuteen, verkkolähteisiin ja tutkimuksiin. Tietopohjassa avataan keskeisimmät käsitteet, taktikat ja hyödyt, jotka liittyvät henkilöbrändäykseen sekä neurodiversiteettiin. Tutkimusote opinnäytetyössä oli toiminnallinen ja autoetnografinen. Toiminnallisessa osuudessa kuvataan verkkosivuston ja muissa digitaalisissa muodoissa ilmentyvän henkilöbrändin luonti pohjautuen teoriaan. Autoetnograafisessa osuudessa kuvattiin ja luotiin yhteys henkilöbrändin ja neurodiversiteetin välillä.

Tutkimusaineistoa kerättiin strukturoimattomalla kyselyllä työyhteisöstä ja kyselyn tuloksia verrattiin VIA instituutin luonnetestin tuloksiin. Lisäksi aineistoon kuului autoetnograafista dataa.

Opinnäytetyö tuotti kokemustietoa henkilöbrändäyksen ja neurodiversiteetin suhteesta, sekä nosti esiin näiden subjektiivisuuden. Molemmat käsitteet liittyvät vahvasti henkilön identiteettiin. Johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että henkilöbrändäyksellä voidaan luoda ymmärrystä, tietoisuutta ja hyväksyntää moninaisuudelle ja inklusiolle.

Avainsanat brändi, henkilöbrändi, neurodiversiteetti, autoetnografia

Sivut 52 sivua ja liitteitä 5 sivua

Author Kalle Viljakainen

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Supervisors Ricardo Galiot

The aim of this thesis was to explore the relationship between personal branding and neurodiversity. The thesis had a practice-based product that designed a website to support the personal brand. Autoethnography was utilized to study the similarities between personal branding and neurodiversity.

A theoretical framework was built based on literature, web sources, and published studies. The knowledge base expands on fundamental definitions, tactics, and advantages related to personal branding and neurodiversity. The thesis mixed practice-based and autoethnographic approaches. The practical section describes the development of the website and digital presentation of the personal brand by utilizing theory. The autoethnographic section was used to describe and establish a relationship between personal brand and neurodiversity.

Data collection for the thesis was done with an unstructured survey in a work community, which was then compared to the VIA institutes' character assessment. Additional data was obtained through autoethnography.

The thesis produced empirical knowledge about the relationship between personal branding and neurodiversity, additionally highlighting the subjectivity of both. Both concepts relate closely to personal identity. In conclusion, personal branding can be utilized to create understanding, awareness, and acceptance of diversity and inclusion.

Keywords brand, personal brand, neurodiversity, autoethnography

Pages 52 pages and appendices 5 pages

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1 Introduction

In today's world, personal branding is more important than ever.

The concept of personal branding has been around in different forms since the 1800s (Waller, 2020), but it has taken a new meaning in recent years. Personal branding is now less about how one presents themselves and more about what one can do. It is no longer all about the image; it is about value as a person and capabilities as an employee or entrepreneur.

As the trend of personal branding grows, so does the need for new and innovative ways to brand oneself. However, one area that needs to explore in depth is personal branding for individuals with neurodiversity. Neurodiversity is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon with many potential benefits for those who live with it. One of the most important of these is a person's ability to brand themselves as one who embraces diversity. Personal branding allows individuals to take control of their identity and make it positive and empowering rather than negative and stigmatizing. Such strategy parallels the neurodiversity social movement, which tries to displace clinical labels of disability with more empowering cultural labels. (Ahmed & Jeffries, 2022, p. 6)

The topic of this thesis is interesting and relevant to the researcher because the researcher is a person with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and aspirations to work in the field of digital marketing and branding as a freelancer after graduation. The researcher explored these themes and looked for a way to incorporate them into the thesis. This thesis will further explore that relationship while developing the researcher's brand. Since the researcher first began considering it, the idea of developing a personal brand website has appealed.

A personal brand website will help to differentiate the researcher from the pool of other candidates applying for the same position after graduation. Personal branding is a critical skill for any professional and essential for those working in creative industries like marketing and branding. (Kang, p. 19). It is vital to stand out from the crowd and having social media

presence and a website accompanying a personal brand is a great way to do that. (Hosain, 2020, p. 2) As a new graduate, the researcher wants to prove that he has the skills necessary to succeed regardless of neurological differences and bring forth awareness of beneficial qualities associated with neurodiversity for organizations. (Avery et al., 2022)

The structural outline for this report is as follows. This thesis has three parts: A product in the form of a website and a report accompanying the development and reflection. First, results from personal branding gained are described. Most importantly, the relationship between neurodiversity and personal branding is elaborated on. This is done with the autoethnographic method, which roots the research into a broader cultural context. The website is developed based on current research about personal branding and associated techniques. The research problem and questions are further elaborated by introducing goals for the project and the future of the personal brand. Finally, significance and research gaps are introduced.

Chapter 2 of this thesis will discuss the process of personal branding, starting with the history of personal branding. After going over the definition of personal branding, tactics and advantages of improving one's brand will be presented. Chapter 2 continues with a definition of the neurodiversity concept, followed by a more detailed exploration of the topic. More specifically, ADHD is discussed. The advantages of neurodiversity are discussed from multiple viewpoints. Neurodiversity is explored from literature sources. Specifically, the contents of Dale Archer's book (2016) *The ADHD Advantage* are reviewed, among other sources. Finally, this theory is used with the design of the author's brand, which uses neurodiversity to differentiate from peers, bring awareness towards issues with how neurodiversity is viewed, and support the researcher's future career goals.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used in the study, which is supported by existing literature and builds on it. This chapter expands on why these methods were chosen. Justifications for the product are discussed in greater detail. Data collected thus far is presented and analysed where applicable. Finally, the relationship between literature and product is discussed.

Chapter 4 describes the planning and implementation of the product step by step with the help of images, among others. Finally, choices made are justified and elaborated further.

Chapter 5 focuses on exploring neurodiversity with an autoethnographic approach, elaborates on the researcher's epiphany for this project, and justifies the need for broader awareness. Cultural implications are further discussed. The chapter presents the findings from empirical research on developing the project. Limitations of the research are introduced. Research questions are discussed, and conclusions are made where applicable. The product is evaluated. Outcomes and implementation of the product are reflected upon. Product future development plans are discussed. Finally, the author's reflections on the thesis process as a whole and possible feedback gained are presented.

1.1 Research problems, goals, and questions

The research objectives set out for this thesis are as follows:

1. The research objective of this study is to explore the relationship between personal branding and neurodiversity.
2. The research objective of this study is to identify the author's strengths and skills to generate an actional implementation in the digital age for the personal brand—a reflection of the chosen methods.

Overall, the research did not set measurable goals for the scope of this thesis project. The researcher seeks to improve skills as well as knowledge in the field. This will be accomplished through research and experimentation. The thesis aims to reflect on the researchers learning about personal branding and neurodiversity while establishing the connection between the two. Additionally, the thesis project is designed to function as a starting point for developing a communication strategy and further elaborating on the target audience and content plan for the future of the personal brand. Following the thesis, the researcher looks to set measurable goals for developing the personal brand by tracking analytics and SEO performance and adjusting accordingly. Future goals for the personal brand are increased communication in blog and social media, further development of the website, creation of an educational destination for neurodiversity, and contributing to fighting the stigma and building a community. Other goals are to expand content creation to include video format and the Finnish language. Lastly, after completing the thesis project, the plan is to build credibility and thought leadership through increased communication in video and text

format on multiple platforms. This attracts freelance opportunities that will allow the researcher to pursue interests in creating content for other companies. Freelancing opportunities are the project's end goal, and the project is developed based on this notion, as freelancing and entrepreneurship are the future career ambitions of the researcher.

According to Skains (2016) research based on practice can often be a process of exploration and discovery; many key insights arise by chance. The initial research question is often vague and typically open-ended, allowing flexibility in practice and space for serendipitous discoveries.

This research seeks to answer the question: "What new knowledge is there to discover from exploring one's brand?" Other sub-questions seek to answer questions:

3. "How can generating a website for a personal brand and having social media presence can help post-graduation?"
4. "How can individuals with neurodiverse conditions use personal branding techniques to improve their lives professionally and personally?"
5. "What did the discovery of being neurodivergent do to me, and how does my brand reflect neurodiversity?"

2 Theoretical background

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of branding processes and how to apply those processes on a personal level in practice. The research will explore how individuals with neurodiverse conditions can brand themselves and neurodiversity as a beneficial trait. This research aims to examine the concept of branding and how it applies in practice. The goal is to learn about the branding process so that one might be able to apply it personally. The research will explore how individuals can use branding as a tool for self-expression and self-identity.

The researcher will also look at how their surroundings can shape one's identity, including the people one interacts with daily. A literature review of current research on the topic of

branding will be conducted to gain an understanding of current best practices in the field. It allows rooting the production of the website to existing literature to draw from.

Literature starts with the history of personal branding and moves on to the definition of personal branding. The author identifies the tactics and advantages of personal branding from the literature. Next, the research identifies the definition of neurodiversity and the advantages it brings. ADHD is more broadly looked at from the perspective of neurodiversity conditions. A gap in the literature regarding personal branding may be attributed to the lack of operationalized concepts for human brands. (Waller, 2020, p. 6)

2.1 History of personal branding

The concept of personal branding was introduced in Napoleon Hill's 1937 book *Think and Grow Rich* under self-positioning. Initially, the idea rose in the 1800s when goods and services started expanding from local to outside communities. 1959 Erving Goffman coined another term viewed as a predecessor for personal branding: impression management. The term was later described in a study by Thompson-Wideside, Turnbull, and Home-Walsh in 2018 as the process of attempting to influence others' opinions about oneself.

Further development for the concept of personal branding can be found in a book by Jack Trout and Al Ries titled *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. (1981) The term's popularity can be attributed to Tom Peters's (1997) article in *Fast Company* magazine. He wrote back then: "To be in business today, our most important job is to be the head marketer for the brand called 'You.' Being CEO of Me Inc. requires you to grow yourself, to promote yourself, to get the market to reward yourself." (Waller, 2020, p. 6)

Notable conflicting research on the coining of the term is published, which attributes it to the works of Goffman in the 1960s or 1980s marketing studies. (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 3) Based on the existing literature, it is evident that the subject of personal branding can be traced back to the times of the industrial revolution. Waller (2020) attributes easier access to technology in this century as the reason for increased awareness and interest in managing one's brand. She mentions the internet and access to personal data to make personal branding processes more accessible and explore industry competitive advantages.

2.2 What is personal branding?

The definition of personal branding is diverse in published research but can be grouped under two categories based on the theoretical approach, which are marketing-related and self-presentative definitions. Lastly, related concepts need to be considered, which are:

- Human branding
- Impression management
- Self-promotion
- Image
- Reputation
- Fame
- Employee branding (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 4)

Marty Neumeier (2006) defines the concept of branding simply as "A brand is a person's gut feeling about a product, service, or company. It is a gut feeling because we are all emotional, intuitive beings, despite our best efforts to be rational." However, according to Waller (2020), some researchers have argued that methodologies used in traditional branding do not apply to human (i.e., personal) branding, citing research published by Conley in 2008 and Lair et al. in 2005. She deduces that technology development makes arguments of Conley and Lair et al. no longer applicable. Hence branding definitions presented by Marty Neumeier (2006) apply to personal branding.

Lair et al. (2005) define the term personal branding in the context of labor markets as referring to a proactive response to the emerging desires of a target audience or market. The authors use the term branding to refer to product development and promotion when used to market persons for entry into or transition within the labor market. (Waller, 2020, p. 6)

Personal branding is a process by which individuals create and manage the perception others have of them. It includes all self-promotion activities through which people communicate their distinct values and resources based on their strengths as they seek to gain visibility and profit in an industry or job market. While talent may be considered a factor in an individual's success, it is only one of many factors that contribute to overall popularity.

Because familiarity breeds liking, people tend to favor those they are familiar with. Trust also plays a role; people are more likely to buy from someone they trust. When more people know about someone or something and like it, there is a greater chance for profit. (Waller, 2020, p. 4)

Mike Kim (2021) defines a personal brand as an extension of branding to present identity online by intentionally crafting public identity to showcase a person's ideas, expertise, reputation, and personality. Kim argues that everyone has been doing this unconsciously or consciously for most of their lives to get the approval of their peers in school or on social media with more followers, attention, or money. He argues that there are two kinds of personal brands: the authentic version, which is about exploration and working on a deeper level on who the person is and wants to become. The second way is building an inauthentic personal brand which argues that this approach lacks integrity and authenticity by trying to sell an image to achieve the desired results. (Kim, 2021, pp. 5-7).

