

Employer Brand and Employer Value Proposition from the Employees' Perspective

A Case Study of Ahola Digital Oy Ab

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Abstract

Employer branding is how the company brands and markets their employer value proposition (EVP), and the efforts they take to attract and retain the best possible human talent within an employment environment that is becoming increasingly competitive. EVP is the values, benefits, and employment experience the company offers to their employees. Employer branding has increased tremendously in popularity recently, and although the theory is relatively new, less than 30 years old, many research studies from different aspects can be found.

The software industry, which the case company operates within, has a large shortage of talent. This thesis is of practical importance for the case company, Ahola Digital Oy Ab. While the company does different employer branding activities as standalone processes, they do not have an overall employer branding strategy in place. The purpose of this thesis was to research what the employees think of Ahola Digital as an employer in the aspect of employer branding and to find out what the employees' current perceptions of Ahola Digital's EVP attributes are and how these can be utilized in an employer branding strategy. This thesis will thus serve as a first step in creating an employer branding strategy.

The theoretical framework was based upon theories regarding employer branding, employer value proposition, and importance-performance analysis (IPA). A deductive methodology was used, a pilot test was done, and quantitative research was conducted through an online questionnaire in the autumn of 2022. The questionnaire included a few general questions regarding employer branding and 48 EVP attributes within these five dimensions: economic, development, social, work, and employer reputation. The quantitative approach allowed for analyzing the result with the IPA method in Excel and testing the hypotheses in SPSS.

The result showed the employees are satisfied with their employment overall, they are likely to recommend their employer to others and they proudly tell others where they work. The employees' current perception of Ahola Digital's EVP attributes was that there were not one distinct but several EVP attributes within social values and work values that the company succeeded with, whilst the EVP attributes that stood out from the ones the company still need to work on were: competitive salary and compensation, opportunities to develop new skills through training, and opportunity to work across multiple technologies. These are further discussed and suggestions for improvements as well as the next steps for the employer branding strategy are given.

Language: English

Key Words: employer branding, employer value proposition, importance-performance analysis

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Abstrakt

Arbetsgivarvarumärke syftar på hur företag utvecklar och marknadsför deras varumärke och medarbetarlöften, samt de insatser de gör för att attrahera och behålla de bästa mänskliga talangerna inom en arbetsgivarmiljö som blir allt mer konkurrenskraftig. Medarbetarlöfte är de värderingar, förmåner och den erfarenhet som de anställda kan förvänta sig att få av att arbeta för företaget. Intresset för arbetsgivarvarumärke har ökat enormt i popularitet den senaste tiden, och även om teorin är relativt ny, mindre än 30 år gammal kan många forskningsstudier hittas var ämnet har studerats från olika aspekter.

Mjukvarubranschen som fallföretaget verkar inom har en stor brist på talang. Detta examensarbete är av en praktisk betydelse för fallföretaget, Ahola Digital Oy Ab. Även om företaget genomför olika aktiviteter inom arbetsgivarvarumärke som fristående processer har dom ingen övergripande strategi för utvecklingen av deras arbetsgivarvarumärke. Syftet med detta examensarbete var att undersöka vad de anställda tycker om Ahola Digital i aspekten av arbetsgivarvarumärke samt att ta reda på vad anställdas nuvarande uppfattning om Ahola Digital's medarbetarlöften är och hur dessa kan användas i en arbetsgivarvarumärkesstrategi. Detta examenarbete är således ett första steg i att skapa en arbetsgivarvarumärkesstrategi.

Examensarbetets teoretiska bakgrund baseras på teorier som behandlar arbetsgivarvarumärke, medbetarlöfte och importance-performance analysen (IPA). En deduktiv metod användes, ett pilottest gjordes och en kvantitativ undersökning utfördes genom ett online frågeformulär under hösten 2022. Enkäten innehöll några allmänna frågor om arbetsgivarvarumärke och 48 medarbetarlöften inom dessa fem områden: ekonomi, utveckling, socialt, arbete och arbetsgivarvykte. Den kvantitativa metoden gjorde det möjligt att analysera resultatet med IPA metoden i Excel och att testa hypoteserna i SPSS.

Resultatet av undersökningen visade att de anställda är nöjda med sin anställning överlag, de rekommenderar sannolikt deras arbetsgivare till andra och de berättar stolt för andra var de arbetar. De anställdas nuvarande uppfattning om Ahola Digital's medarbetarlöften var att det inte fanns ett unikt utan flera löften inom sociala värderingar och arbetsvärderingar som företaget lyckas med, med de medarbetarlöften som företaget borde förbättra är: konkurrenskraftig lön och ersättning, möjligheter att utveckla nya färdigheter genom utbildning samt möjlighet att arbeta med flera tekniker. Dessa diskuteras och förslag för förbättringar samt nästa steg i skapandet av en arbetsgivarvarumärkesstrategi ges.

Språk: Engelska

Nyckelord: arbetsgivarvarumärke, medarbetarlöfte, importance-performance-analys

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Tiivistelmä

Työnantajabrändäyksellä tarkoitetaan miten yritys brändää ja markkinoi heidän työnantajalupauksensa, ja toimenpiteitä mitä he tekevät houkutelukseen ja pidelläkseen paras osaaminen kilpailukykyisemmässä työympäristössä. Työnantajalupauksella tarkoitetaan millaisia arvoja, etuja ja työllisyyskokemuksia yritys tarjoaa työntekijöilleen. Työnantajabrändäyksen suosio on kasvanut paljon viime aikoina ja vaikka teoria on suhteellisen uusi, alle 30 vuotta vanha, löytyy useita tutkimuksia eri näkökulmista.

Tapausyritys toimii ohjelmistoteollisuudessa ja heillä on suuri pula osaajista. Tämä opinnäytetyö on hyödyllinen tapausyhtiölle, Ahola Digital Oy Ab. Vaikka he tekevät erilaisia työnantajabrändäys-toimintoja itsenäisinä prosesseina, heillä ei ole kokonaisvaltaista työnantajabrändäysstrategiaa. Tarkoituksena oli tutkia mitä työntekijät ajattelevat Ahola Digital Oy Ab:stä työnantajana työnantajabrändäyksen näkökulmasta sekä selvittää millaisia käsityksiä työntekijöillä on tällä hetkellä Ahola Digitalin työnantajalupauksesta ja miten niitä voidaan hyödyntää työnantajabrändäysstrategiassa. Tämä opinnäytetyö on ensimmäinen askel työnantajabrändäysstrategian luomisessa.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen tausta perustui teorioihin, jotka käsittelevät työnantajabrändiä, työnantajalupaus ja importance-performance-analyysia. Opinnäytetyössä käytettiin deduktiivista metodologiaa, tehtiin pilottitesti ja kvantitatiivista tutkimusta online-kyselylomakkeella syksyllä 2022. Kyselylomake sisälsi muutamia yleisiä työnantajabrändistä koskevia kysymyksiä ja 48 työnantajalupaus näillä viidellä osa-alueella: rahoitus, kehitys, sosiaalinen, työ ja työnantajan maine. Kvantitatiivinen menetelmä mahdollisti tulosten analysoinnin IPA-menetelmällä Excelissä ja hypoteesien testaamisen SPSS:llä.

Kyselyn tulokset osoittivat, että työntekijät ovat yleisesti ottaen tyytyväisiä työhönsä, he todennäköisesti suosittelevat työnantajaansa muille ja kertovat ylpeänä muille missä työskentelevät. Työntekijöiden käsitys Ahola Digitalin työnantajalupauksista oli, että ei ollut yksi erillinen, vaan useita sosiaalisten arvojen ja työarvojen sisällä, joilla yritys menestyy, kun taas työnantajalupauksista, joita yrityksen on vielä työstettävä ovat: kilpailukykyinen palkka ja palkkiot, mahdollisuudet kehittää uusia taitoja koulutuksen kautta sekä mahdollisuus työskennellä monien teknologioiden parissa. Keskustellaan ja annetaan parannusehdotuksia näihin ja työnantajabrändäysstrategian tulevia askeleita.

Kieli: Englanti

Avainsanat: työnantajabrändi, työnantajalupaus, importance-performance-analyysi

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1 Introduction

Employer brand is a relatively new theory. The term was coined in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow, and it has increased a lot in popularity during the last few years. According to Backhaus (2016) a google search on the term *employer branding* yielded 3000 hits in 2004, and over 3 million hits in 2016. A google search in May 2022, when the writing process of this thesis started, yielded 20,5 million hits, while in October 2022, less than a half year later, yielded over 23 million hits, and in November 2022, yet a month later, yielded almost 29 million hits. A search on the term *employer brand* on the other hand yielded over 98 million hits in November 2022, and the difference between the terms that are often used synonymously will be discussed in Chapter 2, theoretical framework. Nevertheless, employer brand, although quite new as a theory is increasing tremendously in popularity at this moment.

Employer branding can be described as the efforts taken toward “recruiting and retaining the best possible human talent within an employment environment that is becoming increasingly competitive” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 513). With employer branding, the company can differentiate themselves in the employment marketplace. The employer branding process includes developing and marketing the employer value proposition (EVP). (Backhaus, 2016).

EVP can be described as the company’s unique qualities that they want to be associated with (Mosley, 2014), but also the employment experiences the company offers and what it is really like working for them (Adams & Marshall, 2020). The EVP must come from within, preferably from the employees and not management, as they might otherwise lack credibility (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

Employer branding is based upon the concepts of human resources (HR) and brand marketing but is also similar to corporate culture and identity, internal marketing, and corporate reputation (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). According to Backhaus (2016), all companies have an employer brand, but not all put effort into differentiating themselves as employers. Many companies do not have an employer branding strategy in place, instead, they do some activities as standalone processes, such as promoting employee wellness or having a career site.

This thesis is the first step in creating an employer branding strategy for the case company. Employer branding is a vast subject incorporating many different concepts and activities and instead of trying to fix it all at once, this thesis will concentrate on the employees' view of the company's employer brand and specifically their EVP. This thesis intends to find out the key EVP attributes the employees think the case company succeeds with, which could be their unique EVP to market, but also the key EVP attributes the case company needs to work on as improving these could optimize employee retention.

The case company for this thesis is Ahola Digital Oy Ab. They operate within the software industry focusing on developing sustainable logistic solutions. Ahola Digital's international subcontractor and their employees will also be included in the data collection sample because of the nature of the collaboration where employees from both companies work together closely on different software development projects on a daily basis. The software industry had already before the covid-19 pandemic a shortage of talent, especially in Finland with a limited pool of talent. A search on KEHA-keskus (Job Market Finland) 20.5.2022 shows that 2486 of 32470 open vacancies include the term *software*, which is 7,7 % of all open vacancies.

The introduction will now continue to go through the background of the thesis and introduce the case company as well as the software industry. The research problem where previous research has been looked at, as well as the research purpose, research question, objectives, and hypotheses, are then presented. Lastly, the delimitations of this thesis are presented as well as the thesis structure.

1.1 Background

Employee motivation and having the possibility to thrive at work is something I value and find interesting to work with, and employer branding includes these parts hence the choice of subject. This has also been a priority for Ahola Digital for years already, but in regard to employer branding they do not have an overall employer branding strategy in place, instead, they do different activities as standalone processes. The scope of this thesis is set to an overview of employer branding with a focus on EVP as these are a vital part of employer branding. With the current employment market within the software industry, focusing on their employer brand could be useful for Ahola Digital.

Ahola Digital is furthermore going through a rebranding process, and while the new brand was already taken into use two years ago there are a few places where the old brand is still used due to both external as well as internal factors. The survey should take this into account, as well as how the subcontractor's employees, while employed under another company's name, identify with Ahola Digital and their brand.

1.1.1 Ahola Digital Oy Ab

Ahola Digital Oy Ab has over 20 years of logistics experience. They concentrate on creating sustainable logistics software solutions both for road transport services as well as smart city services. They have their own native cloud platform and are both ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 certified. Today they have around 40 employees in total, and while still conducting a hybrid work environment they have offices in several locations both in Finland and abroad. (Ahola Digital, 2022).

1.1.2 Software industry

The software industry consists of the development, distribution, and maintenance of software and it can be divided into four major categories: programming services, system services, open source, and system-as-a-service (SaaS) (Statista, n.d., Investopedia, 2022). Software can be found in all aspects of our lives as both individuals and businesses rely on software and applications to perform daily tasks. One of the major trends in the software industry now is the move from on-premise software to cloud and SaaS. (Statista, n.d.).

Industry 4.0 is defined as the digital transformation era where technologies are blurring out the line between the physical, digital, and biological spheres of production. Industry 4.0 differs from previous industry revolutions in speed, scale, complexity, and transformative power. (Bongomin et al., 2020). Industry 4.0 includes, among other things, artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics, cyber-physical system, internet-of-things, and internet-of-systems (Bawany, 2020).

The great resignation is a term coined by Dr. Anthony Klotz of Texas A&M University which is referring to the wave of job turnover that started in 2021 and has caused a major talent shortage in the job market. According to a survey by TalentLMS (2021) done together with Workable, over 72 % of the employees working in tech and IT roles were thinking about

quitting their job within the next year, which was significantly higher than 55 % of the overall U.S. workforce. The top reasons for wanting to quit were a limited career progression, lack of flexible working hours, and a toxic work environment, whilst the top criteria for selecting a new company were salary and benefits, skills development, and flexibility or remote work options. (Talent LMS, 2021). According to the IDC Market Perspective, the global shortage of full-time developers will increase from 1.4 million in 2021 to 4 million in 2025 (Dayaratna, 2021).