Karen Kang (2013) defines a personal brand as depending on the position in life and what value personal branding can produce in that position. She has three categories: professional, graduate student, and entrepreneur, in her book *Branding Pays: The Five-Step System to Reinvent Your Personal Brand*.

- For professionals, she argues that a robust personal brand brings influence, opportunities, and advancement.
- For graduate students, she argues that a robust personal brand might be the difference between landing a job and ending in circular life.
- For entrepreneurs, she argues that a solid personal brand can inspire confidence and help investors to fund the entrepreneur.

There is much confusion over personal branding, with many believing it is merely a cosmetic process. While many associate personal branding with shallow accomplishments, there are many more benefits beyond making people like a person. A personal brand is an image and reputation, and everyone has one, whether we like it or not. This means that our peers all perceive us in a certain way. Our personality, what we wear, and our gestures and presence are aspects of this. The more important aspect is our knowledge and expertise. (Kang, 2013, pp. 19-20)

It coincides with arguments presented by Mike Kim (2021) in his book: *You Are The Brand*. He says that in daily life, a person's perceived identity may change from situation to situation. Many people experience this change as they act differently in different contexts. A person's identity is different at work than at home or with close friends. To elaborate further, Kim says: "Your friends know you in a way your colleagues will never know." This applies the other way around as well.

However, it is evident from reviewing different literature sources that the concept of personal branding is well established but lacks agreeableness. It is established in the interdisciplinary systematic literature review by Gorbato et al. (2018, p. 6) Authors reviewed over 100 published research papers on the topic and proposed definitions for personal brand and personal branding:

- The personal brand is a set of characteristics of an individual rendered into narrative and imagery with the intent of establishing a competitive advantage in the minds of the target audience.
- Personal branding is the creation, positioning, and maintenance of a unique combination of personal characteristics which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery.

It is feasible to conclude that the definition of personal branding varies from person to person, but all have similar characteristics. Therefore, the researcher would argue that the definition depends on the person's background and goal for the process.

2.3 Advantages of personal branding

According to a systematic interdisciplinary literature review by Gorgatov et al. (2018, pp. 10-11), scholars have differing opinions on the effectiveness of personal branding as a career success strategy. In addition, the outcomes can be challenging to measure as they are multifacet and non-linear. They went on to categorize outcomes into two categories: individual and organizational. The individual ones can be either intrinsic or extrinsic from fifty-one papers reviewed that identified advantages for personal branding.

Individual intrinsic outcomes of personal branding from the literature review indicate that effective personal branding requires self-awareness, feedback seeking, and reflexivity. Other aspects revealed by the literature are motivation, self-realization, credibility and influence, and self-promotion skills. Gorbatov et al. (2018) hypothesize that effective personal branding leads to greater self-evaluations.

Individual extrinsic outcomes of personal branding from the literature review indicate that in most reviewed papers, researchers determine the outcomes of personal branding to be either furthering a professional career or creating some social capital. Other findings identify differentiation and monetary outcomes. (Gorbatov et al., 2018)

Organizational Outcomes of personal branding from the literature review indicate that despite the personal approach to most current research in personal branding, scholars have expanded to study more in-depth value personal brand can generate for organizations. Authors conclude that personal brands, indirectly or otherwise, promote the ideologies of their organizations. (Gorbatov et al., 2018)

The authors conclude that personal branding is a dynamic process that is constantly changing and requires management. It is important to keep in mind the ethical and social considerations for personal branding, which of four can be identified as debates around:

- Egalitarianism versus elitism
- Commodification of self
- Blurring the line between personal and professional lives
- Teaching personal branding (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 11)

According to Karen Kang (2013), the benefits of personal branding are:

- Respect means that a person's name will likely be associated with something of value. The person will have a reputation for excellence in their area of expertise.
- The ecosystem will advocate means that influencers can introduce a person to others or endorse in some way.
- Opportunities for job offers, clients, partnership opportunities, new projects, and speaking engagements will arise.

- Success means that person will be hired for the job, promoted within the company, or funded by investors.
- Enjoying work and life means that by living the brand desired, the person will feel more fulfilled in work and personal life. It means a person's life is better overall with a great personal brand.

Personal branding is a strategy to guide a person's image as a professional in the minds of others. (Kang, 2013, p. 21) This coincides with the definition given by Mike Kim (2021) as "Personal branding simply expands branding to include a person's ideas, expertise, reputation, and personality. We intentionally craft a public identity for an express purpose."

It is feasible to conclude that the advantages of personal branding vary from person to person but have similar characteristics. One consideration for the advantages of personal branding is the subject-centric nature of the process. The researcher would argue that the advantage of personal branding is in the exploration, reflection, and identification of one's personality and strengths. This process of self-reflection is a part of personal branding in varying capacities. It leads to more awareness on a personal level and leads to possible self-development. The advantages are dependent on the goals of the individual for the process.

2.4 Personal branding tactics

There are multiple tactics for personal branding, and it is essential to highlight that there is no comprehensive framework in published research for personal branding that is agreed upon. The lack of measuring personal brands in the academic setting is also problematic. Issues resolve around veracity, portability, and sustainability of personal branding. Currently, available research lacks the possibility for generalization since most research is conducted within specific cultures and industries. (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 13). Hence, this part of the literature review will introduce Karen Kang's (2013) Branding-Pays-system tactics shortly.

The system consists of steps designed to intentionally identify and communicate one's brand. Everyone has an existing personal brand without even knowing it. It means that everyone is perceived in a certain way by their peers and nurturing a personal brand through strategy looks to manage a person's image or reputation. (Kang, 2013, p. 21) Tactics Kang

(2013) proposes as follows: positioning, messaging, brand strategy, ecosystem, action plan, 360-degree branding: vision, symbols, words, portable branding, and social media.

A personal brand has two parts: "cake," meaning rational value, and "icing," meaning emotional value. A combination of these and setting a goal builds a solid personal brand. Identifying a person's expertise, strengths, experience, and personality is the first step toward building a solid personal brand. (Kang, 2013, p. 30) Understanding rational and emotional values allow a personal brand to position itself accordingly. Positioning expands on five themes:

Target Audience

- Demographic the personal brand is trying to reach

Problem Statement

- Solutions to a problem the target audience faces.

Category

- Expertise in the field.

Value proposition

- Value and ability to help with proving expertise.

Competitive differentiation

- Unique value compared to peers. (Kang, 2013, pp. 45-50)

Positioning is about relevance and uniqueness. Positioning assists in crafting personal brands messaging. Messaging builds upon positioning by clearly communicating areas of expertise and providing evidence. Messaging depends on the target audience and is a way to educate. Personal brand messaging should provide value and be strategic, depending on the target audience. Different target audiences require tweaking of the messaging strategy to match the needs of that specific target audience. (Kang, 2013, p. 58, 67)

Positioning theory originates from David Ogilvy in the 1950s, but the term was coined in 1969 by Al Ries and Jack Trout. Ries and Trout are considered experts in positioning theory. Ries and Trout defined positioning as a mental process buyers use to simplify and store new information. (Waller, 2020, pp. 52-53)

Brand strategy is a series of methodological approaches to identify different aspects of a personal brand and the value provided. The brand strategy platform in Kang's book (2013), reflects the current personal brand and encourages identifying developmental areas. Exploring personal brand this way offers critical self-reflection of one's identity and brand. (Kang, 2013, pp. 97-104). Another way to view brand strategy can be derived from traditional branding as a conjunction of strategy and creativity. This means that a brand creates a natural barrier to communication and competition, representing the conjunction of strategy and creativity and allowing the brand to be perceived as charismatic. Charismatic brands are characterized by a clear competitive stance, a sense of rectitude, and a dedication to aesthetics. Effective branding requires one to differentiate, collaborate, innovate, validate, and cultivate. (Neumeier, 2006, pp. 27-34, 163-170)

The brand ecosystem expands on the idea of networking as a more powerful tactic for personal brand development. A brand ecosystem is a tactic Kang (2013), introduces to build a strategic framework to build relationships online and offline. For building a personal brand, it is vital to create relationships, provide value, communicate consciously, and manage relationships. In addition, this approach provides recognition for a personal brand. (Kang, 2013, p. 129)

The action plan for a personal brand consists of brand improvement and communication. Brand improvement explores the differences between the current brand and the goal of the brand. Brand improvement is vital for recognizing areas of improvement to deliver on brand promises. Kang (2013) proposes a phased model for personal brand communication. This proposed tactic for brand communication ensures the validity of communications in private before publication to build references and credibility. Brand communications tactics draw from the brand's positioning, which is fluid and adapting. (Kang, 2013, p. 133, 139, 144)

360-branding calls for consideration of the external image of the brand in question. Concerning personal branding, Kang (2013), means an attractive look in clothes, posture, and materials such as presentations or business cards. Management of external image as a tactic in personal branding assists in countering snap judgments. In their book *Impressive First Impressions*, Vu H. Pham and Lisa Miyake (2010) further solidified its importance. They cite studies that identified first impressions for faces and websites in milliseconds. The

importance of visual assets in the brand's communication with colors and materials for physical goods cannot be overstated. Assets should reflect and communicate the brand and individual personality. (Kang, 2013, pp. 151-164)

Portable branding and social media expand on the importance of differentiation for social media. Kang (2013), argues that social media is a tactic for personal brand development but is often used inconsistently with unclear messaging on social platforms. Unclear messaging in social media lacks a focus, leading to communication that explores too many topics. Therefore, a personal brand needs to leverage social media for exposure. Kang (2013) cites Jobvite's online survey, which consists of over 800 respondents in human resources and recruitment professionals. Survey identified that 89 percent of professionals used or planned to use social media as a recruitment tool. To further emphasize the importance of social media, a survey in the US revealed that the most common reason for rejecting a job candidate was his/her lifestyle rather than employment-related information. (Hosain, 2021, p. 5; Kang, 2013, pp. 166, 172) It is in line with the findings from Sajjad Hosain's (2021), Integration of social media into HRM practices: a bibliometric overview.

According to Kang (2013), it is best to start with LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter as platforms for personal brand communications. It is advisable to spend time on the creation of LinkedIn, especially as this platform is a professional network. LinkedIn groups offer ways to join external discussions and should be in relevant fields with the expertise of the personal brand. Consistency in topic selection and active engagement on LinkedIn, Twitter, or Facebook builds a reputation that furthers personal brand. An important aspect is to be consistent with handles and visual assets on different social media platforms using handles—this aids with finding the personal brand from different search results and promotes a consistent image.

Tactics outside of social media networks include websites and possible blog posts. Blogging for a personal brand is a significant commitment but offers a way for more personalized communication that reflects values and personality. A brand's online reputation requires management, so it is advisable to identify platforms that best support personal brand goals. (Kang, 2013, pp. 181, 184)

2.5 Definition and benefits of neurodiversity

The term neurodiversity was coined by Judith Singer in 1999. From an academic perspective, neurodiversity is not well captured by current definitions, suffers from poor and conflicting definitions, confusing, overlapping symptomatology, and little guidance on practical support at work. A wide range of studies has shown that approximately 15-20% of the population is neurodiverse. (Doyle, 2020, pp. 109-113)

Neurodiversity is a concept that refers to the variation in human brains resulting in learning, social, and mood differences. The definition of neurodiversity is a societal perspective on neurological diversity, conceptualized as a form of identity and social movement. It is essential to distinguish it from the deficit-focused concepts of neurological disability and the lack of social opportunities due to stigma. Neurodiversity includes neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism, dyslexia, and attention-deficit/hyperactive disorders (ADHD). (Jeffries & Ahmed, 2022, p. 2) Other studies have included conditions such as anxiety, depression, general learning disability, Tourette Syndrome, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and acquired brain injury under the concept of neurodiversity. (Doyle, 2020, p. 111)

Diversity in background, disciplinary training, gender, and employee culture is positive factors for organizations. The view of neurodiversity should appear in a similar vein. Because neurodiverse people are wired differently from neurotypical people, they may bring new perspectives to a company's efforts to create or recognize value. (Richman, 2018, p. 20) Multiple companies, including SAP, Hewlett-Packard Enterprise and Microsoft, have reformed their human resources processes to access neurodiverse talent. As a result, these organizations have seen productivity gains, quality improvement, and innovative capabilities boosted along with increased employee engagement. (Austin & Pisano, 2017) Research has shown that organizations with solid diversity climates outperform their competitors in multiple studies. (Avery et al., 2022, p. 22)

According to an article in Forbes (2014), people with dyslexia tend to have out-of-the-box thinking. They process information visually and are good at finding hidden connections in data, making them ideal candidates for pattern recognition and trend analysis.

According to the same article in Forbes (2014), a study published on Personality and Individual Differences indicates that people with ADHD are more creative than their peers and are more proactive. They also adjust well to change, can hyper-focus on topics of interest, and can make quick decisions without much information.

A study published by Falkmer et al. (2015) found that organizations that support and encourage employees with autism spectrum disorder are very successful in their jobs. These workers also display more significant levels of commitment and conscientiousness about their work, along with higher loyalty rates. Incentives for initiating inclusion programs include improved productivity, increased shareholder value, a more significant number of innovations, expanded market share, and access to a broader customer base.

Neurodiversity opponents claim that neurological differences are not normal variations but the result of a disorder. They advocate for a cure. However, as evidence for neurodiversity accumulates, it seems increasingly clear that no overall cure for neurological differences is possible. If such differences are at the root of certain people's achievements, it would not be desirable to eliminate them either. (Roblson, 2013)

However, as technology and other industries face increasing skills shortages, the case for neurodiverse hiring becomes compelling. For example, Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano (2017) cite a European Commission study in their Harvard Business Review article. According to the study, Europe will face a shortage of 800,000 information technology workers by 2020. The most significant expectation of deficits is in strategically important and rapidly expanding areas such as data analytics and IT services implementation, whose tasks are a good match with the abilities of some neurodiverse people.

2.6 ADHD advantages

According to Dale Archer (2016), "ADHD is not a disorder; it's a difference that, in the right context and with a set of customized tools, can help you or your child become one of life's explorers, leaders, inventors, or entrepreneurs. This trait is precisely what can give you the edge. It's your distinct advantage, so go ahead, embrace it!"

Many successful business leaders have been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Sir Richard Branson, Ikea founder Ingvar Kamprad, and JetBlue founder David Neeleman are three leaders who claim that their success is mainly due to ADHD. (Archer, 2014)

According to the current understanding and definition, ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder present from childhood. (CDC, 2022). Dale Archer's (2016) definition slightly differs as he identifies ADHD as a trait composed of two parts: brain chemistry and genetics, which affect how dopamine in the brain is processed differently. He describes ADHD as existing more on a scale rather than being a question of having ADHD or not having ADHD, which is more in line with the concept of neurodiversity (Roblson, 2013; Doyle, 2020, p. 111) as a difference in neurological function.

Archer (2016) proposes to view ADHD symptoms from a different angle: Advantages in the capacity to multitask, function in chaotic situations, non-linear creative thinking, desire to explore, hyperfocus, resilience, high energy, risk tolerance, and deal with pressure situations. Anyone can possess the advantages and strengths of these functions, and they are not exclusive to people with ADHD. These strengths, however, have all been identified in various studies. One exciting and possible ADHD advantage is a 2011 published study: A polymorphism associated with entrepreneurship: evidence from dopamine receptor candidate genes. The study revealed that most participants tended to be entrepreneurs. (Adi et al., 2011)

The literature review results indicate a gap in the literature that explores the similarities and the relationship between personal branding and neurodiversity. Therefore, it is vital to explore further the connection between the two. The approach the researcher chose to do so was first to develop a personal brand that advocates for neurodiversity, using it as a platform from which to explore this relationship. It is essential to consider these two concepts simultaneously, as the research is based on the hypothesis of the interconnection of the concepts.

3 Methodology

The research will introduce multiple methodologies, but the thesis is based on practice-based research at its core. This chapter further explains the methodological choices made and justifies the use of these methods after. Supporting materials are attached.

3.1 Methods

This thesis is practice-based research. Research conducted through practice is an original investigation undertaken to gain knowledge that partly results from practice and partly from practice outcomes. Originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes, for example, images, design, events, or digital media. A complete understanding of the significance and context of a claim can be obtained only regarding outcomes, not from the written word. (Candy, 2006, p. 3) The creative process in this thesis is the website. Creative output can be produced as part of the research process. However, the outcomes must accompany documentation of the practice, the research process, and some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and demonstrate critical reflection. (Candy, 2006, p. 2). Therefore, the primary method for collecting data in this thesis is the creative output in the form of a website. By using reflective practice, learning is derived.

The author will explore his brand by conducting a qualitative survey based on Karen Kang's (2013) Personal Brand Assessment resource from the book. The survey is unstructured and conducted with co-workers of the author from work. Since specific questions might raise ethical considerations, the author decided to let each respondent answer questions they feel comfortable with answering and skip others. Anonymity is also part of the survey since the survey features questions about the positives and negatives of the author. The goal is to encourage authenticity and honest answers from co-workers to protect their opinions from the author. Another consideration for the reliability of the data is the researchers' objectivity in analyzing collected data. To avoid this, the researcher will compare data to the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) assessment.

The VIA-IS has acceptable internal consistency and test-retest reliability, moderate and growing levels of psychometric validity, and moderate levels of predictive validity. In addition, it correlates reasonably well with constructs it would be expected to be related to and does not correlate with constructs it should not be related to; further, additional validity studies are ongoing. (VIA institute on character, n.d.)

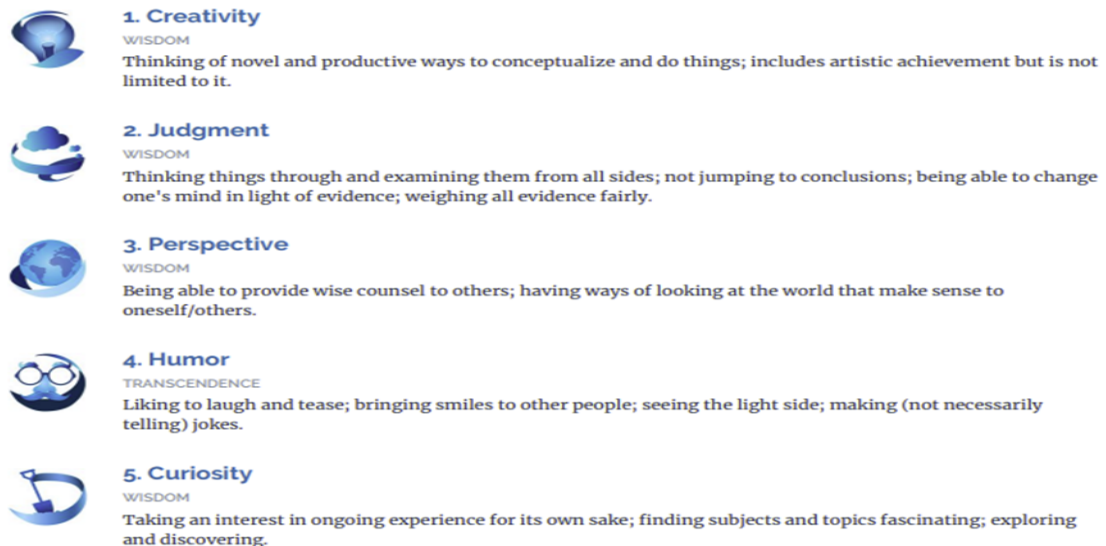


Figure 1 Results from the assessment. (VIA institute on character, 2022)

Other resources from Kang's (2013) book include a positioning statement, elevator pitch, brand strategy platform, ecosystem wedge model, and brand improvement table. These are used in the empirical part of the study to distance the author from his brand and analyze the author's strengths and weaknesses more objectively and as reference material in creating a brand that uses neurodiversity as a positioning strategy.

The researcher explores Neurodiversity and ADHD with an autoethnographic method.

According to Adams et al. (2014), autoethnography is a qualitative research method that:

- Uses personal experience to describe and criticize cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences.
- Acknowledges and values the relationships of a researcher with others.

- Applies reflexivity as a method of inquiry that uses deep, careful self-reflection to name and interrogate the intersections between the self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political.
- It shows people trying to understand their lives, their meaning, and how to proceed.
- Balances intellectual and methodological rigor with emotional engagement and creativity.
- Works to make life fairer and to improve living conditions for all people.

The reason for this is the author's neurodiversity. A secondary reason for using autoethnography is the lack of research exploring the relationship between neurodiversity and personal branding. It allows the author to explore the relationship between neurodiversity and personal branding by adding them as a research subject.

The researcher must know the potential for bias in autoethnographic research reporting. As a researcher, it is essential to be aware that one's personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts may influence collecting data and reporting results. To avoid bias, the research includes additional data collected from public sources that allow for reflexivity and triangulation to validate the findings further. Using public data sources helps with ethical problems autoethnographic research presents.

3.2 Justification of chosen methods

Karen Kang's (2013) book materials function as a blueprint and guide in reflecting the author's brand, values, skills, and strategy. She named this as BrandingPays-system. Application and reflection of the systems techniques. Content added to the website will be communicated on social media channels like LinkedIn and Twitter. The effectiveness of these communication techniques will be reflected briefly.

The justification for using the system is Karen Kang's (n.d.) experience and expertise in branding. Kang has been featured in multiple business media outlets and is a former partner in Regis McKenna Inc., the firm that launched Apple and Genentech. Kang's clients over the years have included Fortune 100 companies all over the globe, with consulting experience from over 200 organizations. Kang has launched multiple successful IPOs (initial product

offerings) and has given speeches at top business schools such as Stanford University and London Business School. To further validate the use of the author's brand, snippets of other approaches and systems are mixed into the creation process from industry experts Marty Neumeier and Mike Kim. Finally, critical reflection is applied in the last chapter to assess success.

Autoethnography is a unique research methodology, and this is reflected in the unique forms it takes as a research report. When personal perspective and the pragmatic concepts of sense-sharing and meaning-sharing are combined, autoethnography becomes a potent tool for research. (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022, p. 204) The researcher has tried to apply this method by telling the story and explaining the meaning of the story. Autoethnography offers accounts of personal experiences to complement or inform generalizations made by other researchers. These accounts demonstrate that the desire for generalizations can mask important nuances in cultural issues such as eating disorders, depression, social class and appearance, and norms of masculinity, desire, and the body. (Adams et al., 2017, p. 3)

Autoethnography is an observational data-driven phenomenological method of narrative research and writing that aims to offer compelling, striking, and evocative tales of human social and cultural life. (Adams et al., p. 4) Personal narratives provide a unique insight into the experiences and thoughts of learners, allowing researchers to access their subjects' private worlds. Another advantage of autoethnography is the ease of access to the data. The researcher calls on his or her own experiences as the source from which to investigate a phenomenon. However, this approach has limitations: because analysis relies on the researcher's narrative, limiting conclusions by that narrative's scope. (Méndez, 2013, p. 282)

Thus, the use of autoethnography in this study is justified. The goal of utilizing autoethnography is to connect neurodiversity to the broader cultural phenomenon of personal branding. Further strengthening the validity of autoethnographic data, success stories from Dale Archer's (2016) book *The ADHD Advantage* are quoted and supported by tweets and discussions.

4 Documenting the development of the personal brand

The goals set for this thesis were exploring and developing the researcher's personal brand through many tools. Tools were chosen based on the learning from the literature. An essential tool in developing the personal brand was reflection. Concrete tools that helped with the reflection were materials from Karen Kang (2013), a survey of coworkers, and character assessment VIA-IS. These tools were used to guide the implementation of personal brands on digital platforms such as websites and social media. The researcher expected that the tools offer clarity and reference for implementing the personal brand. In addition, the tools offered a way to find essential themes for the personal brand to present outward. Findings from the reflection tools were applied to the digital presentation of the brand in social media and website to craft a concise message and personal brand. Content creation is strategically used to brand individuals online at the heart of presenting a personal brand in the digital world. (Labrecque et al., 2011)

Practical implementation in the form of a website for the personal brand for differentiation was used to gain more digital presence and to have more ways to be discovered.