There were 81400 employees working within IT (software, consulting, and related tasks) in Finland at the end of June 2022, and about 3200 employees more per year are needed according to Teknologiateollisuus Ry (2022). Software E-business Finland CEO Rasmus Roiha stated in an article in Talous Taito from October 2021 that Finnish software and IT-service companies would be able to hire 10000-15000 new employees if the right talent were to be found, but this is impossible with Finland's talent pool where less than 4000 people graduate within this field each year (Remes, 2021).

Industry 4.0's digital transformation and covid-19 where a lot of companies had to move swiftly over to distance work and to find new solutions for their business, has increased the demand for talented software and IT employees. Today's market on the other hand, with the increasing inflation and energy prices, might decrease the need and the large shortage of employees momentarily.

1.2 Research problem

When searching for a master thesis topic, Theseus is a good place to start as previously published theses can be found there. Employer brand is gaining popularity continuously as a search on the term *employer brand* published during this year alone yields 49 hits in October 2022. Previously written theses on employer branding have usually been for specific case companies where the authors have studied how to attract and pursue talents, or how to engage, secure and promote talent retention. Below are three examples of master's thesis written within the subject of employer branding but from different aspects.

Sinkkonen (2021) studied employer brand experience development in a crisis situation where they examined how the employees experienced challenges in internal communication and management during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings showed

that the case company's employees see the management's actions in a good light for securing the company's finance and economy in this crisis, but they highly disagree with rewarding any employees when employment contracts for some have been terminated and the company is constantly finding other permanent saving solutions. Furthermore, the crisis management was irregular, and the employees had difficulties using multiple internal communication channels. They conclude that the pandemic brought forward challenges of leadership and management and the necessity of good communication in a crisis situation.

Kallio (2020) studied the significance of employer brand in the ground handling business with the aim to examine if different strategies were needed for different departments, and their findings showed that so was not the case. They also studied EVP and their findings showed that soft values such as interest and social values were very important for the case company's employees.

Rantamäki (2019) studied employer branding in the ICT sector, examining external prejudices with internal experiences. Their findings were that the case company's employee experience of the company as an employer did not align with students' perception at all and that the students perceived the company as a worse employer in all characters that were studied. The external communication of what it is like to be employed at the company had not generated the desired result. Their findings did also show that the employee experience varies greatly between the subsidiaries across Finland making it difficult to utilize a unified employer value proposition.

As for published research, there are several studies conducted within the concept of employer branding and EVP, researching different aspects of these. Below follows a short introduction to a few of these studies.

Pereira, Patrício, Sempiterno, Lopes da Costa, Dias, and António (2021) have studied how to build pride in the workplace where they identified the drivers of organizational pride and created strategies to help organizations. Their findings showed that organizations need to make employees feel appreciated by involving them in the decision-making process and promoting the organization's values so employees can relate to them and maintain honest communications to enhance management credibility. Identification, distributive justice, and work conditions were the key promoters of organizational pride.

Dabirian, Paschen, and Kietzmann (2019) studied employer attractiveness of IT companies where they identified eight values that IT professionals care about, of which the most important are social value, interest value, economic value, management value, and brand image. They also mention that application value, development value, and work-life balance play a role. Figure 1 shows the eight value propositions and examples of what kind of attributes or characteristics they include.









SOCIAL VALUE	INTEREST VALUE	APPLICATION VALUE	DEVELOPMENT VALUE
			
Is this a fun place to work with talented people and a great organizational culture?	Is the work interesting, challenging and achievable?	Is the work meaningful and does it invite the application of knowledge and skills?	Are there opportunities for employees to grow and advance professionally?
ECONOMIC VALUE	MANAGEMENT VALUE	WORK/LIFE BALANCE	BRAND IMAGE
			
Is work rewarded appropriately through salaries, benefits and perks?	Are managers good, honest leaders who inspire, trust, protect, enable and respect employees?	Are work arrangements flexible enough to achieve success on and off the job?	Through the eyes of employees, how is the firm's brand perceived? Is it seen as cool and innovative?

Figure 1. Value propositions for employer branding (Dabirian et al., 2019, p. 86).

Ahmad and Daud (2016) studied what effect employer branding has on turnover intention. Their findings showed a significant relationship between development value and turnover intention. Development value included the need for managers to acknowledge or appreciate the employee's accomplishments and give career-enhancing experiences that

can be useful for future employment. They suggest employers should equip employees with enough knowledge and capability to do their job and strategically align the employee's recognition program with business goals.

Chhabra and Sharma (2014) studied management students take on strategy for improving employer attractiveness. Their findings showed that students' most preferred organizational attributes were organizational culture, brand name, and compensation, and the most preferred channel for employer attractiveness was a job portal. Their findings showed also that a significant positive correlation existed between a strong brand image and the likelihood to apply.

Arachchige and Robertson (2011) studied business students' perceptions of a preferred employer, and they identified eight significant factors for attracting potential employees: corporate environment, job structure, social commitment, social environment, relationships, personal growth, organizational dynamism, and enjoyment. The most preferred employer attributes for the highest achieving students were gaining career experience, developing confidence, and promoting self-esteem, whilst for the lowest achieving students it was a good relationship with superiors, developing confidence, and valuing creativity.

Davies (2008) studied employer branding and its influence on managers with the purpose to explore the role employer brand has in influencing employees' perceived differentiation, affinity, satisfaction, and loyalty. Their findings showed that perceived differentiation as well as loyalty was predicted by a combination of enterprise (exciting, daring) and chic (stylish, prestigious), affinity was predicted by agreeableness (supportive, trustworthy) and ruthlessness (aggressive, controlling), whilst satisfaction was predicted by agreeableness as well. They state that their findings emphasize the importance of an employer brand but also highlight the complexity of its management as there is not one dominant influence.

Deepa and Baral (2019) studied employer branding strategies where employees' perceptions of 40 different EVP attributes within five dimensions (economic, development, social, work, and employer reputation) were analyzed. They used the Importance-Performance analysis (IPA) to see how companies have fulfilled the attributes compared to importance. Their findings showed that social values need focus, economic value was of low priority, work value and employer reputation were of potential overkill, whilst

development value got a good result and they can keep up the good work. Of the individual EVP attributes, *Healthcare benefits* got the highest EVP importance and performance score, meaning it is the attribute the employees value the most and is fulfilled by their employers. *Childcare facilities* got the highest EVP importance score but a low fulfillment score, meaning it is the attribute the employers must concentrate on the most.

Deepa and Baral's (2019) research showed the possibilities of the IPA model, which will be used as a tool for this thesis. The reason IPA will be used is because it gives the result another dimension as it does not only find out the performance but also its correlation to importance. The IPA model gives an easy-to-interpret overview of the result. More information on the IPA model can be found in Chapter 2.3 Importance-Performance Analysis. Deepa and Baral's (2019) list of 40 attributes has already been validated based on previous theory, and this thesis questionnaire will be adapted from their research "Importance-performance analysis as a tool to guide employer branding strategies in the IT-BPM industry".

What differentiates this thesis from previous studies and theses is that the survey will be sent out only to Ahola Digital and their subcontractor's employees, and the questions whilst adapted from Deepa and Baral's (2019) research will be altered to suit the Ahola Digital's need as well as the markets they operate in. This thesis is of practical importance for the case company. The focus is on identifying key EVP attributes but also how these can be utilized in an employer branding strategy and how it is all connected.

1.3 Research question and objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to research what the employees think of Ahola Digital as an employer in the aspect of employer branding. This thesis will serve as a first step into creating an employer branding strategy, focusing on identifying and analyzing EVP attributes within the following segments: economic, development, social, work, and employer reputation.

The research question is:

"What are the employees' current perceptions of Ahola Digital's EVP attributes, and how can these be utilized in an employer branding strategy?"

The research question is supported by the following objectives with the intention to guide both the theoretical and empirical part of the research:

1. Identify what employer branding and EVP are, and what advantages and disadvantages there are with these.
2. Identify Ahola Digital's key EVP attributes for retaining current employees and attracting new talents which could be their unique EVP to market, and key EVP attributes they need to work on and give suggestions for improvements to these.
3. Analyze if there is a difference in how the company's own employees and subcontractor's employees perceive the employer brand and EVP attributes.

The hypotheses for this research are intended to support the research purpose, research question, and objectives, as well as to guide the data collection, interpretation, and IPA analysis.

H0: The mean difference of importance and performance is equal to zero.

H1: The more satisfied employees are with their employment overall the more likely they are to recommend the employer to others.

H2: There is a difference in how proud newer employees and employees who have worked for the companies for a longer time are.

1.4 Delimitations

The introduction is delimited to shortly presenting the company, the software industry, and a few previous research and theses within this subject. The theoretical framework of this thesis will focus on the theory of employer branding and EVP as well as shortly describe the IPA method. The questionnaire will be adapted from Deepa and Baral's (2019) research "Importance-performance analysis as a tool to guide employer branding strategies in the IT-BPM industry".

This thesis is a case study and is delimited to Ahola Digital and their need. Employer branding consists of many different processes and activities, and this thesis is delimited to the employees' point of view of Ahola Digital's employer brand. The focus point of the

thesis is to identify the areas where Ahola Digital succeeds as well as underperforms in the aspect of employer branding and their EVP attributes. This thesis will explore what the employees think of the brand at a specific point in time, which can then serve as a baseline for future surveys. The respondents will be Ahola Digital and their subcontractor's current employees.

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of five chapters: introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, result, and discussion. After this introduction follows the second chapter which describes the theoretical framework. It introduces the main authors and goes through the key concepts of this thesis: employer branding, employer value proposition, and the importance-performance analysis. The theoretical framework is summarized at the end of the chapter.

The third chapter describes the methodology and the methods used for this thesis and includes arguments for the choices made. It starts by describing the research design which includes the data collection, the questionnaire design, and the pilot testing. Then follows the data analysis, and lastly the reliability and validity of this thesis.

The fourth chapter presents the result of the survey and data analysis. First, the descriptive statistics are presented, then follows the result and hypothesis testing of the questionnaire questions related to employer branding, and lastly the result and hypothesis testing of the questionnaire questions related to EVP.

The fifth chapter will summarize the research by answering the research question and objectives. First is the discussion of the key findings, then managerial implications and suggestions for further research are given, and lastly, there is the conclusion.

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter goes through the relevant theory related to the research question starting with an introduction of the main authors, continuing with the background to and definitions of employer brand, as well as the difference between the terms employer brand and employer branding. Then follows theory regarding the employer branding framework, employer branding in practice, and a deeper look into what employer value proposition as well as what the importance-performance model is. Lastly, the summary of the theoretical framework including the advantages and disadvantages of employer branding is presented.

The authors who have formed employer branding into what it is today are among others, Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow who defined and coined the term *employer brand* in 1996 (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Barrow later wrote an employer brand practitioner book together with Richard Mosley (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Mosley (2014) has since written several articles and books regarding employer brands in practice. Graeme Martin has co-written several articles regarding employer branding from the human resource management perspective (Graeme Martin, 2022). Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo (2004) proposed a conceptual framework for employer branding, and Backhaus has since written several articles on employer branding with a focus on corporate recruitment, attractiveness, and reputation (Kristin Backhaus, 2022).

These authors and their writings will serve as a basis for the theory. They were either among the top result when searching for employer branding and EVP, or the ones most studies and research cited. This is thus the result of tracing the topic back to where it began and how it has developed. These are accompanied by recent research and studies done on the topic throughout the chapter.

2.1 Employer Branding

Employer branding can be described as the efforts taken towards “recruiting and retaining the best possible human talent within an employment environment that is becoming increasingly competitive” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 513). Ambler and Barrow (1996) recognized the need for employer branding when they noted that people were often cited as companies’ most important resource and brands as their greatest asset.

Employer branding is based upon the concepts of human resource and brand marketing but is also similar to corporate culture and identity, internal marketing, and corporate reputation. Branding has relevance within the context of employment. (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Similarly, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that employer branding is the application of branding activities to human resources management and that marketing and human resource theory support employer branding.

In Ambler and Barrow's (1996) research findings, they concluded that the employer brand concept already exists, although fuzzily, in some companies, such as where highly skilled employees were required. Eight years later, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) noted that the interest in employer branding had increased and that companies found value in the practice as they spend considerable resources on employer branding campaigns. When Backhaus later revisited employer branding in 2016 they argued that all companies have an employer brand, but not all put effort into differentiating themselves as employers.

According to Backhaus (2016), a google search on the term *employer branding* yielded 3000 hits in 2004 and over 3 million hits in 2016. A google search in May 2022, when the writing process of this thesis started, yielded 20,5 million hits while in October 2022, less than a half year later, yielded over 23 million hits, and in November 2022, yet a month later, yielded almost 29 million hits. However, a search on the term *employer brand* yielded over 98 million hits in November 2022. The difference between the terms will be discussed in the next subchapter.

2.1.1 Definitions

The definition of employer branding and what it means has evolved over the years. Ambler and Barrow (1996), who was the first to coin the term and to define the employer brand, defined it as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (p. 187). They further described the concept of employer branding where "the main role of the employer brand is to provide a coherent framework for management to simplify and focus priorities, increase productivity and improve recruitment, retention and commitment" (Simon Barrow Associates, paras. 4).

As cited in Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), The Conference Board proposed in 2001 that “the employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses the firm’s value system, policies, and behaviors toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and retaining the firm’s current and potential employees” whilst Sullivan defined employer branding in 2004 as “a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm”. (pp. 501-502).

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), employer branding is how companies differentiate their characteristics as an employer from their competition and how they highlight their unique employee offerings or their employment environment. They define employer branding as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors”. (p. 502).

Majerová et. al (2021) on the other hand argues that there is a difference between employer brand and employer branding from a terminological point of view. They define *employer brand* as the employer’s brand itself, similar to Ambler and Barrow and the Conference Board’s definitions, whereas *employer branding* as the process of obtaining a competitive advantage, which is similar to Sullivan and Backhaus and Tikoo’s definitions.

Most of the referenced literature in this thesis uses the terms employer brand and employer branding synonymously. Both terms will be used in this thesis and when referencing theory, the terms may be used synonymously, whereas own discussions will follow Majerová et. al (2021) example where employer brand refers to the brand itself (name, thoughts, associations) and employer branding refers to the process.

Lievens and Slaughter (2016) furthermore distinguish between external and internal employer brands and they suggest external employer brands correspond with the organization’s employer image whilst internal employer brands correspond to the organization’s identity.

2.1.2 Employer branding framework

Employer branding was introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996) who linked the quality between employees and products or services in a virtuous circle where one good thing leads to another in a recurring cycle of events, as seen in Figure 2. One respondent in their research said, “if we have the best shops, with the best people, then we have the best word of mouth and receive the best applications and then we will have the best shops” . (p. 186).

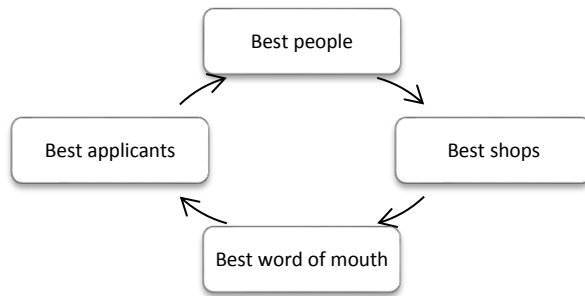


Figure 2. Link between quality of employees and quality of product or service (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 186).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) created a framework for understanding employer branding. Their model, as seen in Figure 3, shows the relationship between management and marketing concepts, as well as the incorporation of the human resource concept. According to them, the employer brand creates two assets: employer brand association and employer brand loyalty. Externally there is employer brand association which shapes the employer image which in turn affects the employer attraction. Internally there is employer brand loyalty that is impacted by organization identity and organizational culture, and that in turn contributes to increased employee productivity.

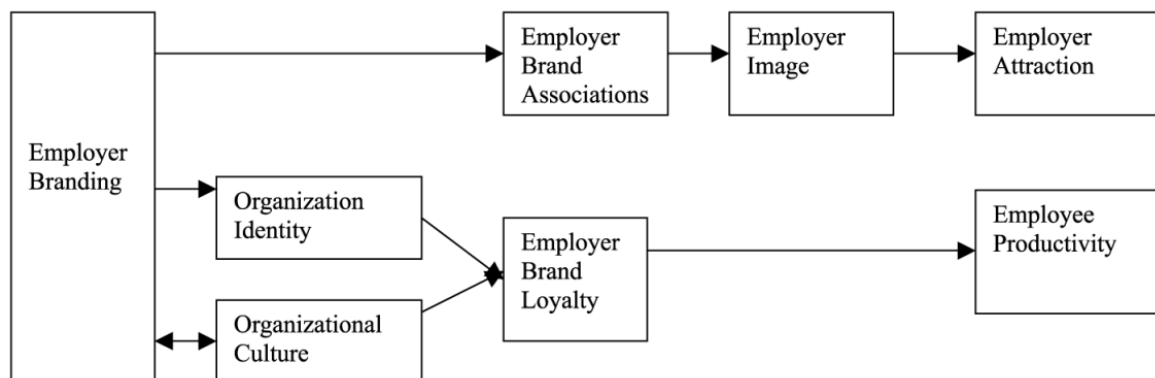


Figure 3. Employer branding framework (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 505).

This chapter will continue to go through the different concepts brought up in Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) employer branding framework. Starting with *brand*, which is a term that originates from the marketing theory and is defined as a "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers" by American Marketing Association (2017, Definition of a brand section, paras. 1). The ISO brand standard defines a brand as "an intangible asset that is intended to create distinctive images and associations in the minds of stakeholders, thereby generating economic benefit/values." (American Marketing Association, 2017, Definition of a brand section, paras. 2). According to Cascio and Graham (2016) brand in regards of employer branding is the "impression of what current and prospective employees believe the employer to represent" (p. 183).

From the external concepts, there is the *brand association*, which is what a brand means to the consumers, it is the thoughts and ideas they have linked to a specific brand. It can be for example a feeling, specific lifestyle, product, service, character, or symbol that they relate to the brand. The association with a brand will be stronger the more exposures, experiences, and communications there are, and when it is supported by a network of other links. How a person associates with a brand can also influence how they interpret facts and communications. (Aaker, 1991). Cascio and Graham (2016) describe employer brand association as "the thoughts and ideas than an employer's brand suggests in the minds of employees or potential employees" (p. 183). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), prospective employees develop employer brand associations also from external resources that are not controlled by the company, but it is beneficial for them to take a proactive approach where they identify and develop their desired brand associations.

Brand image is defined as a set of associations that are organized into different groups. These groups can be based on the product, service, or intended consumer (Aaker, 1991). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) research shows that potential recruits compare the employer's brand image to their own needs, personalities and values, and the more these matches the image the more likely they are to be attracted to the company. Chițu's (2020) research findings showed that to attract young talent companies must reflect the needs and desires of this group, which were such as authenticity, transparency, spontaneity, and a clearly defined purpose.

Berthon et al. (2005) define *employer attraction* as the “envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization” (p. 156). They argue that the more attractive an employer is perceived to be the stronger that company’s employer brand equity is. Cascio and Graham (2016) state that an organization’s reputation affects employer attraction for potential candidates as the better reputation an organization has the more attractive it tends to be. Berthon et al. (2005) mention “Best Employer” status as something more and more organizations are striving for. In Finland, the corresponding status is the Great Place to Work’s “Suomen Parhaat Työpaikat”, which is a list that is updated yearly based on employee’s experiences measured in a personnel survey as well as a third-party audited culture analysis. By being ranked on the list organizations can get a lot of media attention in Finland, and if the personnel survey result is over a specific value the organization will get the Great Place to Work certificate. (Great place to work, 2022).

From the internal concepts, there is the *organizational identity* which was defined by Albert and Whetten (1985), as cited in Backhaus and Tikoo, as “the cognitive image held by the organization members about the organization” (2004, p. 509). Organizational members want to identify themselves with the organization and when they do so their commitment to the organization also increases. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Organizational culture is the accumulated shared learning of values and assumptions, including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive elements, passed on from a group to new members (Schein, 2004). According to Chițu (2020), potential employees search for information about an organization’s culture before applying for a job. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that the more accurately an employer portrays their organizational culture to prospective employees the more likely they are to stay or else they might feel deceived and might leave the organization. To retain current employees, companies need to develop and maintain a productive and supportive organizational culture where the desired work behaviors are reinforced, and the individual quality of work life supported. This can be done by promoting the value of the organizational culture or by internal marketing.

Brand loyalty is the attachment a consumer has to a brand, and it reflects how loyal they are to a specific brand. When brand loyalty increases consumers are less likely to switch to a competitor. Brand loyalty is influenced partly by brand equity, awareness, associations, and perceived quality. (Aaker, 1991). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), similarly to

product brand loyalty, employer brand loyalty is the commitment that employees have to their employers, and it can be shaped by behavioral elements related to organizational culture or by attitudinal elements related to organizational identity. Employer brand loyal employees remain with the company even in less-than-ideal circumstances.

Hanaysha (2016) argues that *employee productivity* is the output of an employee in a specific period, assessed relative to the average of employees doing similar work. Their study showed that work engagement had a positive effect on employee productivity. They suggest that companies should put emphasis on work engagement and continuously evaluate the progress of their employees.

Hence a closer look at *employee engagement* as well. According to Barrow and Mosley (2005), short-term employee engagement can be achieved with branding promises, but for a long-term commitment, the company must prove that their branding promises are fulfilled. They recognize the quality of an employee's immediate management as a vital factor for successful employee engagement, and recognition as a factor for employee motivation. Deepa and Baral (2019) state that a highly engaged employee contributes to developing the employer brand. According to Saks (2006), as cited in Deepa and Baral (2019), disengaged employees on the other hand might increase absenteeism, negative word-of-mouth, and attrition of the company. Graeme and Sinclair (2021) argue that employee engagement has a huge impact on organizational reputations. They state that investing in employee engagement leads to capital assets in form of employee advocacy and reputational capital.

2.1.3 Employer branding in practice

Besides creating their employer branding framework, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) proposed also that employer branding can be a valuable concept if used as an umbrella under which different recruitment and retention activities can be coordinated into a human resource strategy, generating a substantially different effect than performing the different activities each alone. Figure 4 is an adaption of their idea visualizing the different concepts and activities found in employer branding theory. As previously mentioned, employer branding is based upon human resources and brand marketing, but there are also different general functions such as the branding process, strategy, EVP, communication, metrics, and

benefits besides the internal activities such as onboarding, training and development, career advancement, and employee retention, and the external activities such as talent attraction, social networks, staffing, and recruitment. This chapter will go through some of these different processes and activities as they are a part of employer branding.

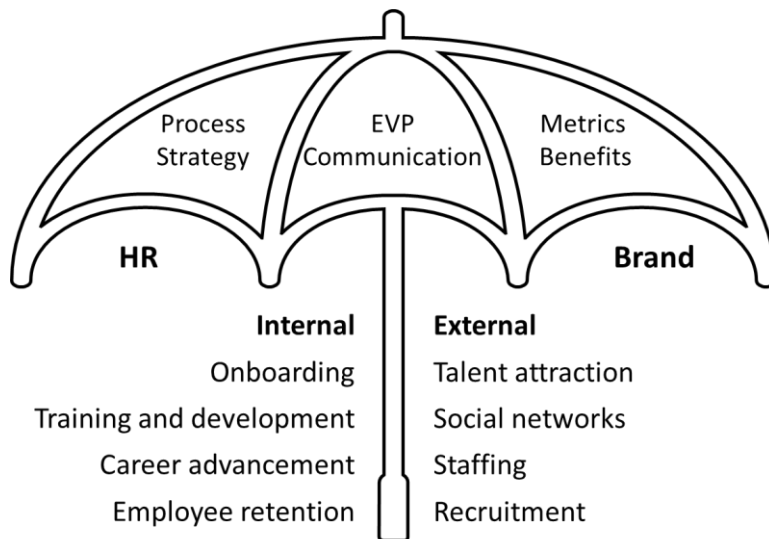


Figure 4. Employer branding umbrella visualization (Adapted from Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Barrow and Mosley (2005) suggest that before a company develops an employer branding strategy, they need to address some key issues, such as: How will it support the business strategy? What do their employees regard as characteristics of the employer? Is there a gap between the stated values and the employee's experiences? Furthermore, they argue that companies need to understand both the needs and the implicit needs of their employees, as well as their key drivers of engagement and commitment before defining the company's employment proposition. They state that the companies need to identify their employee profiles, who are they targeting to recruit, and how to get them interested.

Communication is a vital part of employer branding. Communication includes how the company is communicating their message, what is communicated, as well as the language and tone they use in their communications. Companies must consider the continuity over time and how to keep their messages interesting. They must also consider the consistency between external and internal communications as employees will take part of the external messages as well and these must feel credible to them, meaning that the promises made are how the company is run. (Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe how employer branding is a three-step process based on human resource practitioner literature where the value proposition, which should be based upon a true representation of what the company offers their employees, is to be defined first. More information on the value proposition can be found in Chapter 2.2 Employer value proposition. The propositions are then to be marketed to potential employees, and while it should attract the target market it also supports and enhances both the product and company brand at the same time. The third step is internal marketing with the intention to get the employees committed to the values and goals established by the company and incorporate the value proposition into the organizational culture.

Human resources consultants Hewitt Associates (as cited in Berthon et al. 2005, p. 154) go a bit further and claim that there are five steps for developing a strong employer brand, but they also emphasize the value propositions, although mentioned in their process as a brand promise. According to them the steps to be taken are:

- i. Understand your organization
- ii. Create a “compelling brand promise” for employees that mirrors the brand promise for customer
- iii. Develop standards to measure the fulfillment of the brand promise
- iv. “Ruthlessly align” all people practices to support and reinforce the brand promise
- v. Execute and measure

Hewitt Associates summarize the process well which corresponds to other literature. For example, the first step of understanding the organization is also emphasized by Barrow and Mosley (2005), the second step of the compelling brand promise goes hand in hand with the employer value proposition (see Chapter 2.2 employer value proposition for more information), and below follows what others have written about the last few steps of measuring and managing the employer brand.

After employer branding is initiated it must be carefully managed to be effective. This requires measuring the employer branding assets (employer brand associations and employer brand loyalty) and the impact employer branding has on the company’s

performance. Factors to measure can be a qualitative measurement of new and current employees' skills, knowledge and ability, the company's employee turnover rate, as well as the incremental increases in individual-level productivity or overall productivity at the aggregate level. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Moroko and Uncles (2008) have listed a few common HR metrics for measuring a company's employer branding success, as seen in Table 1. The indication of these is either attractive/unattractive or accurate/aspirational, and the result can be used as a snapshot of the company's current employer branding success.