Additionally, having a personal website ensures the ownership of the content and the audience, unlike in social media platforms where the ownership of the content is in the hands of the platform in question. This poses a problem because the personal brand can, in the worst case, cease to exist if the platform is shut down or the account is deleted. (Kim, 2021, pp. 67-68)

Personal branding was used as a tool to explore the relationship between that and neurodiversity. The concept of personal branding can be used to explore neurodiversity because it is a way to represent a person and individual's skills in a way that is unique and authentic while also being able to build a network of people who are interested in what the person has to offer. Personal branding allows one to connect with others who share similar interests, and it can also help in developing an identity that makes sense for who one is as a person.

When people think about personal branding, they often focus on their professional lives—how they present themselves to employers, how they present themselves on social media,

and so on. Nevertheless, another aspect of personal branding worth considering is how one represents themselves on an individual level. Individuals have different ways of thinking about identities and the ways individuals want others to understand them—and those things may not always line up with what society expects from individuals or how other people perceive them.

Neurodiversity is one-way people try to understand themselves with the world around them—it is a movement that focuses on recognizing differences between individuals rather than trying to fit everyone into the same mold. (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012, p. 5)

This chapter describes the steps of discovering a brand using different materials. The research serves as the foundation for the personal brand. In addition to identifying the personal brand, this chapter describes the implementation of the brand, starting from the use of supporting materials to the finish. First, the brand is explored with self-reflection tools, three website builders undergo cost comparison, and a choice is made based on the cost and functions of the builder. Next, the structure and development of the website are documented in chronological order. Lastly, the researcher will discuss the brand's different social media channels.

4.1 Assisting materials used in development of the personal brand

The researcher started by using Karen Kang's (2013) Branding-Pays-resource personal brand assessment and compared it to the results of VIA-IS. The results of the cross-validation study indicate that the inventory generally meets psychometric standards for measuring the targeted character strengths and virtues. (VIA institute on character, 2022). This is done to understand the researchers' view of the personal brand as like external individuals, in this case, co-workers.

A personal branding assessment questionnaire was sent to 10 of the researcher's co-workers and consisted of 10 questions in total, with the possibility of skipping specific questions. The researcher received five replies to the questions. Next, semi-qualitative content analysis was applied to sort the answers under six categories used in VIA-IS to compare the results. This was done by placing each answer into one category that best fits the answer to personal

brand assessment questions:

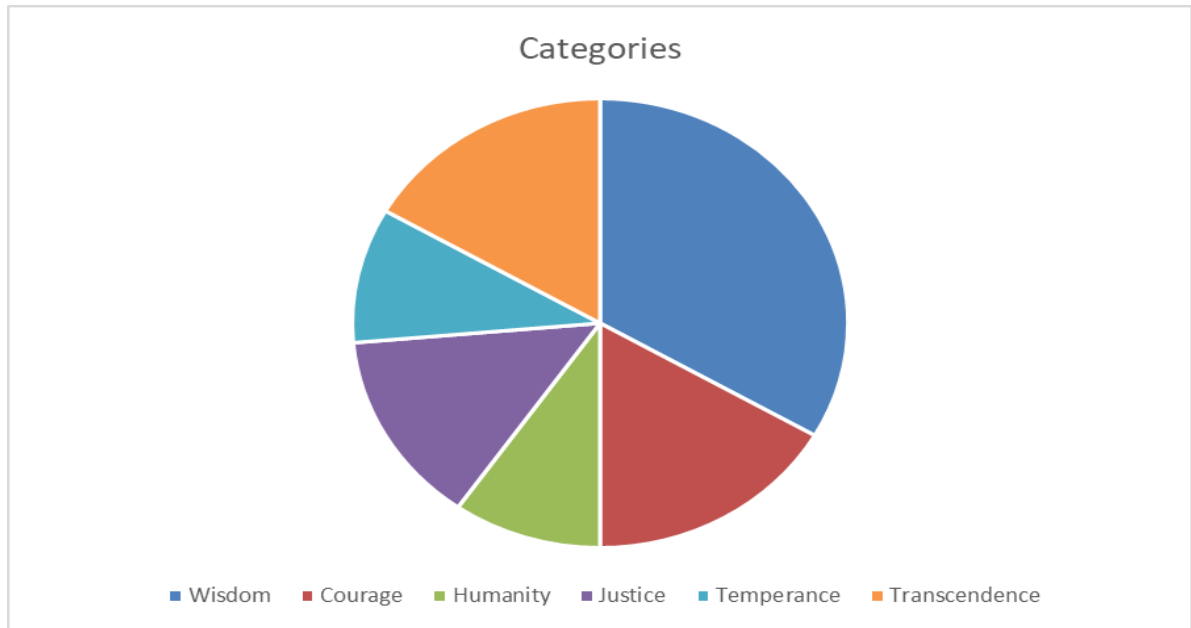


Figure 2. Pie chart highlighting the division of different categories in VIA-IS (VIA institute on character, 2022)

The researcher calls this semi-qualitative content analysis since this approach is not a traditional method application. Out of the five categories, themes under Wisdom ranked the highest by far. Strengths under the wisdom type are creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective. (VIA institute on character, 2022)

The co-workers' results match the first results from the VIA-IS test, the top 3 strengths being all from the wisdom category. Looking through the first ten attributes in VIA-IS, the researcher has all five wisdom strengths. The other 5 are humor and hope from transcendence, forgiveness, humility from temperance, and lastly, kindness from humanity. However, the rest of the results are not perfectly in line with the answers of the co-workers. According to the answers from the co-workers, the split-second place category is courage. Courage consists of bravery, honesty, perseverance, and zest. This might be explained by difficulty applying specific answers to categories in VIA-IS. Another explanation might be that the researcher's perception of work is more in line with these attributes. The primary reason for this phenomenon is that people tend to show different identities in different settings, leading others to perceive us differently. (Kim, 2021, p. 6)

The results revealed that the researcher has excellent communication skills, especially in writing which is most of the communication with co-workers. The researcher identified a need to be able to translate that better to spoken word. Improvement areas identified from this additionally are time management and development of leadership abilities. Leadership requires good communication but based on co-workers' answers; the leadership style leans towards autocratic style. The autocratic leadership style is often seen as authoritarian, where the leader makes all decisions. This style has benefits and disadvantages, which one needs to be familiar with. (Cherry, 2022) Overall the assessments were designed to identify the strengths and be used in developing brand strategy and positioning. (Kang, 2013, p. 34)

Excellent communication skills and showcasing this skill to recruiters with the researcher's personal brand can further highlight the ability to bring new perspectives into the company. This is one of the benefits for organizations looking to hire neurodiverse workers. (Richman, 2018, p. 20) Innovations and perspectives need to be communicated, which is one of the strengths of the researcher. The researcher can further differentiate from peers by implementing messaging and producing educational content about neurodiversity and diversity as beneficial factors for organizations on social media and website. Additionally, ADHD is associated with creative thinking in studies, among other benefits (Archer, 2016, p. 8), which was identified from the analysis of the researchers' strengths. Strong communication skills can be used in the future to draft compelling, creative writing that resonates with the target audience. Lastly, as highlighted in the article by Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano (2017), neurodiverse workers are positioned extremely well for filling the needs of strategically important and expanding industries by educating more recruiters through personal branding tactics of the benefits neurodiverse individuals possess for specific roles.

Another consideration is that according to an article in Forbes (2022), 85% of the jobs in the future do not exist yet today. Other literature and articles around the future of work have made similar predictions; for example, in the article (2022) written with help from the University of Witwatersrand, skills with high demand are cognitive flexibility, digital literacy, and computational thinking, judgment and decision making, emotional and social intelligence and creative and innovative mindset. This means that the skills and benefits of being a neurodiverse individual will increase. For example, cognitive flexibility refers to

adaptability, complex ideas, and multi-tasking (Lukins, 2022), and these qualities are found more frequently in individuals with ADHD. (Archer, 2016, p. 8) Another example is individuals who have dyslexia and are associated with studies to better information processing and pattern recognition in data (Montvelisky, 2014), making them excellent in the future of digital literacy and computational thinking, which are heavily reliant on data analysis. (Lukins, 2022)

A position statement is a helping tool for identifying positioning. The goal of positioning is to express rational value to the target audience. The statement is a foundation for future materials, such as an elevator pitch and brand strategy platform. The researcher is the product when the positioning statement is applied to personal branding. This approach helps to see the personal brand more objectively and as a reminder of the website's design. The primary target audience is recruiters and hiring managers looking for hiring talent, which is reflected in the positioning statement. (Kang, 2013, pp. 40, 44-45)

Target Audience	For recruiters in the marketing and branding field.
Problem Statement	Who needs to find unique talent for the development of business brand marketing and identify organizational value in a diverse workforce.
Category	I am a graduate student who has an understanding of the best practices of brand marketing with a diversity of thought.
Value Proposition	I have a variety of experiences and have been described as strategic communicator with the ability to solve problems creatively and lead teams in a startup environment.
Competitive Differentiation	Unlike most brand marketers my approach is to build emotional connections with storytelling and understand the value of diversity and communication for the constant development of processes. My background in startups makes me adaptable.

Figure 3. Positioning statement. (Kang, 2013)

Following the positioning statement, the researcher has designed an elevator pitch based on the positioning statement to organize talking points and messages into a shorter format.

This is designed to articulate positioning and offer proof for claims made. An additional benefit of the elevator pitch is that the researcher can feel more confident in job interviews and networking events and leave a positive image about the personality or future ambitions. Elevator pitch further condenses what the researcher needs to communicate with the website for the target audience of recruiters. (Kang, 2013, p. 61, 69)

<p>What I Do (or Want to Do)</p>	<p>I'm Kalle Viljakainen, and I'm a digital marketing & branding specialist in a startup. I am a graduating from Bachelor of Business Administration degree in international business.</p>
<p>Context and Value</p>	<p>I am interested in finding a job as a brand manager at an organization that values diversity. My background in startups and my education in entrepreneurship, combined with the latest information on branding and marketing, make me a valuable asset to any business looking to grow. My goal is to help businesses realize the benefits of hiring employees with neurodiverse conditions by giving talks and writing articles on this topic.</p>
<p>Evidence</p>	<p>I know based on published research that diversity within organizations is beneficial. My ability to tell stories has offered me a chance to explore workshop methodology by invited to facilitate a branding workshop. I am described as a leader, results-orientated innovator in my current role. I was part of a team to land the first project deal funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland for the company.</p>

Figure 4. Elevator pitch. (Kang, 2013)

The brand strategy platform serves as a methodology template for the personal brand. It helps to understand the researcher and the personal brand and further expands on the positioning statement. The goal is to strategically reflect on the brand's emotional value and incorporate it with rational value in clarity. This comprehensive reflection tool helps to recognize brand strengths but also areas of improvement for the future. (Kang, 2013, p. 80, 104)

Core Values	Strengths (Cake)	Personality (Icing)	Brand Image (Cake & Icing)	Brand Promise (Cake & Icing)
1. Freedom 2. Innovation 3. Communication 4. Diversity	Hard Skills - Brand strategy - Streamlining processes - Storytelling - Research	Personality Attributes - Direct - Creative - Learner - Adaptability	Brand Associations - Branding expert - Emphatic leader - Communicative	Rational Value Branding expertise and thought leadership.
What I love doing Solve problems with creative solutions	Soft Skills - Communication - Inclusion - Creativity - Creative problem solving	Type of leader, worker, friend - Flexible - Analytical - Emphatic - Communication	External Image - Funny - Good communicator - Honest - Easy going	Emotional Value Fun to work with and accepting everyone.
My life/career dreams Short-term: Expertise in branding Long-term: Build something ground-breaking	Expertise - Brand processes - BBA - Social media - Adobe, SEO, content schedulers.	Brand Metaphor A magnifying glass let you see the whole vision and the details at the same time without any disruption.	Relationship Image - Professional - Friendly - Honest	Brand Experience Smooth and honest processes. Communicative and collaborative

Figure 5. Brand strategy platform. (Kang, 2013)

The following tool for developing the personal brand is the ecosystem wedge model. This tool identifies all layers in the researcher's goal to reach recruiters and hiring managers with the brand. By connecting with layers one by one, the researcher can build a path of reference within the ecosystem that can validate credibility, for example, to a job opportunity. The communication path moves from the researcher to the target audience of recruiters. A path of reference for recruiters to check the credibility from multiple sources moves through the ecosystem offering more credibility and reason for them to hire the researcher. One way to describe the ecosystem wedge model is as networking with a more specified goal of building valuable relationships. By exploring this, the researcher has more clarity for the messaging with the website. (Kang, 2013, pp. 109, 111, 127-129)



Figure 6. Ecosystem wedge-model. (Kang, 2013)

The last material used for discovering the brand is the brand improvement table. The improvement table focuses on identifying areas to improve brand communication. With the website, this means updating social media profiles to include a website link, updating the resume, and enhancing communication with the blog. Areas of improvement for this thesis are to come up with tactics to increase brand visibility. The improvement table also forces the researcher to identify practical actions for improvement. (Kang, 2013, p. 148)

Key Areas to Improve	Rating (How am I perceived)	Challenge	Priority Actions	Allies or Tools
Visibility and understanding of my brand	1	Exposure	Value offering content Social media strategy	Ecosystem model Messaging
Time management	3	Priorities	Training Tools like calendar	Coaching Reading Calendar
Public speaking	2	Uncomfortable in speaking	Training Build confidence	Exposure Training Develop confidence

Figure 7. Brand improvement table. (Kang, 2013)

4.2 Comparing website builders

The researcher had familiarity with WordPress-based website management prior to building the website. The researcher had also heard from Squarespace before. The researcher started exploring different website builders with Google search and reading different articles on the subject. What was found from reading multiple articles listing best builders was that it is highly subjective based on the article. The researcher found articles that named different builders the best, depending on the article and criteria for the rankings.