Table 1. HR metrics and corresponding dimensions of success

<i>Type of metric</i>	<i>Indication for successful employer brands</i>
Percentage of job offers accepted	Higher percentage than industry average indicates attractive
Number of applicants per role	Higher number of applicants than industry average indicates attractive
Average length of tenure	Higher than industry average indicates attractive
Average staff turnover	Lower than industry average indicates accurate
Level of staff engagement	Higher than industry average indicates accurate

(Moroko & Uncles, 2008, p. 1692)

Ambler and Barrow (1996) argue that for employer branding to be managed successfully in a company it needs to be advocated for by senior management. Barrow and Mosley (2005) also acknowledge that employer branding requires leadership team support with a clear mandate and authority to create a long-term effective employer branding strategy. They further argue that the brand strategy should be linked to the overall business plan to achieve the set key goals and targets. They explain that it requires investments in time and money to generate the expected return on investment and metrics to be used as a baseline must be identified for measuring success.

There are a few actions a company can do to enhance their employer brand. Anonymous surveys, suggestion boxes, and exit interviews can be used to understand and get the employees' input. The company must ensure that all strategic leaders are on board with the employer brand and its development. They must also ensure that all actions and communications both internally and externally convey the same brand message. Their communication must be clear and current, and the communication methods easy to use. They can furthermore make employees part of the message as well as educate them on

how to share the message appropriately. They can monitor what employees say on internal surveys versus social media, and check if the information is consistent, and if not, learn why employees feel the way they do. (Cascio & Graham, 2016).

There are several benefits of employer branding, such as it improves applicant quality and enhances recruitment, leads to a competitive advantage, helps employees internalize company values, and enhances employee engagement, commitment, and retention. (Conference Board, 2001 as cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, Barrow & Mosley, 2005, Cascio & Graham, 2016). According to Barrow and Mosley (2005), these benefits improve business performance as a strong employer brand can help to reduce costs in new recruitment, lower sickness absence, and increase customer satisfaction. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) also state that it is assumed that human capital brings value to the company and enhances their performance. Previous studies have shown that companies with satisfied employees tend to have higher performance levels as well as a higher level of customer satisfaction, which in turn affects profits positively.

Katoen and Macioschek (2007) created in their master thesis a model, which summarizes the contribution the employer brand has towards profitability, retention, and employee attraction as seen in Figure 5. Gaddam (2008) used this model in their research and argue that a powerful employer brand has an indirectly significant correlation to profitability, and their findings showed also that employer brand affect profitability indirectly through employee performance, employee commitment, and customer satisfaction.

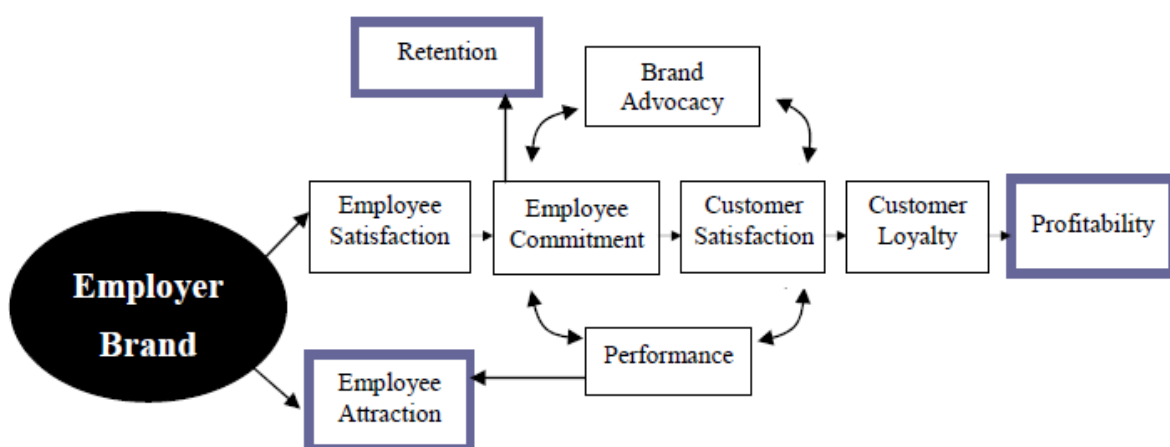


Figure 5. Employer brand model (Katoen & Macioschek, 2007, p. 36).

The process of employer branding and its benefits has now been described, but these are from the company's point of view on how things are done. Below follow some activities that are important for the company, but they are presented from the view of the employees' life cycle instead, starting from attracting a potential candidate up to retaining an employee.

Cappelli (2001) argued already 20 years ago that with an increasingly well-informed and restless applicant pool and workforce companies must work even harder to establish a trusting relationship. In today's world, it is easy for potential candidates to receive the information they need about companies from social networks or by consulting current employees. Hence it is vital that companies have an impeccable presence online and that they pay attention to the perception it creates for potential and current employees. (Chițu, 2020). Cascio and Graham (2016) argue that having a user-friendly website where authentic information about the company's internal environment is important for the company's brand communications. Further, they state that social media can multiply the negative (or positive) effects of interactions both rapidly and exponentially. Sivertzen et al. (2013) research showed that social media can be used in employer branding campaigns to build a positive reputation for the company, and that there is a clear link between a positive reputation and potential employees' intentions to apply for a job.

Onboarding a new employee is an important process as the new employee is more receptive to cues then, but it is also a time when most employee turnover occurs. It is suggested that a structured set of activities covering the first months, e.g. what to occur prehire, on day 1, on day 15, etc. can be helpful in successful onboarding. (Cascio & Graham, 2016). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that recruits have their perceptions about working for the company from the recruitment process and the branding promises that the company makes, which they will carry with them into employment, thus supporting the company's values as well as giving the new employees a stronger feeling of commitment to the new employer.

Styvén and Näppä's (2021) study showed that the social environment at work, the possibility of various creative and stimulating tasks, development opportunities, secure income, and that the company is innovative and forward-thinking are some important factors for employees to feel content with their employer and remain at their workplace.

As cited in Backhaus and Tikoo (2004): career advancement is required according to Rosenbaum (1989), as employees and organizations lose their competitive edge without it, and Sullivan (2004) argues that employer branding is “focused on strategic alignment of human capital with organizational goals”. (p. 511). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) proposed hence that “employer branding provides a framework and support for the organizational career management program”. (p. 511).

The relationships between various factors and employee retention within the banking industry in Iran was studied by Khoshnevis and Gholipour (2017). Their findings showed that there is a positive relationship to employer brand, compensation, corporate reputation, authority (and independence), work environment, and corporate social responsibility, but there is not a positive relationship to flexible working conditions, job security, career, and corporate culture.

Employer branding and its concepts have now been described from different aspects. First was a short introduction, followed by the definitions, the employer branding framework, and lastly employer branding in practice. Employer value proposition have been mentioned throughout these subchapters, and the next subchapter will take closer look into that.

2.2 Employer Value Proposition

EVP stands for both *employer value proposition* and *employee value proposition* in the literature. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) furthermore talk about *value proposition* and that what is offered to recruits can be seen as *brand promises*. When Backhaus (2016) later revisited employer branding, they talk about *employment value proposition* as well as employee value proposition. Barrow and Mosley (2005, 2014) also use the term employee value proposition, whereas the newer sources, Casio and Graham (2016), Deepa and Baral (2019) as well as Graeme and Sinclair (2021) all talk about employer value proposition.

According to Morgan (2022), both terms are referencing the same thing and they can be used synonymously. They state that recent engine metrics show that different markets and geographical locations prefer one over the other. They further explain why Universum, a company that is specialized in employer branding, uses the term employer value proposition instead of employee value proposition to be because it corresponds to the value the employer offers to the employees, not the other way around.

The referenced literature in this thesis uses the mentioned terms synonymously and these will be used as is when referencing theory. Own discussions will use *employer value proposition* and are in these cases also referring to the former terms, however, the common abbreviation EVP is mostly used.

“What’s in it for me” is according to Bussin (2018) the simplest definition of EVP. It is the total employment experience including what the company offers in return for the skills and capabilities the employee brings to them. (p. 93). EVP can be described as the company’s unique qualities they want to be associated with (Mosley, 2014). Graeme and Sinclair (2021) proposed EVP to be “the unique set of valued benefits that employees can expect to find from their employment experience in return for contributing their knowledge, skills, experience, personal attitudes and emotions.” (p. 33).

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) value proposition originates from human resource practitioner literature. They cite Sullivan (2002) who argues that value proposition shall be developed upon “the organization’s culture, management style, qualities of current employees, current employment image and impressions of product or service” as well as Eisenberg et al. (2001) who state that it is “intended to be a true representation of what the firm offers to its employees” and that the value proposition is the central message presenting the brand. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502).

Barrow and Mosley (2005) suggest that companies should have one, or a few focused, core propositions for their employer brand that is describing why the company is a great place to work at. The core proposition could be based upon the company’s vision or mission or align with the company’s customer brand proposition. The core proposition could also be supported by a few other EVPs from different areas, e.g. technical EVP, marketing EVP, or Human Resources EVP.

Some companies’ employer brand is closely associated with their consumer brand and the advantage of this is that the employer brand will be enhanced also by the consumer brand advertising, but this can be a disadvantage if the consumer brand advertising is not suitable for an employer. (Mosley, 2014). They give a few examples, L’Oréal, which finds it harder to attract men, and McDonald’s, whose image was that they paid low salaries due to advertising low prices for their restaurants.

Styvén and Näppä (2021) argue that values can be seen as promises to current and future employees and companies should clarify why their values are important for the company, their brand, and their employees. Figure 6 (by Näppä et al., 2014) shows an illustration of how these are all connected. (pp. 25-26). While there can be different EVP and branding promises depending upon the target group, the messages these relay cannot contradict each other, instead, they should support each other and convey a similar message, with the same voice of tone, value, or something else that is identifiable to the company.

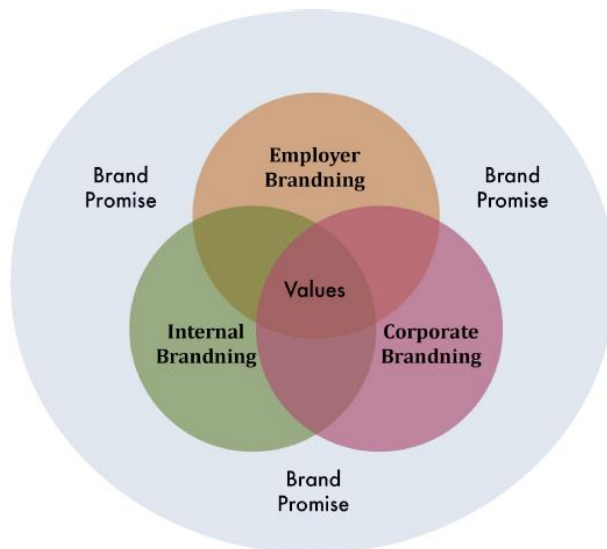


Figure 6. Employer branding and the central values (Näppä et al., 2014).

It is important to not only understand what kind of organizational culture there is, but also what makes the organization different from everyone else, both history and personality - wise. The value statements must come from within, preferably from the employees and not management, as they might otherwise lack credibility. Employees need to understand and commit to the company's branding promises so that they deliver and meet customers' brand expectations, as their actions might otherwise be counterproductive. (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Berthon et al. (2005) also bring up the importance of employees as their behavior can either reinforce the brand values or undermine the credibility of the message the company tries to send.

Evans et al. (2011) argue that in contrast to employer brand that is to be consistent, EVP should be different based on the employee target group and their geographic market. To figure out the best value proposition the company needs to understand their employee target group as it goes beyond pay, benefits, and morale. They give an example of

employees that will choose to work for less pay if they offer something else distinctive, such as a great work-life balance or a high degree of autonomy. They suggest constructing the EVP based on elements within the company, rewards, leaders, and jobs as seen in Figure 7 and further give a few suggestions on different attributes to take into consideration.

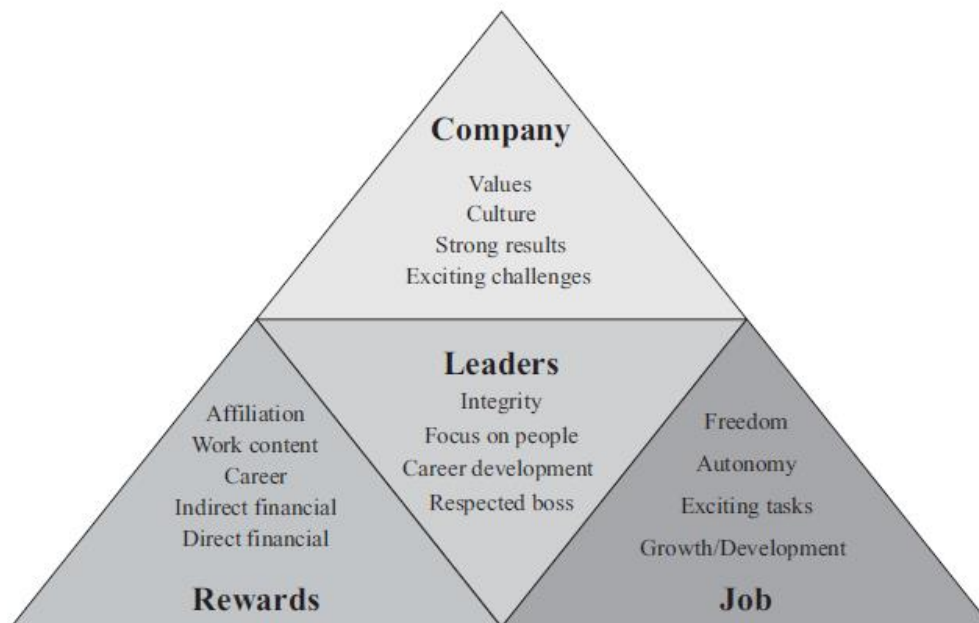


Figure 7. EVP elements (Evans et al., 2011, p. 274).

According to Bassin (2018), more companies differentiate their EVPs based on the different needs of generational segments, and they give the example that younger employees think career opportunities are important. They also mention that different industries value different things, engineering and research employees value innovative work whilst IT employees value organizational technology.

Whilst most of the employer branding theory suggests that it is to be used for attracting the right talent to the right positions at the right time, Adams and Marshall (2020) argue that EVP is to be used as a smart filter and repel the wrong ones so that unsuitable candidates do not even apply to open positions. By repelling unsuitable candidates, the company can save time and money in the recruitment process. They have created the Give and Get model, as seen in Figure 8, with a comparison to the traditional model. The greatest difference between these models is that the give and get model has an EVP for each employer brand pillar which includes the value exchange of what the employee give and

what they get in return, as well as "How it feels" where the employee experience is to be described. The give and get employer brand framework is designed to answer two main questions for potential candidates: "What is it really like at your organization?" and "Do I have what it takes to thrive at your organization?".

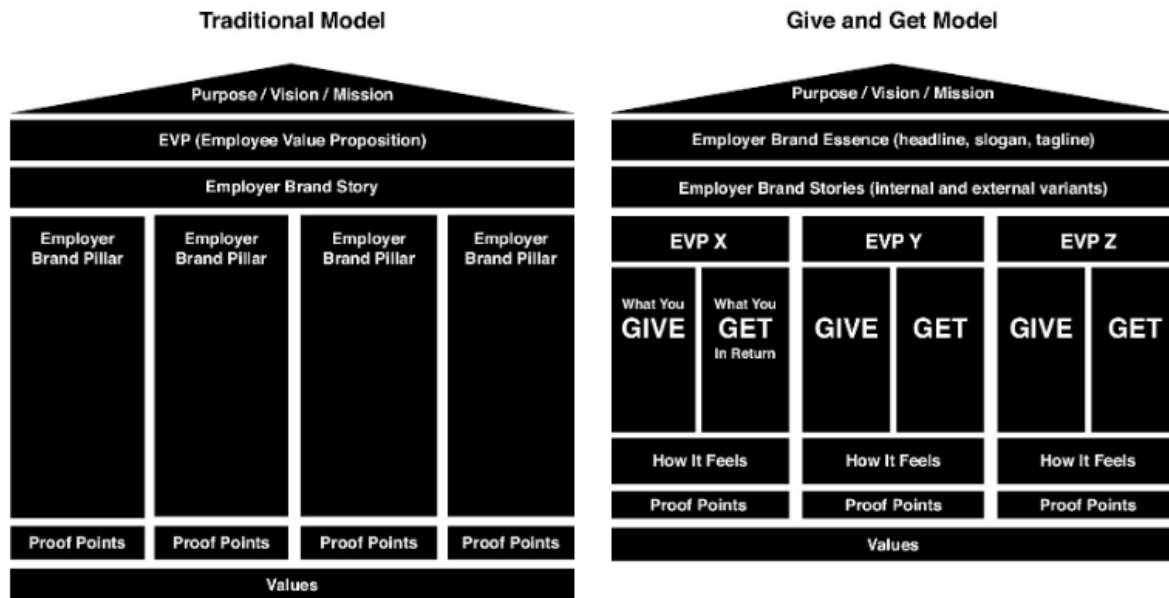


Figure 8. Traditional model vs Give and Get model (Adams & Marshall, 2020).

According to Adams and Marshall (2020), the company must clearly articulate their gives: i.e. their wants, needs, expectations, and demands but also state the gets: i.e. the benefits the candidates will get in return if they were to work for the company. The companies must communicate the harsh realities, vulnerabilities, and challenges candidates need to overcome by telling authentic stories where both the highs and lows of the job are captured. This can be done by clearly illustrating what the employee experience at their company is really like, what the candidates would feel like, what they need to be prepared for, and what kind of sacrifice, commitment, and achievement they are expected to bring. The candidates can then do well-informed decisions on whether they have what it takes to thrive at the position and if they are up for the challenge or not. Adams and Marshall (2020) argue that this is a more human and effective way to manage the employee experience.

EVP can be summarized as what the employees can expect to get for working at a specific company, both in terms of benefits but also experiences. The next subchapter will take a closer look at the IPA tool which will be used for analyzing the EVP attributes.

2.3 Importance-Performance Analysis

Importance-Performance analysis (IPA) is a tool created in 1977 by Martilla and James that allows attributes to be analyzed by both importance and performance. By adding a separate variable, for example by also measuring loyalty, the analysis allows for finding attributes that might differ in importance or performance between highly loyal or disloyal customers. As the attributes are to be measured by both importance and performance the questions need to be separated into two sections so that there is a clear separation between importance and performance for each attribute, as else one might influence the answer for the other. (Martilla & James, 1977).

The result can however be easily interpreted as they are graphically displayed in a two-dimensional grid where the attributes are plotted as points, as seen in Figure 9. The figure shows an example of Martilla and James (1977) study's attributes with importance and performance mean scores to the left and the result shown in an IPA grid to the right.

EXHIBIT 1
Importance and Performance Ratings for Automobile Dealer's Service Department

Attribute Number	Attribute Description	Mean Importance Rating ^a	Mean Performance Rating ^b
1	Job done right the first time	3.83	2.63
2	Fast action on complaints	3.63	2.73
3	Prompt warranty work	3.60	3.15
4	Able to do any job needed	3.56	3.00
5	Service available when needed	3.41	3.05
6	Courteous and friendly service	3.41	3.29
7	Car ready when promised	3.38	3.03
8	Perform only necessary work	3.37	3.11
9	Low prices on service	3.29	2.00
10	Clean up after service work	3.27	3.02
11	Convenient to home	2.52	2.25
12	Convenient to work	2.43	2.49
13	Courtesy buses and rental cars	2.37	2.35
14	Send out maintenance notices	2.05	3.33

^a Ratings obtained from a four-point scale of "extremely important," "important," "slightly important," and "not important."

^b Ratings obtained from a four-point scale of "excellent," "good," "fair," and "poor." A "no basis for judgment" category was also provided.

EXHIBIT 2
Importance-Performance Grid with Attribute Ratings for Automobile Dealer's Service Department

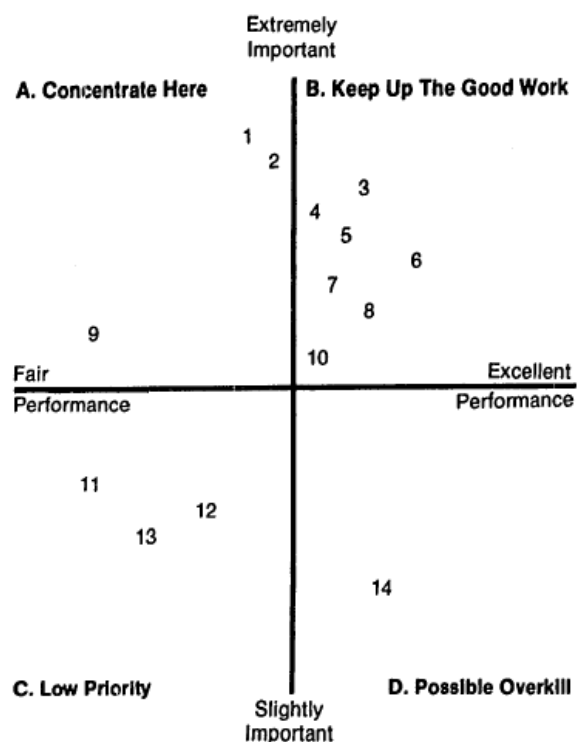


Figure 9. Attributes and results are shown in an IPA grid (Martilla & James, 1977).

The IPA grid is divided into four groups where attributes are plotted showing their importance versus performance (Martilla & James, 1977, Wyród-Wróbel & Biesok, 2017);

- “Concentrate here” are attributes that are of high importance, but performance is low. These attributes are the company’s major weaknesses and require immediate measures. The company has the most to gain from improving these.
- “Keep up the good work” are attributes that are of high importance and performance is high. These attributes are the company’s major strengths and can indicate further opportunities for gaining or maintaining a competitive advantage.
- “Low priority” are attributes that are of low importance and performance is low. These attributes are the company’s minor weaknesses and does not require action.
- “Possible overkill” are attributes that are of low importance, but performance is high. These attributes do not require all the resources that are assigned to them.

Wyród-Wróbel and Biesok (2017) modified the IPA grid by dividing “Keep up the good work” and “Low priority” into two more groups, as seen in Figure 10. To be noted is that importance and performance are on different axes in their example.

- “Warning” are attributes that the company needs to be aware of as a worsening of the performance in these would put them into the concentrate here group where they would require immediate measures.
- “Improve” are attributes that could be improved.

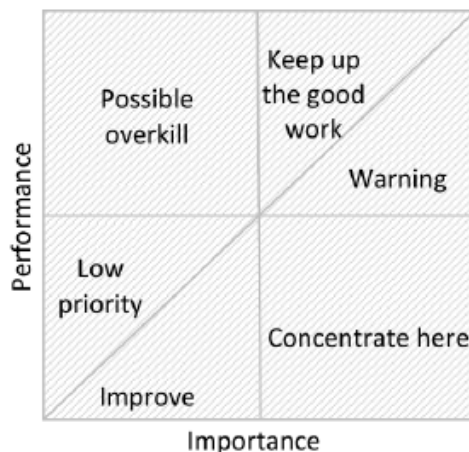


Figure 10. Modification of the IPA grid (Wyród-Wróbel & Biesok, 2017).

The positioning of vertical and horizontal axes is relative and often the median values are used as a central tendency, that is, the groups are not always divided into four equal sizes but instead the axes are moved on the scale when needed (Martilla & James, 1977).

Figure 11 shows how the IPA grid is used in Deepa and Baral's (2019) analysis of EVP importance and fulfillment, whose research will serve as a basis for this thesis. To be noted here are the differences in the scale of the x- and y-axis.

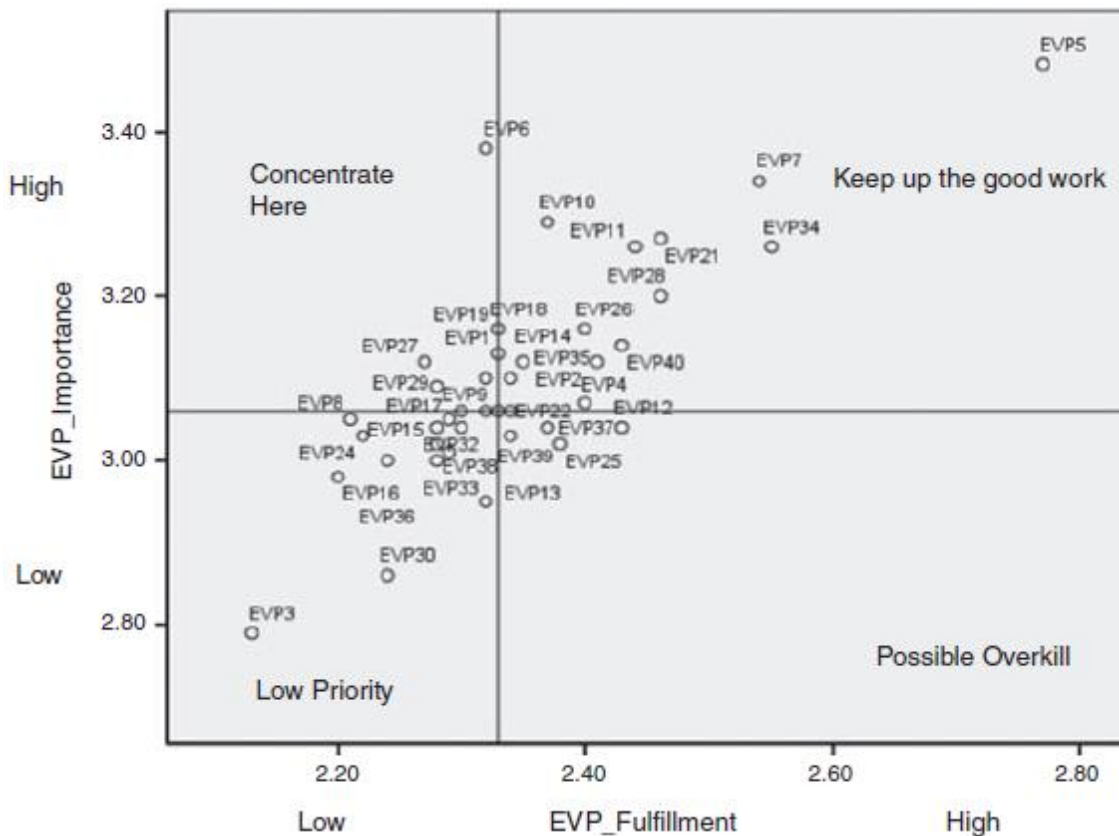



Figure 11. IPA of EVP attributes (Deepa & Baral, 2019).

2.4 Summary of the theoretical framework

It all comes down to this, how the employer value proposition is connected to employer branding, which can in short be explained as seen in Figure 12. EVP is the *what* - what values, benefits, and employer experience the company offers to their employees, and what message they want to send out, whilst employer branding is the *how* - how they market their EVP, how they brand themselves as an employer, and how, the actions they take attract and retain employees.

Employer value proposition is the value and benefits a company offer to their employees, and the experience the employees can get from a career at the company.