Nevertheless, Squarespace, WordPress, and Wix were most constantly recognized as the best solutions. The researcher wanted to learn and test a new website builder, which eliminated WordPress from the list. Both services offered a 50% student discount for the annual plan, and personal plans cost 11 euros per month for Squarespace and 10 euros for Wix without applying a student discount. (Squarespace, 2022; Wix, 2022). For the researcher's budget, this made no difference. The researcher ended up with Squarespace because after testing both builders with a test site, it felt like Squarespace offered a better user interface. Overall, the decision was based on personal preference after a test.

4.3 Implementation phase

A starting point for the website was a ready-made template in Squarespace named Brower.

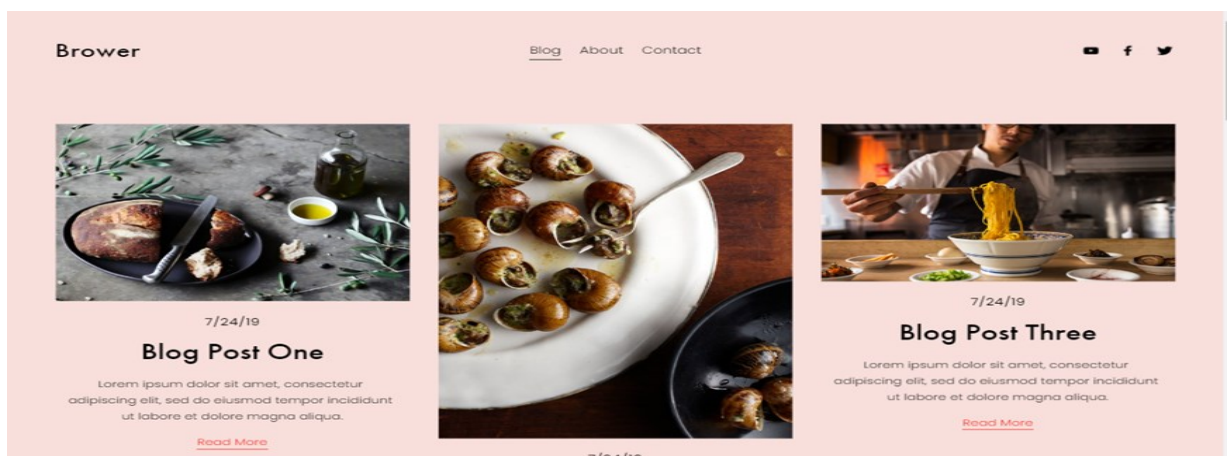


Figure 8. Base template used to develop website. (Squarespace, 2022)

The goal for a start was to find a simple design to modify with a blog focus built in. The researcher was looking for a clean and straightforward navigation style. Originally the navigation had four sections: Home, about, blog and contact.

Later in the design process, it changed to include three with one dropdown menu.

- Hi, I am Kalle, landing page.
- Portfolio
- CV
- Blog, separate.
- Contact, separate.

This was done to make the look more minimalist and cleaner. Inspiration was drawn from various personal brand websites and recommendations for developing the page. This applies to the typography used on the website, too, which was chosen next to be easy to read.

(Feldman, 2019; Thrive Themes, n.d.)



Figure 2. Navigation. (KallTalks, 2022)

After settling with navigation, the researcher browsed multiple websites and articles discussing color psychology to understand what colors are associated with personality and image. Color has been studied from multiple points of view and disciplines over the years. According to Elliot and Maier (2013, p. 112), color is more than just an aesthetic consideration; it carries crucial information and can influence people's moods, thoughts, and actions. The researcher found this important to consider for personal branding since this has to do with the image and perception given to others. This coincides with the arguments of Karen Kang (2013) in her book. The result was yellow, black, and white after testing multiple combinations based on the information read and found these to represent the researcher's personality most clearly. (Color Psychology, 2021)

The next step was to start designing the individual pages for the website. The logical place was to start with the landing page since that is a page visitor usually ends up first. Drawing from recommendations and examples good landing page consists of a hero section, headline, call-to-action, and proof of credibility. (Thrive Themes, n.d.)

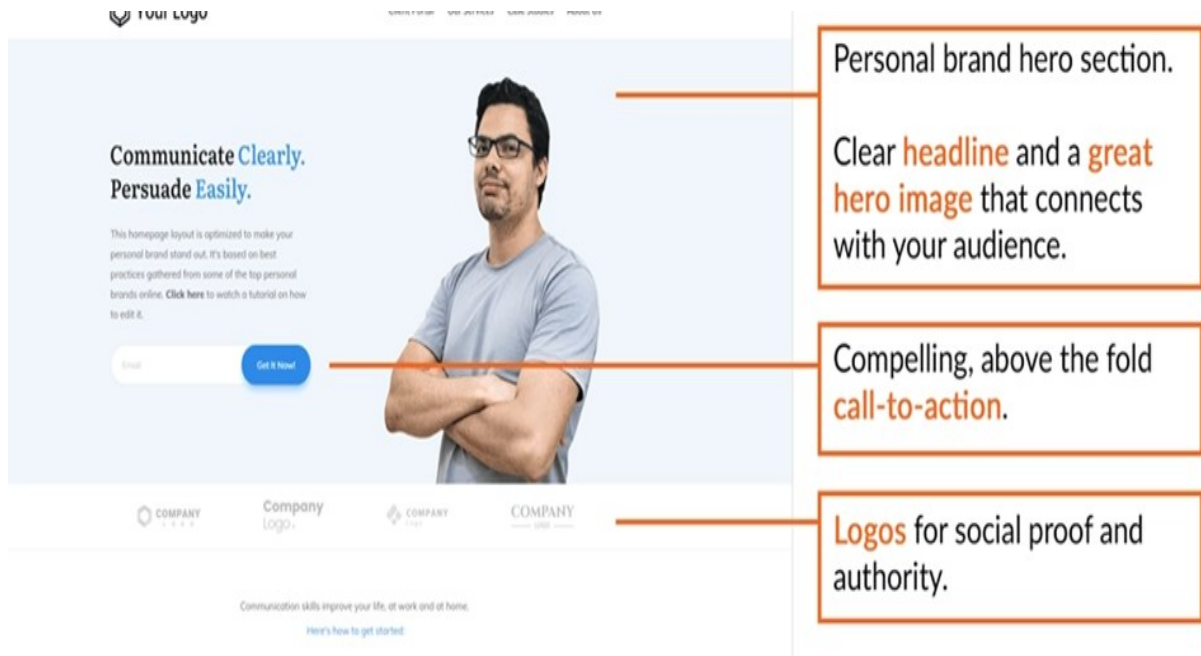


Figure 10. Hero page content recommendations. (Thrive Themes, n.d.)

The researcher used to draw inspiration from the elevator pitch and positioning statement to craft the hero section. After multiple tries, the results were this.



Figure 11. Hero page. (KallTalks, 2022)

The researcher had the most trouble with designing the hero section to make it functional in desktop and mobile views. The researcher had other ideas that were liked more, but these were not feasible with customization skills to implement by requiring custom CSS code injection. Additionally, there was trouble with choosing a hero image.

The research had hundreds of options for hero pictures. This was because the researcher asked the partner's sister to take pictures for the website since she is a photographer. The researcher ended up doing 4 hours photoshoot session with different outfits and scenery. The researcher had a clear idea that he wanted to be portrayed in a relaxed and not too formal scenery. This goal was to open more of the personality with the images. The source of inspiration was Pinterest for what kind of pictures to add to the website. After many edits to the photos with Adobe Lightroom and felt like the photo chosen was the best for the feeling of the website, even if it does not follow recommendations for the hero image fully. This choice was intended as the researcher tends to think differently and challenge the norms. It was essential to highlight this and stay authentic.

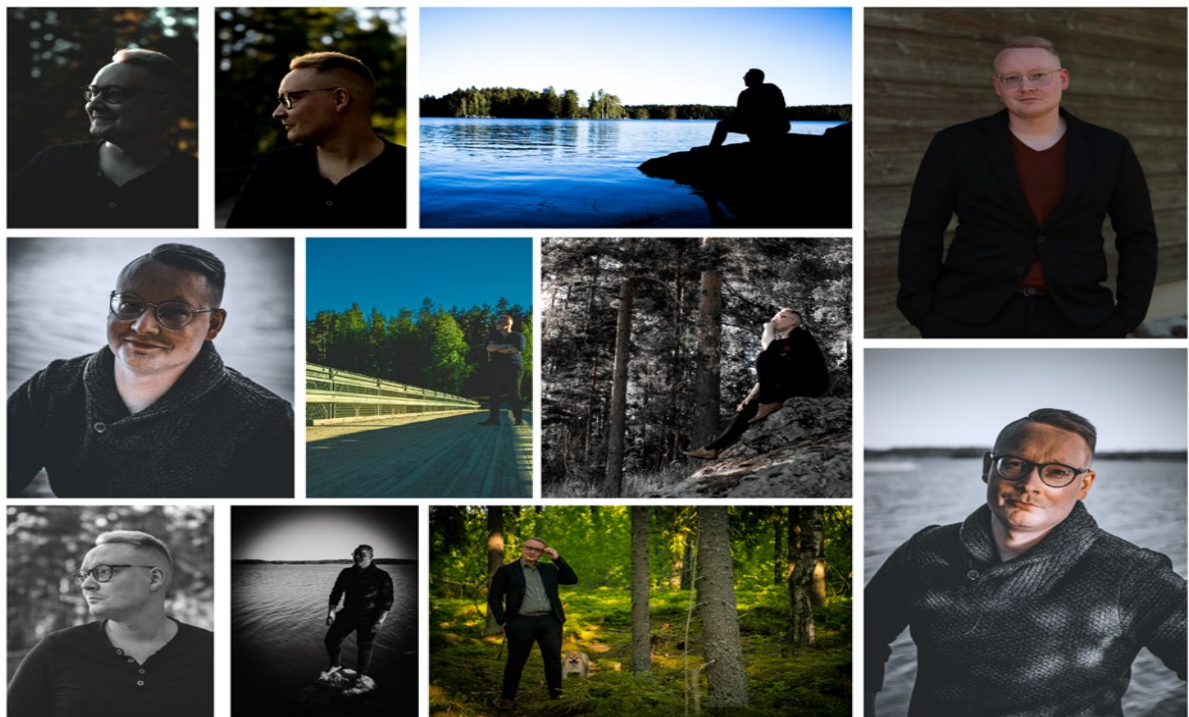


Figure 12. Few photos to choose from. (Helmikkala, 2022)

The next topic of controversy was the website domain name which does not follow recommendations. For example, Mike Kim (2021) and Karen Kang (2013) recommend

formatting the domain as first name + family name. However, the researcher chose a different route with the domain Kalltalks.com. The reasoning was that the family name Viljakainen is too hard to pronounce in English as the career goals lie in an international environment making English the first language in most cases. Another valid reason for not using the current family name is that it will change in marriage. For these reasons, the researcher took his Twitter handle @kalltalks and repurposed social media channels to have the same handle as the website. The researcher's brand is designed to communicate and educate recruiters about neurodiversity. However, it is not limited to only recruiters as the information presented can be used by anyone interested in neurodiversity.