Employer branding is how the company brand and market their employer value proposition and the efforts they take to attract and retain the best possible human talent.

Figure 12. EVP and its connection to employer branding. (Adapted from Blue beyond consulting, 2022).

Although employer brand is a new theory, less than 30 years old, it has been researched extensively already and is constantly increasing in popularity. Employer branding is a vast subject as it incorporates not only what is now known as employer brand and employer branding but also the concepts it is based upon, which are human resource and brand management. The human resource concept brings forward how to attract and retain employees, and how to get them interested, onboarded, engaged, and committed to the company. The brand marketing concept brings forward the image and associations the company has as an employer and how these are marketed both internally and externally.

The definition of employer brand has evolved over the years going from the benefits provided by employment, to the company's identity as an employer, to the process of differentiating themselves from others. Majerova et. al (2021) had an interesting point of distinguishing the terms employer brand and employer branding. Drawn upon their statement and previous literature the employer brand can be seen as the perception and image people have of the company as an employer, whilst employer branding is the actions companies take to differentiate themselves to attract and retain talent.

Employer branding can be studied from different perspectives which are shown by the different research mentioned in this thesis. The theoretical framework goes through the employer branding framework which takes a closer look at the internal and external activities of employer branding focusing mainly on brand and human resource

management, the employer branding process takes a closer look at what steps the company shall take when creating and executing their employer branding strategy, and whilst it was not clearly stated in any framework or model the steps viewed from the employee's life cycle, i.e. from recruiting until retention was mentioned as well.

The objectives of this thesis included finding out the advantages and disadvantages of employer branding and employer value proposition. Majerova et. al (2021) and Conference Board (2001, as cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) state that employer branding gives companies a competitive advantage. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that employer branding, where recruitment and retention activities can be coordinated into a human resource strategy, generates a different effect than performing the different activities alone. They also state that differentiating themselves as an employer from their competitors gives the companies an advantage when attracting and retaining employees. (p. 502, 513). According to Gaddam (2008) affects employer brand profitability indirectly through employee performance, commitment, and customer satisfaction.

Whilst there are several advantages and clearly stated benefits with employer branding (see Chapter 2.1.3 Employer branding in practice) the literature does not bring forward any disadvantages with employer branding or with EVP. One disadvantage could however be that it requires substantial resources, management support, and focus to be successfully implemented (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Also, just as the employer brand can be affected by the consumer brand this goes the other way around as well where the consumer brand can be affected by the employer brand (Mosley, 2014). For example, there were recently a viral TikTok of Starbucks employees walking out in support of their colleague who was wrongfully fired, and a lot of comments were from customers showing solidarity and talking about boycotting Starbucks (SBWorkersUnited, 2022).

Barrow and Mosley (2005) bring up that EVP must come from within the company to have credibility, Evans et al. (2011) argue that the company must also understand their target group as it goes beyond pay, benefits, and morals, whilst Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) state that the recruits have their perceptions of the company from the recruitment process and the branding promises the company makes which they will carry with them into employment, thus supporting the company's values as well as giving the new employees a stronger feeling of commitment to the new employer.

Adams and Marshall (2020) had an intriguing argument of repelling wrong candidates instead of attracting the right ones. They bring forward the importance of clearly articulating and illustrating what the employee is expected to give to the company, what they get in return, and how it would feel working for the company, as well as what they need to be prepared for, and what kind of sacrifice, commitment and achievement they are expected to bring into employment. However, communication is vital for the company, and how they bring forward their authenticity should be done so that it does not scare away potential great candidates or customers.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on previous research and published books or articles, and only a few case-based references are included as these gave valuable information. However, when searching for *employer branding* on e.g. Google Scholar it yields 29 000 hits, whilst a search on Google yields over 28 million hits. Another approach to this research could have been to include more case-based data in the theoretical framework and to compare the findings from the case-based to the research-based theory as these seem to differ a bit. Companies might find it useful to take a look at the case-based sources as these give different suggestions on how to create and proceed with the employer branding strategy and companies might find a way that is most suitable for them.

This theoretical framework chapter has gone through the different theories relevant to this thesis and summarized the findings. How these findings can be useful for the company and utilized in an employer branding strategy is further discussed in Chapter 5. Discussions. The next chapter will go through the methodology.

3 Methodology

This chapter will go through the methodology of research and explain what methods have been utilized in this thesis and why. The focus lies however on the quantitative research approach which has been used for this research.

3.1 Research design

Research is an undertaking with the intention to increase one's knowledge by finding out things in a systematic way. The deductive methodology is testing theory with hypotheses whereas inductive methodology is building a theory based on data collection and analysis. (Saunders et al., 2007).

This thesis will use a deductive methodology where theory is the first source of knowledge, from which hypotheses will be created and tested empirically. This methodology suits the practical need of the thesis.

Data collection includes two basic methodologies: quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research covers collecting countable or measurable material where the form of data is numerical. The research design is set up to test the hypothesis and data is collected in controlled replicable ways. (Franklin, 2012). A questionnaire is a typical data-collection method, and data analysis often includes the creation of graphs and statistics to show the result. (Saunders et al., 2007).

Qualitative research covers "meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, [experiences] and descriptions of things" that cannot be explained by numbers. Data-gathering techniques include researching the human subject (interviews, small-scale surveys, focus groups with selected individuals or groups), researching in a field, with or within communities or groups (participating or observing, short- or long-term), and researching documents and other social texts (archives, policies or similar with content/textual analysis). (Franklin, 2012, pp. 169-170). Qualitative research focuses on non-numeric data, i.e. words, and includes a data analysis procedure of categorizing data. (Saunders et al., 2007).

Quantitative research will be done for this thesis through a questionnaire conducted in the autumn of 2022. The questionnaire is sent to the case company and their subcontractor's employees. The company's working language is English and so is the questionnaire. The quantitative approach allows for analyzing the result with the IPA method.

The questionnaire design includes two basic categories, open-ended and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions give respondents the freedom to answer in their own words which allow for unanticipated answers. Closed-ended questions are predetermined with a few acceptable responses to select from. The respondent's choice might not however be listed which could defeat the purpose. (Franklin, 2012).

The questions regarding EVP attributes will be adapted from Deepa and Baral's (2019) research "Importance-performance analysis as a tool to guide employer branding strategies in the IT-BPM industry" and they are closed-ended. They identified 40 EVP attributes and used a 4-point Likert scale to "force-choice" the responses, meaning avoiding neutral opinions. Not all attributes are suitable for Ahola Digital and their subcontractor's employer market and business and were thus altered so that the survey serves its intended purpose. The altered list of attributes was presented, further revised, and approved by the company supervisor. 24 attributes are from Deepa and Baral's (2019) list, 7 were rephrased, 9 were not relevant and removed, and 17 attributes more suitable for the company's needs were added. Deepa and Baral (2019) had 40 EVP attributes whilst this thesis questionnaire had 48 EVP attributes.

The questionnaire includes, however, two open-ended questions allowing the respondents to answer in their own words which support the purpose of this thesis. One question asks the respondents to describe the company in their own words even before any attributes have been shown to them, the other question checks whether the respondents thought any important attribute was missing from the list of EVP attributes.

Pilot testing can be done to ensure whether the object of the research and research questions are feasible as in some cases certain things do not work or are beyond the researcher's means. By sending out the survey to a pilot group for testing the researcher can ensure that their questions are well-formulated and support the aim of the research. (Franklin, 2012).

A pilot test of the questionnaire was done and sent to a few different groups of people for feedback. More information on the result from the pilot test and the changes that were done based upon it can be found in Chapter 3.1.3 Pilot testing.

Franklin (2012) has listed a few rules for doing a good quality quantitative data analysis. The data-gathering process must be documented, and the data collected should include as many observable implications as possible (e.g. age, gender, and occupation if conclusions or assumptions are based upon these). Maximize the validity and reliability of the measured used and ensure that all data produced is replicable. Do not overuse percentages for smaller samples, write instead e.g. 1 out of 10. Cross-checking needs to be done to ensure that the result is valid and that there have not been any errors made or incorrect parameters used.

The questionnaire will be analyzed similarly to Deepa and Baral's (2019) research through IPA which will be done in Excel, but also a correlation analysis will be done in SPSS. Using an already performed model as a basis validates the research as part of the result can be compared to the original research. The questionnaire does also allow for future surveys where the data should be replicable, but the result might differ due to changes in the company, the work environment, or the world overall. The IPA analysis allows also for visual analysis of how the attributes are distributed in regard to importance versus performance, and the null hypothesis tests if the means of performance and importance were statistically significantly different. More information on how the data analysis was performed can be found in Chapter 3.2 Data analysis.

In hindsight, a semi-structured qualitative interview with the supervisor at Ahola Digital would have given this thesis another dimension and could have answered the thesis objectives a bit better. I can only speculate why the result is as it is, whilst the supervisor would have more insights on the way they are working, as well as how they are collaborating with their subcontractor. A semi-structured qualitative interview with a representative from the subcontractor could also have given more insight on why there were differences in the result between the companies.

3.1.1 Data collection

This thesis is quantitative research. An online survey was sent to the case company and their subcontractor's employees. The questionnaire was created in Microsoft Forms and a general link was created. Data were collected for 8 days between the 6th and 14th of October 2022. I had the opportunity to give a short 5-minute presentation about myself, the thesis subject, and the survey's purpose to the employees at a company meeting before the link was sent to them. The presentation as well as the possibility to win a gift card after a completed survey was done with the intention of optimizing the number of respondents as it is a quite lengthy survey (about 10 minutes) with many questions to answer and attributes to think about.

The link was sent to the supervisor at Ahola Digital who forwarded it to Ahola Digital and their subcontractor's employees. About 40 employees are working for the companies in total, and the survey got 28 responses resulting in a response rate of about 70 %.

3.1.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire is divided into three sections, which are shown as separate pages for the respondents. The first page includes the introduction, general questions, and questions regarding the employer brand. On the second page, the respondents are asked to rate the importance of the listed EVP attributes. On the third page, they are asked to rate the performance of their company on the same list of EVP attributes. Please see appendix 1, the questionnaire form with print screens from the survey.

The first page starts with an introduction to the questionnaire followed by two general questions. The first question is where the respondents work: Ahola Digital or the Subcontractor name. This allows for analyzing if there is a difference between the employees of the two companies in regard to how they perceive the employer brand and how they value the EVP and the company's performance. Then follows the question of how long they have been working at their company with the options 0-2 years, 3-7 years, and 8 or more years. The options were limited to three groups for anonymity purposes so there are enough employees within each group which ensures that no one can be singled out based on their answer. This allows for analysis of newer employees, those who have worked for some years, and those who have worked a long time already.

Questions 3 through 7 are for analyzing the employer brand. The company has gone through a rebranding and question 3 is to determine which brand the employees relate more to today, the new brand: Ahola Digital, or the old brand: Attracs. Deepa and Baral (2019) researched if there is a difference between highly engaged and less engaged employees but in this research measurement of satisfaction was opted for which allows for analyzing if there is a difference in how very satisfied and less satisfied employees perceive the EVP attributes. Satisfaction, as well as if the employees would recommend their employer and if they tell others proudly where they work can be an indication of how strong the employer brand is in regard to employee advocacy. The optional open-ended question asks the employees to describe in their own words what it is like working at their company, in one sentence. This allows for analysis of whether the company has already a strong internal employer brand.

Page 2 of the questionnaire has all the EVP attributes listed divided into separate questions based upon the five dimensions: economic, development, social, work, and employer reputation. The respondents are asked to rate the importance of these on a scale from not important, less important, important, to very important. The optional open-ended question asks the employees to give their general opinion of the EVP attributes or if anything is missing from the long list that they value.

Page 3 has all the same attributes listed, divided into separate questions based upon the five dimensions but here they are asked to rate the company's performance on a scale from poor, fair, good, to excellent. After they submitted their answers, they could choose to continue to a separate form, for anonymity purposes, to enter the draw for a gift card.

3.1.3 Pilot test

The questionnaire was sent for pilot testing to a total of 10 people from four different groups; school thesis supervisors, company and subcontractor supervisors, two classmates studying the same subject, and a few friends whom all work in different industries. The responses received were superb and their feedback enhanced the quality of the questionnaire. There were some greater findings that had not been noticed earlier as well as a few minor details, as can be seen in the list below.

- The question “How long have you worked for the company” had the alternatives 1-2, 3-7, and 8 or more years, meaning that new employees were left completely out. This was changed to 0-2, 3-7, and 8 or more, to ensure that everyone could find a category they belonged to.
- The attributes on pages 2 and 3 were listed with their EVP id, but this created confusion as the question number could be e.g. “8. How important do you think the following employer value propositions are (development value)?” which is then followed by attribute “5. Exposure to global business and work practices”, attribute 6 and more. All EVP IDs were removed completely from the attributes as they were not relevant for the questionnaire and the respondents, only for data analysis.
- Although briefly mentioned in the introduction what the purpose of pages 2 and 3 are, they confused the pilot testers so a short introduction was added to each page describing what the purpose of that page was: page 2 - answer by importance, page 3 - same attributes as the previous page but answer now by company’s performance.
- Open questions were added to pages 1 and 2, allowing the respondents to describe in their own words what it is like working for the company, and if they have any general thoughts or think there is an EVP attribute they value missing from the list.
- Question 1 was rephrased from “Who pays your salary?” to “Where do you work?”, question 2 was rephrased from “How long have you worked for the company?” to “How long have you been working for the company?” as they are still working there.
- Questions 4 to 6 with a scale of one to five stars had the scale described as e.g. 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. The feedback received was to add all scale alternatives to eliminate any misconceptions and to ensure that the respondent’s choice corresponds to how they really feel.
- One EVP attribute had capital letters for all words which was inconsistent with the rest of the EVP attributes that had only the first word with a capital letter, this was also changed.

3.2 Data analysis

The result was exported from Microsoft Forms to Excel where the data was then cleaned. An unedited copy of the file is saved as a backup if edited data needs to be verified against the original data. Unnecessary columns which had been added automatically by Microsoft were removed. Likert scale measurements (for importance and performance) were converted to numbers 1 to 4, allowing for statistical analysis. Importance and performance attributes were rearranged, and new tabs were created based on the data needed for specific analysis. Hypothesis testing was done in SPSS whilst the IPA grid, graphs, and other tables were created in Excel.

3.3 Reliability and validity

Reliability refers to “the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings”. Identified threats to reliability are subject or participant error, subject or participant bias, observer error, and observer bias. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 149-150).

Validity refers to “whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about”. A few examples of threats to validity are surrounding circumstances, i.e., has something major happened recently that can affect the responses, or do the respondents think that answering truthfully can affect them negatively in a way? (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 150).

The survey was open for eight days, allowing participants to respond at a time suitable to them. To ensure anonymity the same link was sent to all participants, and if they chose to participate in the draw for the gift card they were redirected to another separate form after submitting their answers, where they then could leave their contact details. The questionnaire was adapted from Deepa and Baral’s (2019) research, and while the conditions differ from their research, the result will be similar in regards to the analysis and scattered plots. The thesis questionnaire does also allow for future surveys where the data should be replicable, but the result might differ due to different conditions such as potential changes in the company, the work environment, or the world overall. Pilot testing was done to ensure the questions were easy to understand. The results of this research can therefore be considered to be valid and reliable.

4 Result

The result of the survey conducted will be presented in this chapter. First, the descriptive statistics are presented, then follow the result and hypothesis testing for questions related to employer branding, and lastly results related to EVP.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The questionnaire was sent to around 40 employees of which 28 responded, resulting in a response rate of about 70 %. Most of the respondents, 61 % are working for Ahola Digital and 39 % are working for the subcontractor as seen in Figure 13.

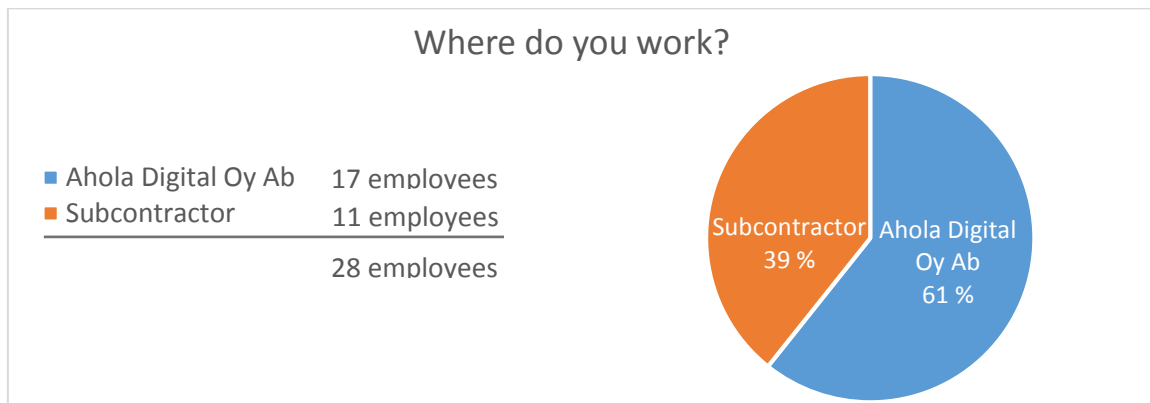


Figure 13. Responses to question 1

As Figure 14 shows, 29 % are newer employees who have worked for 0-2 years, more than half of the respondents, 53% have worked for 3-7 years, and 18 % have worked for 8 or more years.

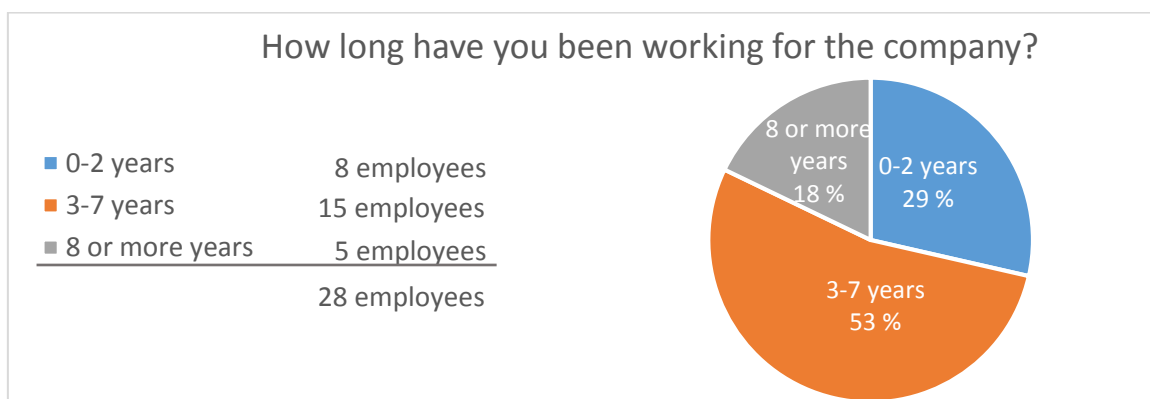


Figure 14. Responses to question 2

4.2 Employer branding

Ahola Digital's new brand was taken into use two years ago. All respondents but one relate more to the new brand today as seen in Figure 15. The respondent who relates more to the old brand is employed by the subcontractor and has worked for the company for 3-7 years.

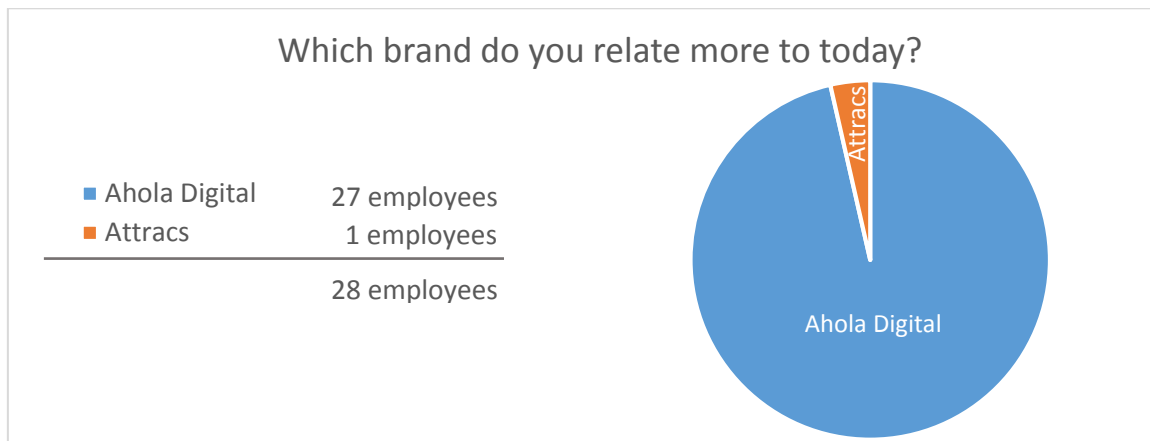


Figure 15. Responses to question 3

Table 2 below shows the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation (SD) scores for the specific employer branding questions. As the table shows there is not a great difference between any of these. Mean differs with less than 0,07 and SD with less than 0,18.

Table 2. Responses to questions 4-6

Question:	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
How satisfied are you overall with your employment?	4,21	4	4	0,686
Would you recommend your employer to others?	4,18	4	5	0,863
Do you proudly tell others where you work?	4,25	4	5	0,799

Figure 16 shows the responses in a chart on how each respondent has answered these questions. Ten respondents answered with 5 stars on each question, six respondents with 4 stars, and three respondents with 3 stars, resulting in 19 of the respondents who felt that all questions were on the same level. Eight of the respondents answered with 4 stars on satisfaction, of which three would very likely recommend the employer, one would likely recommend and four were neutral. Further, of these eight respondents, three would absolutely yes tell others proudly where they work, two would likely tell others and three

were neutral. One of the respondents answered with 3 stars, i.e. neutral on satisfaction as well as if they would recommend their employer, but with 4 stars if they would likely tell others proudly where they work.



Figure 16. Responses to questions 4-6

The result in the number of respondents and percentage from these employer branding questions can be seen in Figure 17 below. The scale used for measuring employees' overall satisfaction with their employment was 1= Very dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Satisfied, and 5 = Very satisfied. Most of the respondents, 50% of them answered that they are satisfied with their employment overall, whereas 36 % were very satisfied and 14 % were neutral.

The scale used for measuring if employees would recommend their employer to others was: 1 = No, very unlikely, 2 = Unlikely, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Likely, and 5 = Yes, very likely. Most of the respondents, 46 % of them answered that they would Yes, very likely recommend their employer to others, 32 % answered they would likely recommend their employer and 21 % were neutral.

The scale used for measuring if they proudly tell others where they work was: 1 = No, I do not tell at all, 2 = No, I rather not tell, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Yes, 5 = Yes, absolutely. Most of the respondents, 46 % of them here as well, answered they would Yes, absolutely tell others proudly where they work, 25 % would tell others, and 21 % were neutral.

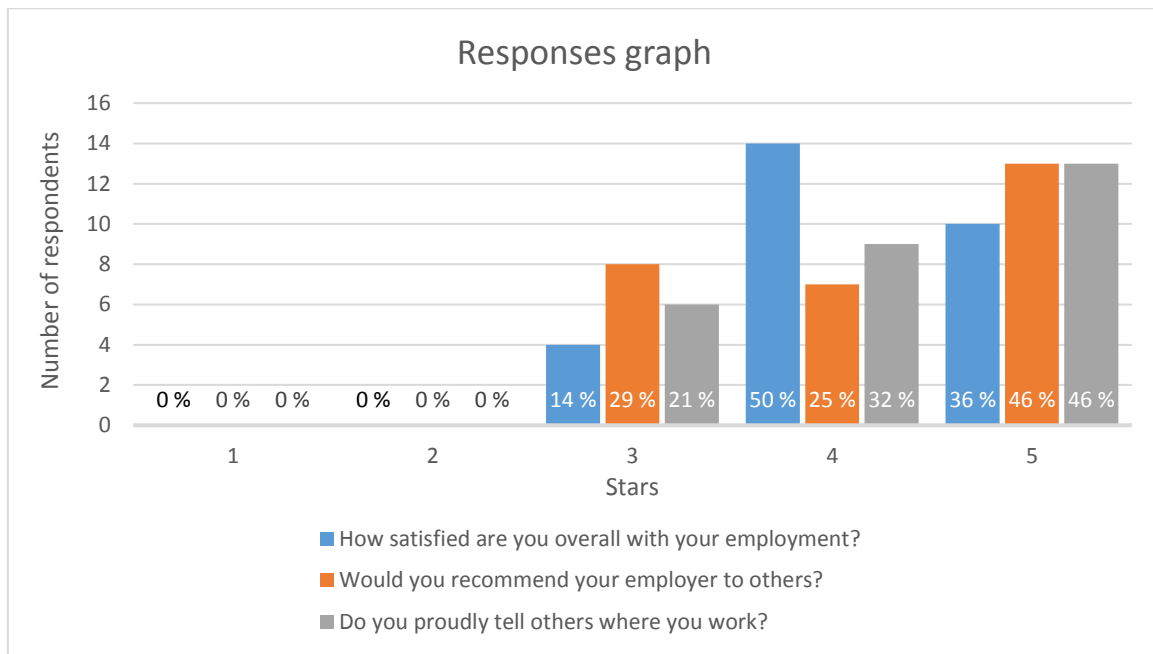


Figure 17. Responses to questions 4-6 graph

H1: The more satisfied employees are with their employment overall the more likely they are to recommend the employer to others.

A bivariate Pearson correlation was conducted and showed that there is a strong positive correlation between how satisfied an employee is overall with their employment and how likely they are to recommend their employer to others. ($r=.809$, $n=28$, $p<.001$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported. See Table 3 for the output from SPSS.

Table 3. Hypothesis 1

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Satisfied	4,21	0,686	28
Recommend	4,18	0,863	28

Correlations			
		Satisfied	Recommend
Satisfied	Pearson Correlation	1	,809**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000
	N	28	28
Recommend	Pearson Correlation	,809**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	
	N	28	28

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H2: There is a difference in how proud newer employees and employees who have worked for the companies for a longer time are.

An independent t-samples test was conducted to compare how proud newer employees (0-2 years) and employees who have worked for the companies for a longer time (3-7 and 8 or more years). The assumption on equal variance: The F test (Levene's Test) indicates equal variances because the p-value is .231 which is much higher than the usual $p = .05$ so equal variance is assumed. There were no significant differences ($t(26)=.000$, $p=1.000$) in scores for newer employees (4.25) and those who have worked for a longer time (4.25). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is rejected. See Table 4 for the output from SPSS.