A further consideration is to translate the website into the Finnish language later. Another way to name a website domain is to incorporate terminology that is related to the purpose of the business or site. (Kim, 2021, p. 76) The researcher's website revolves around education through blogging to lessen the stigma associated with neurodiversity. This led the researcher to incorporate part of the first name with the purpose of the website and resulted in KallTalks, which identifies the researcher as Kall and the communication method of choice as talk, meaning written and verbal communication, as this was identified to be one of the strengths of the researcher. The website domain is designed to highlight communication skills further.

The researcher continued the landing page design by adding a call-to-action and a short about section with links to CV and portfolio pages. The hardest part was writing a satisfying text for these sections. The researcher has made minor changes multiple times and reorganized the contents once. The researcher has tried to write a text that expresses his personality and values; hence he has included a section about ADHD on the landing page with links to resources that confirm ADHD advantages. The researcher chose to use ADHD as a part of the positioning and as a differentiator from the peers.

The design for the blog section has gone over multiple different layouts, as this section was designed next. It was important for the researcher to have a blog added to the website to showcase solid communication skills and help with positioning as an expert in the field as a part of the ecosystem wedge model. The blog is part of the brand and a tool for additional discovery as one tactic suggested for personal branding. A blog is a potent tool for self-

expression and personality. Finally, the blog serves as an accountability tool for the researcher as he has committed to posting once a week. (Kang, 2013, pp. 166-167, 181)

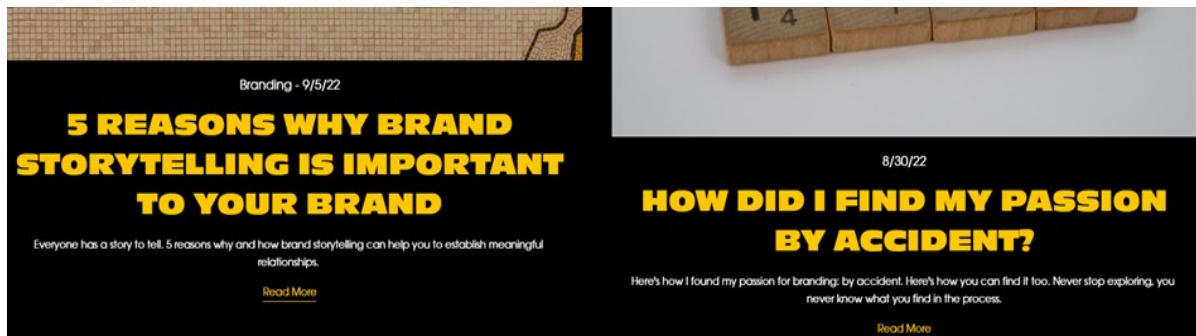


Figure 13. Overview of the blog. (KallTalks, 2022)

The portfolio page consists of five links to different projects the researcher has or is part of that are worth mentioning. Each link leads to a new page in the portfolio. Initially, the design had a pop-up picture about the project mouse hovering over, but it was found not to fit the minimal design.

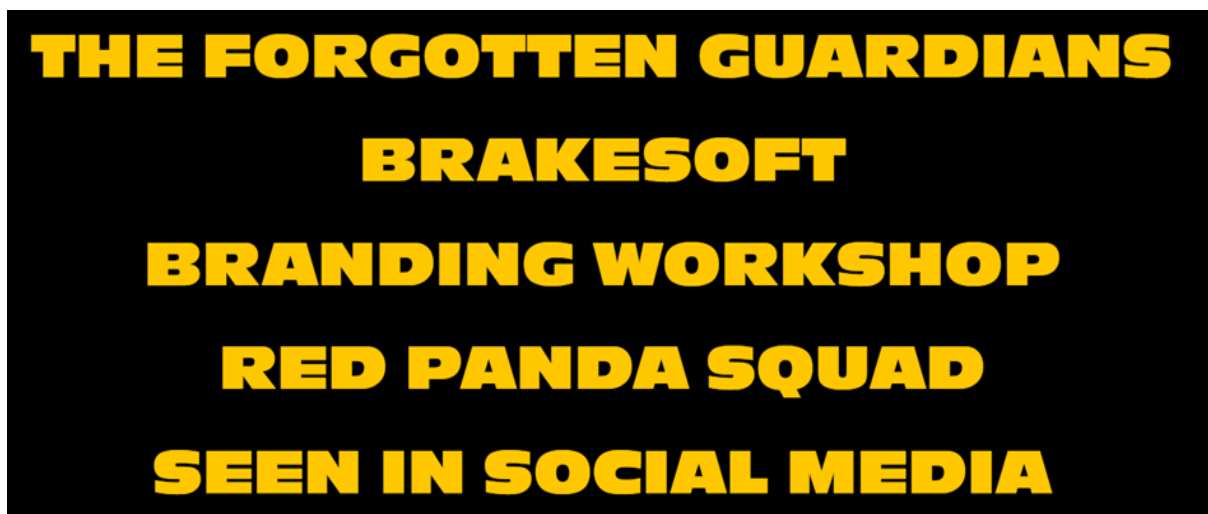


Figure 14. Portfolio layout. (KallTalks, 2022)

The purpose of the portfolio is to show previous or ongoing work for the target audience of recruiters. Each portfolio page describes what has been done, with what tools, and for what purpose, with links or pictures of the creations. In addition, the researcher added an extra category seen on social media to collect older works into one place.

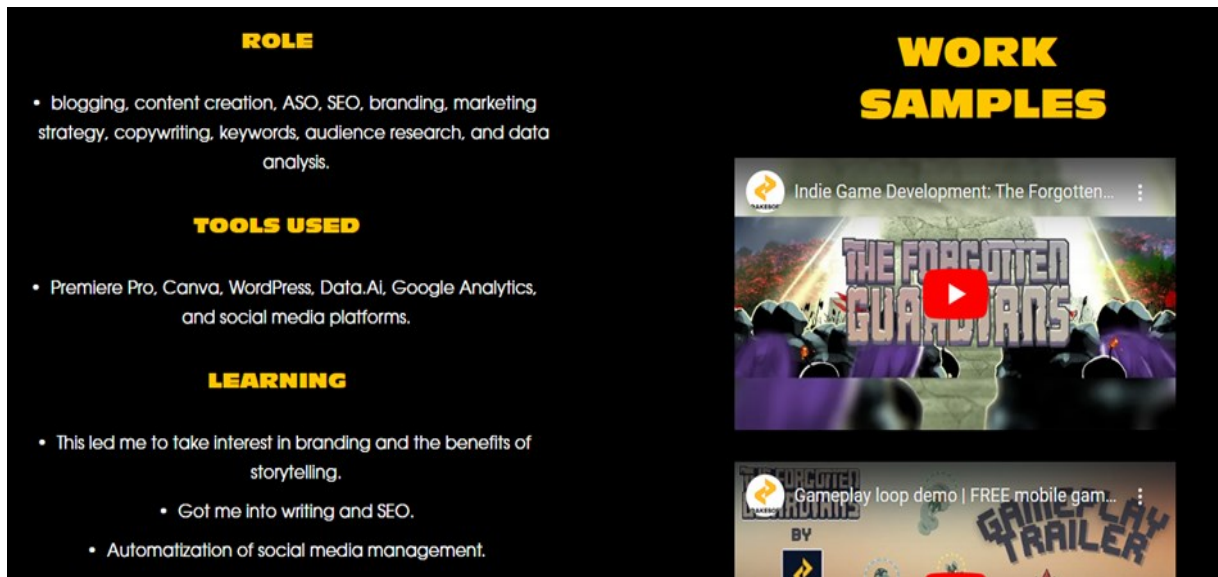


Figure 15. One of the portfolio pages. (KallTalks, 2022)

The last two pages left for the website are Contact and CV. The contact page is a quick way to contact the researcher if needed. Contact pages consist of a submission form with an email address and message. If anyone submits the form, the researcher gets an email notification from Squarespace of the submission.

 The image shows a contact form on a dark background with yellow text and a yellow 'Send' button. On the left, the text reads 'I'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU.' followed by 'Fill the form and I will get back to you.', 'All inquiries are welcome.', and 'Thanks, talk to you soon!'. At the bottom left are social media icons for Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. On the right, there are two input fields: 'Email *' and 'Message *', both with asterisks indicating they are required. Below the 'Message *' field is a yellow 'Send' button.

Figure 16. Submission form for contact. (KallTalks, 2022)

The CV page is where the researcher's resume is in downloadable pdf format for recruiters and hiring managers in case it is needed. The page also features the CV in written format for convenience purposes.

The last step was to update the social media channels to be on brand and to communicate outward with a cohesive brand image. The basis for the update and website was derived from the updated Twitter profile. Other updates were with LinkedIn since most people describe it as a professional network. The researcher tried to include Instagram before realizing he could not stretch himself to all possible channels. This led to an exploration of different social media schedulers, and the researcher tried to use one after the research. However, it still felt impossible to manage blog, Twitter, and LinkedIn with any additional social media channels with other obligations and needs to be reflected further.

The website was developed based on the assumption that there is a significant overlap between personal branding tactics and neurodiversity. According to published literature by Kim (2021) and Baker (2006), both are about defining strengths, using them to one's advantage, and making sure individuals are seen as experts in what they do.

Personal branding is about communicating who an individual is and what they can bring to any situation. The key here is that the person doing the branding needs to understand what they are good at and then communicate that information effectively. (Kim, 2021, p. 4)

The researcher believes neurodiversity is about communicating what makes an individual different in a way others can understand. It is also about being comfortable with who one is and explaining why it makes sense for others to work with someone like that. According to a study by Richman (2018), neurodiverse individuals may benefit organizations in a similar vein to traditional diversity. This can be elaborated through a personal brand messaging strategy, as personal branding includes presenting personality and identity, among others. (Kim, 2021, p. 4)

Blogging on the website is designed to be a tool for self-expression that can positively affect how neurodiversity is viewed and educate the readers about neurodiverse conditions. The blog serves as a tool for education, reflection, and learning and benefits the whole neurodiverse community. Researchers' other goal with the website, blog, and social media is to demonstrate in practice that being a neurodiverse individual does not mean that someone is less capable of working in the field of business.



Figure 17. LinkedIn page with brand elements. (Viljakainen, 2022)



Figure 18. Twitter page with brand elements. (Viljakainen, 2022)

5 Discussion

In the research, the goal was to explore the relationship between personal branding and neurodiversity. This was done using a practice-based research approach to create a personal brand. Then autoethnography was used to explore how researchers' neurodiverse identities

formed and affected the design of the personal brand. This chapter further elaborates on the problems around mental health stigma in the broader cultural setting and how the researcher looks to impact these misguided views. Additionally, the researcher achieved beneficial results and encouraging feedback about branding the researcher as neurodiverse. This is discussed further to encourage authenticity and others to do so; hence this chapter is written in the first person as opposed to the rest of the report to describe personal experiences better and improve the quality of the writing.

This chapter will discuss concrete, measurable results achieved, share the researcher's epiphany, and conduct small autoethnographic research within the research to explore the relationship between personal branding and neurodiversity. Themes will be linked to a broader cultural context. Reflection will be shared, and further development goals for the personal brand will be discussed. The researcher will also suggest future research and make arguments. Finally, the limitations of the study will be discussed.

5.1 Concrete results

Research has found that measuring the effectiveness of personal branding as a career success strategy is difficult. (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 10) Nevertheless, I have identified benefits and results from my project that I contribute to my personal brand. I will present the benefits and reflect on them in this chapter. Most of my results are feedback from others, but one tangible result can be identified.

The tangible benefit I identify as the main benefit was an invitation to cofacilitate a workshop in HAMK Design Factory. I was invited to present the basics of branding and the following workshop related to branding. I was approached to do this based on my posts on LinkedIn about branding. The goal was to open the branding concept for students of HAMK and VAOO and members of the FC Haka marketing team working on a joint project through Design Factory. This was an excellent experience for the future. I had to challenge myself with presenting and verbal communication, which I see as a skill I need to improve. I consider myself better at written communication, but that is not always an option. I managed to gain recognition for my expertise in branding and a few new connections, which ultimately is the goal of personal branding. (Kang, 2013, p. 21)

My messaging on LinkedIn has revolved around branding, storytelling, sharing blogs, and talking about neurodiversity. I struggled with imposter syndrome and needed to post only about a specific niche. Imposter syndrome was coined by psychologists Suzanne Imes and Pauline Rose Clance in the 1970s. A person with impostor syndrome may doubt his or her competence and act as if that person is a fraud. (Cuncic, 2022) However, I have used LinkedIn to share these topics and educate about neurodiversity as personal brand messaging should. (Kang, 2013, p. 67) Additionally to my branding workshop, I have gained positive and encouraging feedback on LinkedIn about the topics from multiple sources.

Messaging on Twitter has resolved solely around ADHD. Twitter has a vibrant community of neurodiverse individuals who educate, interact, and offer support in dealing with the condition. I started to engage in conversation and post my tweets around the start of May 2022 but more consistently from June to the end of August. Therefore, I will exclude data from September since the month has not ended when writing this.

Results month to month from Twitter activity:

Month	Number of tweets	Tweet views	Profile views	Mentions	New followers
May	4	1006	141	24	1
June	37	1199	256	42	0
July	160	31100	1750	190	12
August	68	6760	756	27	11

Table 1. Twitter analytics. (Twitter, 2022)

My website has struggled more in terms of numbers found in the data. The website was published in the first format on June 10th. However, something worth mentioning is that I have gained one form submission and positive feedback from other sources for my blog to be interesting to read. I have neglected my blog and have not been able to publish posts as frequently as I would have liked. This might have affected the results. My website has been viewed 189 times, and further development of the website is my goal, with active blogging and providing educational content. I have a solid foundation to direct traffic to my website,

especially on Twitter. Currently, I am missing a reason for free resources or additional content to drive traffic to the website.

5.2 Research limitations

The study has some limitations. First, the researcher is a student and graduate student. The researcher does have limited professional experience in marketing or branding. Data collected and used in the study is based on the researchers' interpretations of developing personal brands according to the recommendations in the literature. The study will not go further in measuring the success of the personal brand as this would require a longitudinal study approach which is not feasible for a bachelor's thesis and poses problems with time. However, if possible, benefits arise during the research; these will be discussed briefly. For this reason, the emphasis of the research is limited mainly to a reflection on the learning and broader cultural phenomena.

Second, this study focuses on generating a personal brand website to highlight the author's personality, skills, and previous experience for post-graduation benefits. Third, the goal is to raise awareness of neurodiversity and ADHD. Additional goal is to have a competitive advantage over peers applying for the same job positions and reflect on the success of these practices when possible. Thus, social media platforms are mentioned briefly without going in-depth about best practices for each platform. Goals of the thesis are elaborated further in the first chapter.

Time constraints limit measuring the success of managing the author's brand. For this reason, the researcher has limited measurements to reflect on the creation process and attained results during the project, if there are any. For the same reason of time constraints and being still a student, it is not feasible for this research to explore recruiters' views or feedback for the product. It would widen the research to include biases, interview reliance, and hiring processes (Austin et al., 2019, p. 1), hence the exclusion. Lack of an agreed framework for measuring the benefits of personal branding limits possibilities for measuring success. (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 10)

The relationship between personal branding and neurodiversity is discussed with an autoethnographic approach, as this allows the use of personal experiences and stories to showcase the need for a change in how neurodiversity is perceived within the broader culture. It limits the validity of the data by adding the researcher to the research. Addition of the researcher inside the research as a subject is one of the most common criticisms of the method. Another limitation autoethnographic narratives pose is the reflexive practice. Reflexivity requires honesty and the ability to self-disclose from the researcher and might raise ethical considerations by disclosing sensitive information about those in the stories. (Méndez-López, 2013, p. 284) Hence this research includes additional methods, which are presented in the methodology chapter.

These reasons have limited the researcher's scope to personal experiences as a student and graduate student for the report. So, instead, the researchers have focused on reflecting on the learning process and epiphany.

5.3 Understanding the relevancy of epiphany for the research

It is vital for the reader of this research paper to understand relevancy of the epiphany for the scope of the whole report. Autoethnographic was described in the methodology chapter of this report but the researcher's goal here is to validate and highlight the importance of sharing the epiphany further. Additionally, it is vital for the reader to understand that autoethnographic reports does not follow traditional structure and the shared epiphany or autobiographic text is the analytical work that is further analyzed. Autoethnographers seek to produce analytical, accessible texts, change the world for better and challenge the rather narrow ways to produce academic writing. Lastly, autoethnographers write provocative and evocative stories that seek emotional responses from readers and keep the conversation going or bring up new themes for the conversation. (Adams et al., 2011)

The core of autoethnography lies in combining characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. Autobiography can be defined as a method for retroactive and selective writing about authors past experiences in autoethnographic report. For autoethnographers, these are epiphanies which are necessary part of the method. (Adams et al., 2011)

Another part of autoethnography lies in ethnographic research method. Ethnography can be defined as a method to study cultural practices, common values, beliefs, and experiences with the goal to connect individuals from outside and inside and offer understanding of differences between these. (Adams et al., 2011)

Autoethnography seeks to connect these two methods. Author has combined autobiographic epiphany, analyzed that experience in relation to other similar epiphanies and provided ethnographic descriptions of a culture of neurodiversity. In terms of autoethnographic subtypes of the following chapter applies two types in community autoethnography and personal narratives. Both methods seek to illustrate, provoke, change, and intervene in cultural context for development of the society and understanding. (Adams et al., 2011)

Author is confident that shared epiphany below is rigorous description of the current cultural atmosphere in which countless individuals must navigate between gaining possibly life changing diagnosis, transformation of self-identity because of diagnosis and being perceived as less worthy because of neurological differences. Epiphany shares an autobiographic story and connects it to cultural context through ethnographic observations.

After all, autoethnography as a research method: “must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research.” (Adams et al., 2011)

5.4 Autoethnographic epiphany

It was the start of the year 2022. I started to explore a topic for my thesis, but I didn't have a clue where to start. I had an ongoing ADHD diagnosis process, and I spent most of my nights, my eyes glued to the screen of my phone, trying to learn everything I could about ADHD and neurodiversity. Countless sleepless nights struggling to understand why I had struggled so much in school and in life or what it all meant for me as an adult, for my future family, for my career... For years, I struggled with depression and anxiety because no one understood me or what made me different from others. I certainly felt different from my peers for most

of my life. I was able to lie and justify this feeling of not belonging to my childhood and adolescence for so long.

2004 quotes from child service texts when I was 11 years old:

"Father came to the office and told me that Kalle does not want to go home."

"Kalle has had to be in an environment of uncertainty for a long time, taking care of himself during the evenings and weekends..."

"Kalle does not want to go home since there is that man."

I remember being so embarrassed about my family. All those years wasted trying to change something about myself that cannot be changed. All those late-night fights with my fiancée when I got a new idea of what I wanted to do next before changing the plans again. It became evident to her and through her to me that this could not continue. In retrospect, this makes complete sense. I felt like a kite without direction and just went where the wind took me in the sky. I was desperate for answers.

"What if I have ADHD?"

"Why did it take me so long to figure out what was wrong?"

"Why did no one ever tell me that this is just how my brain works?"

"Is this real or just another stamp the medical system gives me?"

Like so many times before, with diagnoses of major depressive disorder, anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder, and suspicion of bipolar disorder, each of these diagnoses required me to approach and pitch the diagnosis for them myself. I tried countless medications, I tried eye movement desensitization, and reprocessing for complex post-traumatic stress disorder. I have been in psychotherapy for five years, and it's safe to say I was running out of options at this point. I could say that ADHD was my last resort, and it was scary.

After months of uncertainty and doubt, I finally had a meeting with a psychiatrist on 4.4.2022. I was nervous. It was a Monday morning, and I'd been waiting to meet with the psychiatrist for weeks. I had spent months waiting for this moment of doubt, fear, and uncertainty. I'd spent so much time being unsure about whether or not I was right about my suspicion of having ADHD. But now... now it was time for me to find out if this whole thing was going to work out or not. I pulled my office chair and took a deep breath before clicking join the meeting, which was held online. It felt like anything that came out of the meeting would be important in one way or the other —like what happened today would set everything else into motion for me. And while that might seem dramatic, it's true. I knew that this meeting could change everything for me. Maybe today would be when all my problems went away forever; maybe today would be the day that everything fell apart completely and irreparably; maybe today would be just another day where nothing changed at all.

I didn't know which one of those things was going to happen, but I knew that it would change something in my life. When I finally got a diagnosis and stimulant medication, it was like someone had turned on the lights in a room that I hadn't known was so dark. It offered clarity and direction for my life, which had been in chaos for 28 years. Finally, I got confirmation, and it felt liberating. I had an explanation for my continued hardships in adulthood, finally. It was a moment that I'll never forget. It was an incredibly emotional moment. But it also served as a turning point for me, personally and professionally. Until then, I had been running around like a chicken without a head, trying to do everything everywhere. But after the meeting, I knew something had to change, whether because of stimulant medication or otherwise. I knew that if I didn't take some time off to reflect on what was important in life, I'd never be able to truly live it. So, I took a step back from work and decided to put myself first for a week.

I spent time doing things that made me happy, like going out for coffee with friends or taking long walks through the park with my dog, and I started finding myself again. But, it wasn't just about "finding myself"; it was about figuring out whom I wanted to be. That's when it all clicked into place after I stumbled upon the writings of Dale Archer. Archer flipped the script for me by highlighting the benefits of ADHD and neurodiversity. I had a gift that made me more creative and able to think on my feet in ways others couldn't. It was like someone had

taken a giant mirror and shown me how my mind worked—and how it could work even better if I started using those strengths instead of fighting against them and trying to fit in. It is not my fault society is built for neurotypical brains.

Until this point, I had struggled with my thesis topic and pitched a multitude of ideas to my supervisor but had the base of doing practice-based research. I was starting to lean towards a personal branding website to benefit from my thesis after graduation. Then it hit me. I am an individual who is neurodivergent. I need to go where no one has gone before and explore the relationship between neurodiversity and personal branding. The more I tried to find information on the topic, the less I found. I knew at this point in time that I had identified something new, exciting, and novel with significance to pursue. I had just undergone a transformative life event that shaped my perception of my personality in a different light. From my struggles, I realized that being a neurodivergent is part of who I am. There is a need for a shift in culture towards us on a personal and professional level to end the stigmatization. What better way to do that than myself?

I ended up writing this earlier than I thought. What I mean by this is that I could not start writing about this experience until I had lived as a neurodivergent and made sense of that through communicating with other neurodiverse individuals. Like Stacy Holman (2014) writes in their book *Autoethnography*:

"However, it was not until I became an adoptive mother and began to write about the "inside" experience of adoption that I could make sense of the knowledge "out there" about adoption. Reflecting and writing allowed me to connect empirical knowledge generated through the observations and analyses of others"

She describes her process starting with thinking of adopting as rigorous research to learn about the experiences of birth mothers, adoptive mothers, and adopted children. She read memoirs and novels, nonfiction works that discussed how to adopt and provided advice about raising adopted children, and a variety of research reports (articles, book chapters, and edited collections) on transnational adoption. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 22) This is what I did with ADHD back in 2021 when I started my diagnosis process, but I can only now reflect on my observations and others.

It is a bit intimidating to realize now how much there are similarities between developing my personal brand and the discovery of being a neurodivergent. Discovery of having ADHD completely reinvented my whole identity and, in that sense, my brand. It forced me to reflect and observe myself from a totally new angle. My thesis has offered me a chance to expand that reflection even further. This happened when I tried objectively viewing my brand with the help of resources, feedback, and literature. I would not be able to say that both are highly reflective processes to go over if I had not done it yet. Clearly, ADHD had a major influence on my website and the personal brand it tries to convey.

The cultural significance of personal branding (Zarkada, 2011) and neurodiversity (Ortega, 2009.) in recent years is undeniable. As the trend of personal branding grows, so does the need for new and innovative ways to brand oneself. One area that has not been explored in depth is personal branding for individuals with neurodiverse conditions. The presentation of ADHD and neurodiversity as a strength-based identity (Baker, 2006) and the term's popularity offer me a chance to destigmatize mental disorders by marketing my brand as neurodiverse. (Ahmed & Jeffries, 2022) We are far from ending the stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001) and need to examine how a person's personal brand may help advocate and promote awareness.

The stigma associated with mental illness discourages people from seeking treatment; as a result, 70% of people with mental illnesses do not receive treatment. (Henderson et al., 2013). Neurodiverse consumers represent a large, under-served market, relate to the market exclusion of marginalized groups, and are focused on positive cultural shifts enabling consumer well-being. This is further emphasized in their findings that the existence of large, hidden populations of neurodiverse people who are compelled to mask their neurodiversity indicates that there are barriers to disclosure. (Ahmed & Jeffries, 2022, pp. 2, 14) This is not surprising since neurodiversity is not understood, even in medical care.

I got asked by a nurse today what level of autism I had and where I was on the spectrum? What does this even mean? I've got a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. She also said, "we're all a little bit autistic aren't we?" I wish I knew how to respond to comments like this.

Figure 19. Tweet from Twitter. (Pinkautiegirl, 2022)

This tweet is a perfect example of a need for wider recognition of neurodiverse conditions. If the level of understanding is this from medical professionals, it is not a surprise it is viewed negatively. What makes this worse, especially with ADHD, is the lack of understanding among medical professionals. It is more common to go through every possible diagnosis before ADHD is even considered as the underlying condition. I was not alone in this, as this discussion with my friend in August 2021 shows.

"I can rant you about how disappointed I am after they say to me that I don't have ADHD, enjoy your diagnosis roulette for the rest of your life." I said.

"My friend had a similar problem. Pretty sure she's only been diagnosed with ADHD recently. And it's been like depression and all the others. She has really bad problems with concentration on top of dyslexia as well. It sucks"

I replied:" Yeah me too with depression and all the others. Most recent being generalized anxiety disorder. I am having hard time focusing as well. Especially on thing that I don't do voluntarily, but then again I can have hyperfocus on interesting things to a point where I ignore basic human needs like eating."

"Yup, that's her as well."

I remember being astonished by all the signs of ADHD in my childhood. This happened when I read all the old documents from school, medical and child services. I needed to collect these from birth to the present day and provide for the diagnosis process. Especially in my certificates from elementary school, I could not find a single one that did not mention hyperactivity or attention deficit. In hindsight, it was a balancing act between being sad and annoyed by it or not. Now, it still is; after all, diagnosis for the condition did not exist until 1980, and ADHD was added as late as 1994. (Archer, 2016, p. 20) I can't help but think if my

parents were not labeled as alcoholic, my ADHD might have been identified earlier. Obviously, the condition was not recognized as often back then, but what is the excuse for the last ten years when I got my first mental health diagnosis of depression. According to Dale Archer (2016), the medical community is beginning to acknowledge that it has largely failed its patient population in diagnosing and treating ADHD. This applies to over and under-diagnosis of ADHD.

Archer (2016) argues that we are over-medicating and diagnosing currently, and the root problem is aggressive marketing campaigns. I tend to agree with this. The prescription of a pill is a solution to everything in our culture. I will not pretend that I do not use stimulant medication occasionally, but I do argue that the pill was not the solution. Rather the changing factor for me has been the affirmation and acceptance that my brain functions differently. My life would be different if I had had an opportunity to do this earlier. I base this on my empirical experience and observing experiences of others in the neurodiverse Twitter community. My experience has commonalities with Jessica McCabe's TEDxBratislava talk (2017), where she describes her experience and journey with ADHD. That talk resonates with me on a deep level to the point I have a hard time not crying each time I listen to it. She attributes her success as one of the most successful ADHD content creator and educator to three things:

- She learned about her unique brain function.
- While learning, she discovered the career that suited her.
- She learned strategies to function in a society that is not built for neurodiverse brains.

I gained the confidence to share my epiphany based on Dale Archer's (2016) writings on success with ADHD and the talk by Jessica McCabe (2017), among other sources. As a result, I developed a desire to do the same. Why is there a culture of stigmatization of ADHD when at the same time, we have highly successful individuals attributing ADHD as their source of success? Such individuals as Michael Phelps, Justin Gatlin, and David Neeleman have publicly embraced their ADHD. Other successful individuals with confirmed or speculated to have ADHD traits include individuals such as: Sir Richard Branson, Alan Meckler, Steve Jobs, Walt Disney, Andrew Carnegie, and Malcolm Forbes. (Archer, 2016, p. 45, 181)

It was interesting to find out that there is scientific evidence of individuals with ADHD possessing the so-called explorer gene. Archer cites a study published in 1999 by scientists at the University of California, which found that long history of migration within groups is associated with a variant of the D4 receptor gene called 7R. This gene variant is linked to ADHD and is recognized as the explorer gene. He adds that ADHD has been found to be vital for the survival of the human species (Archer, 2016, pp. 69-70), thus making ADHD a natural part of the human species from an evolutionary standpoint. However, this creates a problem rooted in academic research culture, resulting in poor understanding among medical professionals and society about neurological differences. There is a wide body of evidence in academic research concluding neurodiversity is a natural variation in humans. However, current understanding never reflects this at the societal level and culture.

Further validity for this is found in Johan Wiklund, who has published multiple studies on entrepreneurship and was interviewed for Archer's book. (Archer, 2016, p. 177) Wiklund states that he found a remarkable lack of research examining causal links in academia about the benefits of ADHD for entrepreneurship regardless of existing evidence. More so, by portraying ADHD in a positive light by citing two studies from 1993 and 2013.

At which point our culture and perception of neurodiverse conditions shifted from natural variation to problematic? I want to emphasize this further by sharing a few motivational stories of ADHD from ADHD advantage book. (Archer, 2016, pp. 187, 201, 233, 244, 248)

"As I learned of other entrepreneurs with the same need for a change of pace and desire to jump from thing to thing, I realized that what people label ADD or ADHD might be a badge of honor in the entrepreneurial world. It's a gift, not a weakness. I need to leverage the parts that help make me who I am and take advantage of this opportunity." - Brian Scudamore, CEO

"Rash action is stimulating for my ADHD brain. Things are moving so fast in sports, and events are so unpredictable that you have to react to things as they occur. I am so tuned into

everything happening at the moment when things are flashing before your eyes. In fact, I kind of like it when the pressure is on.” - Tatiana, ex-athlete, startup incubator consultant

“ADHD people have something to offer, but that gets stunted or muted in a regular workplace. If only people could learn to leverage what they are good at, ADHD would become a nonissue.” – DeShawn Wert, ADHD coach

“People in positions of authority used to tell me that if I don’t do well in school, I won’t do well in life. Well, what about Steve Jobs, Sir Richard Branson or Bill Gates?” – Daniel Sandler, online career advice entrepreneur

“You have to have a passion. If you can combine that drive with the energy of an ADHD brain, there’s just no stopping you.” - Lee Mallet, entrepreneur.

5.5 Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was for the author to bring to light and demonstrate the obstacles neurodiverse individuals must conquer. It was important to share how hard it is to arrive at the right diagnosis. Offering a voice for all neurodivergent individuals who struggle with disclosure and taking the risk of being stigmatized to inspire is a risk worth taking, and the author did this to raise awareness of the stereotypes associated with conditions related to mental health or neurological difference.

In addition, doing this in practice, and developing a personal brand by advocating for the benefits of neurodiversity and as a positioning strategy, the author’s intention was to encourage a shift in how neurodiversity is viewed. It was imperative to show how a personal brand can be used for the benefit of a marginalized group of people and the concept of neurodiversity heard, with the objective to show how being authentic gained results, as well as helped the author to overcome the fear of being stigmatized. The target was to encourage organizations and recruiters to adjust their processes of talent acquisition, and, to encourage researchers to expand the scope of diversity research.

Neurodiversity should be viewed similarly as diversity is viewed in organizations and culture. Diversity has been studied and found to be beneficial in multiple studies. However, systematic review of diversity management literature found that the top three dimensions of diversity have been repeatedly examined—age, gender, and race—but other relationship-oriented dimensions such as LGBT and disability have been largely ignored. (Lenka & Yadav, 2019, p. 19) These findings have similarities with research around the concept of personal branding. Personal branding has been viewed as a space where one can stand out from the rest, it has also been rigidly characterized by a rather heterogeneity mold of knowledge, ideas, and ways of thinking. (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 1) Although this characterization was in many ways well-intentioned in its innovative ways of thinking, it overlooked and excluded many people who did not fall into the conventional academic model. An identity-first definition of neurodiversity allows us to see that everyone is different, everyone learns differently, and this should be reflected in the research.

The author argues that personal branding, a cultural and social movement, is like neurodiversity because they both focus on changing public perceptions. Personal branding works to redefine the way people view themselves and their identities by focusing on their strengths rather than weaknesses, while neurodiversity strives to change the way people perceive those with neurological differences by emphasizing the importance of recognizing their unique abilities. This is emphasized with the success stories from Dale Archer's book. Both movements are trying to change the way people think about themselves and others around them. As someone who identifies as neurodiverse and has been working with my personal brand for some time now.

Furthermore, these two concepts can work together to make an individual feel comfortable expressing themselves authentically without fear of judgment or stigma from others around them. The first step to making this happen is by changing the way people talk about these issues. Instead of talking about mental illnesses or mental disorders, we should be talking about neurodiversity and being different. The reason for this is because it is a widely accepted fact that there are many different types of brains out there, and if one person's brain happens to function differently from another's, that doesn't make either one of them broken or damaged in any way.

In addition to changing the way people talk about these issues; it is necessary to start focusing more on teaching people how they can be more accepting towards others who may not act or behave exactly like them. This means educating people of all ages on how important it is for them to accept other people's differences instead of treating those differences as something negative or wrong about someone else's behavior.

Overall, the positives and benefits that were discovered through writing this thesis have helped immensely when developing the author's personal brand. New insights, new connections, opportunities, and confidence have been gained, as well as learning through doing that it requires hard work, dedication, and consistency to build a personal brand. The chance to explore neurodiversity through the development of personal branding has helped to gain confidence which is advantageous with regards to imposter syndrome. A glimpse into the demands of content creation has been seen, and it has been noted that it is necessary to ensure that the content put out there is consistent and developed in a way to further grow a personal brand. This project has demanded a lot of reflection and inner observation, while developing expertise as a researcher.

The author's assumption of doing research has changed from being a boring and tedious task to interesting. The desire to further study oneself through autoethnography as the sole method of study, has been transformative and exciting. Autoethnography has been an incredibly hard research method but rewarding. I would take all that out. Creativity plays a major role in the author's identity and autoethnographic research is a freeing way to explore that creativity in a different way from traditional research approaches. Through this thesis, autoethnography is one of the most suitable ways to conduct research where applicable for neurodiverse individuals. The reason for this is quite simple; traditions and rules of doing academic research are designed for neurotypical brains.

It is important to end this paper by encouraging readers to be different, find creative solutions and approaches to research. This is especially true for individuals with neurodiversity conditions—it is part of our identity.

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Appendix 1: Personal brand assessment questions

1. What do you think my core values are?
2. What is my skill set?
3. What is my expertise?
4. What are the weaknesses that may hold me back?
5. What is my unique expertise or value that differentiates me?
6. How do I come across to others?
7. What are the key adjectives that describe my personality? You can also describe my look and style.
8. What kind of leader am I?
9. What is it like to engage with me – professionally and socially?
10. What is a living or inanimate thing that best represents my brand? Examples: 1. A trusted Saint Bernard dog who always comes to the rescue. 2. A mini cooper car that is efficient, fun to drive and has quirky sense of style.

Appendix 2: Personal brand assessment replies in Finnish

1

Honesty, integrity, communication, driving for results, result-oriented, competent, wordly
Trust, innovation and teamwork
Respect, trust, accountability, leadership, honesty, responsibility
compassion, trust, inclusiveness
Accountability, adaptability and leadership

2

Strategic vision and communication
Problem solving, creativity, communication. Marketing and brand building.
communication, new ideas

3

Research, knowing where to look.
Collaboration and communication

People management, strategic planning and leadership.
Marketing

4

-
Busy time and many projects same time
not the youngest so could be held back

5

Sense of humor and determination
Flexibility and open to try new ideas and concept. Eager to learn always.
Confidence

6

Friendly & sense of humor
Very well. You do have good communication skills and positive attitude and character.

easy going and some one who wants to listen to others ideas

7

friendly
Social, honest and funny
Positive, friendly and energetic.

8

Reliable and analytical
You have potential to be a good leader in future.
a listener, commpasionate
Autocratic Style

9

Honest and sense of humor
Easy to work and very much professional.

"professionally: takes the lead and says what needs to be said without hesitation

socially: easy going and super friendly"

10

As sharp as glasses: can be seen the whole vision and the smallest details at the same time on through them

I choose option 2.

a puma - ready to strike but lurking nicely waiting to fix what needs to be fixed