Table 4. Hypothesis 2

Group Statistics					
Years		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Proud	0-2 years	8	4,25	0,707	0,250
	3 or more years	20	4,25	0,851	0,190
Years		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Proud	0-2 years	8	4,25	0,707	0,250
	3 or more years	20	4,25	0,851	0,190

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
	F	Sig.
Equal variances assumed	1,506	0,231
Equal variances not assumed		

	t-test for Equality of Means					
	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		
Equal variances assumed	0,000	26	0,500	1,000	0,000	0,341
Equal variances not assumed	0,000	15,533	0,500	1,000	0,000	0,314

The optional open-ended question: "Please describe what is it like working at your company, in one sentence?" got eight responses. Keywords from the responses can be seen in Figure 18. The descriptions received related mostly to the employee's own work, their working environment, and their cooperation with others. The words that are larger in the figure challenges and teammates, were mentioned in several responses.



Figure 18. Responses to question 7

The result for the questions regarding employer branding has now been presented and the next subchapter will present the result for the questions regarding employer value proposition.

4.3 Employer value proposition

EVP attributes were measured by importance and performance. The respondents were asked to rate the importance on a scale from not important, less important, important to very important, and rate the company's performance on a scale from poor, fair, good, to excellent. These have been converted to a numeric scale from 1-4. EVP attributes standing out from the result will be presented with their description, whilst others can be seen in figures and charts with only their ID. Please see appendix 2 with a list of EVP attributes sorted by ID, and appendix 3 with the result of importance and performance mean scores for all EVP attributes in descending order of the importance score.

The optional open-ended question: "What do you think in general about the employer value propositions presented above? Is there anything missing that you value?" got two responses. Gender equality and target-based bonuses are something they value but were missing from the list of EVP attributes.

H0: The mean difference of importance and performance is equal to zero.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to assess the significant difference between the overall values of importance (M=3.2, SD=0.27) and performance (M=3.1, SD=0.27). The null hypothesis was rejected at ($t(47)=3.271$, $p=0.002$) and indicates that the means were statistically significantly different. See Table 5 for the output from SPSS.

Table 5. Null hypothesis

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Importance	3,1972	48,0000	0,2680	0,0387
Performance	3,0826	48,0000	0,2736	0,0395

	Paired Differences			t	df	Significance	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Importance - Performance	0,115	0,243	0,035	3,271	47	0,001	0,002

IPA was done and a two-dimensional grid was created based on importance and performance mean scores for each attribute. The scatter plot shows the result for each attribute, and the plot was divided into four groups based on the median for importance and performance. Furthermore, a diagonal axis was added according to the adaption from Wyród-Wróbel and Biesok's (2017) modification of the IPA model where the groups low priority and keep up the good work are divided into two new groups: warning for attributes in the keep up the good work group and improve for attributes in the low priority group.

Figure 19 shows the result on an IPA grid. The median was 3,23 for importance, and 3,13 for performance. Most of the attributes can be found within keep up the good work and low priority groups, these include 17 attributes each, whereas there are 7 attributes each within the concentrate here and possible overkill groups.

The only attributes to clearly stand out of the scatter of plots are within the low priority group. Attribute 4 (free coffee, fruit, snacks, etc.) received a higher importance score but lower performance. This attribute is within the improve group and is the attribute furthest

from the diagonal axis. The other attribute that stands out is number 13 (possibility to change roles or department within the company). This attribute had a low importance and low performance score and can be seen as the least important attribute.



Figure 19. IPA grid

There is not one distinct EVP attribute that stands out within the keep up the good work group, instead attributes 20 (people are treated with respect and trust) and 22 (good work environment) have high importance but score slightly less in performance. These are within the warning group. Attributes 24 (work-life balance) and 40 (flexible work schedule) have high performance but score slightly less in importance, these are the ones furthest from

the diagonal axis. These four attributes can however be considered the most valued EVP attributes based on importance and performance. Table 6 lists the EVP attributes found within the keep up the good work and warning groups.

Table 6. EVP attributes within keep up the good work and warning groups

ID	EVP attributes within keep up the good work
9	Employees are encouraged to find new solutions and try new things
21	Management is open to constructive criticism
24	Work-life balance
31	Feel trusted
40	Flexible work schedule
ID	EVP attributes within warning
11	Challenging and interesting work assignments
17	Supportive and encouraging colleagues
18	Culture of supportive leadership
19	Organization treat all employees equally
20	People are treated with respect and trust
22	Good work environment
29	Possibility to influence one's own work
33	Good working methods
34	Stress-free work environment
39	Job security & stability
43	Management value their employees
44	Competent and fair leadership

There are three attributes with a higher importance score but lower performance within the group concentrate here. These are attributes 1 (competitive salary and compensation), 6 (opportunities to develop new skills through training), and 15 (opportunity to work across multiple technologies). The rest of the attributes in the concentrate here group are close to the performance of the keep up the good work and warning groups. Table 7 lists the EVP attributes found within the concentrate here group.

Table 7. EVP attributes within concentrate here group

ID	EVP attribute
1	Competitive salary and compensation
6	Opportunities to develop new skills through training
7	Opportunity to apply what was learnt
15	Opportunity to work across multiple technologies
27	Adequate resources to perform on the job
28	Work relevant to one's strength, competency, and interests
46	Organization's focus on high quality products and/or services

All attributes in the possible overkill group have a higher performance score than importance score. Attribute 36 (informal work culture) is the furthest from the median values, whilst attribute 45 (innovative and forward-thinking employer) is on the edge to keep up the good work group. There is furthermore one attribute divided by all the axes, attribute 29 (possibility to influence one's own work), any changes to importance or performance for this attribute would change its directory.

The five dimensions of the EVP attributes were analyzed by calculating the mean scores for all the individual EVP attributes under each dimension. The result, as seen in Figure 20, shows that economic value and development value falls within the concentrate here group whilst work value, employer reputation, and social value are within the keep up the good work group.

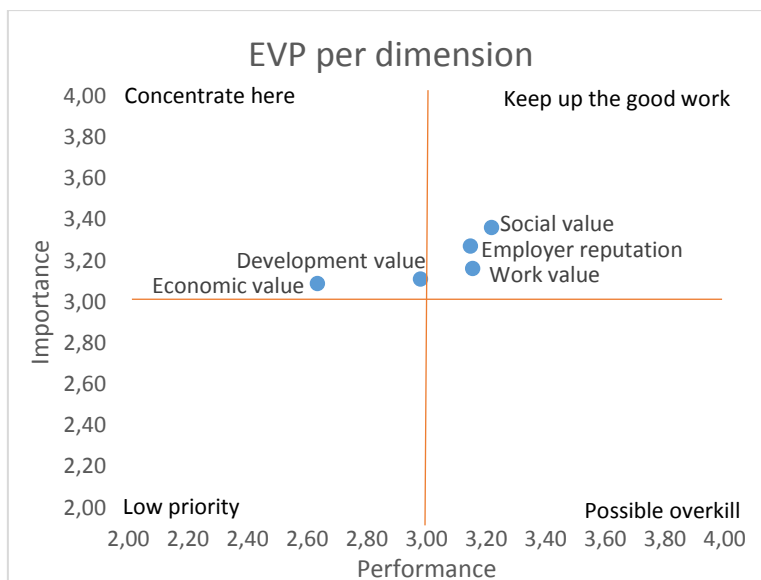


Figure 20. EVP per dimension

H3: There is a difference in how the company's own employees and subcontractor's employees perceive the EVP attributes.

To analyze the difference between the companies, and how their employees view the EVP attributes own IPA models have been created for both Ahola Digital (see Figure 21) and their subcontractor (see Figure 22). The positioning of the vertical and horizontal axes is based upon the median which was in Ahola Digital's case 3,1 for importance, and 2,9 for performance.

Attribute 13 (possibility to change roles or department within the company) is the one that stands out within low priority as the least important one of all attributes. Attribute 24 (work-life balance) is the one that stands out within the possible overkill group, although it is close to being within the keep up the good work group as it is an attribute with high performance but not as high importance score.

For the subcontractor, the positioning of the vertical and horizontal axes is based upon the median which was 3,4 for both importance and performance. As can be seen in Figure 22 almost all attributes are close to the axes but there are a few that stands out.

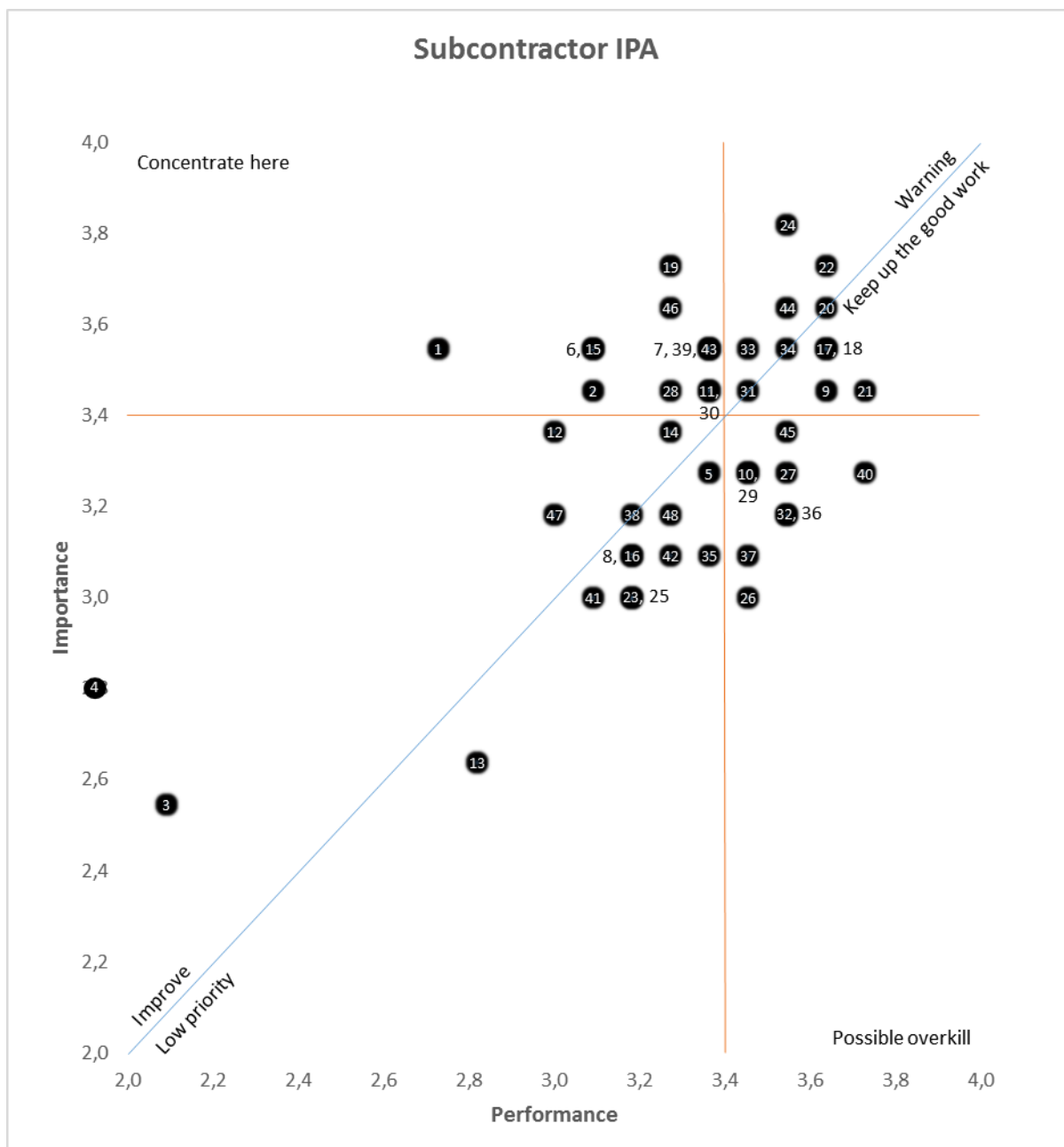


Figure 22. Subcontractor's IPA grid

Attributes standing out within keep up the good work group are attribute 21 (management is open to constructive criticism) which received a high performance score but not as high score in importance, and attribute 24 (work-life balance) which has a high importance but not as high performance score making it the attribute furthest away from the diagonal axis within the warning group. From the concentrate here group attribute 1 (competitive salary and compensation) has high importance but much lower performance, and attribute 19 (organization treat all employees equally) stands out for the same reason.

Most of the attributes standing out clearly are within the low priority group. Attributes 3 (employment benefits and perks) and 4 (free coffee, fruit, snacks, etc.) are within the improve group whereas attribute 13 (possibility to change roles or department within the company) is within low priority and one of the attributes that is least important. The possible overkill group has attribute 40 (flexible work schedule) standing out the most whereas the rest are closer to the axes.

Table 8 shows a list of the three EVP attributes that stands out the most within keep up the good work group for Ahola Digital and the subcontractor. As can be seen, all of these attributes differ between the companies.

Table 8. EVP attributes within keep up the good work group per company

Ahola Digital	
31	Feel trusted
40	Flexible work schedule
45	Innovative and forward-thinking employer
Subcontractor	
17	Supportive and encouraging colleagues
18	Culture of supportive leadership
21	Management is open to constructive criticism

Table 9 shows a list of the three EVP attributes that stands out the most within the concentrate here group for Ahola Digital and the subcontractor. As can be seen, attribute 1 (competitive salary and compensation) can be found in the top three for both companies, whilst the other two attributes differ between the companies.

Table 9. EVP attributes within concentrate here group per company**Ahola Digital**

- 1 Competitive salary and compensation
- 6 Opportunities to develop new skills through training
- 27 Adequate resources to perform on the job

Subcontractor

- 1 Competitive salary and compensation
- 19 Organization treat all employees equally
- 46 Organization's focus on high quality products and/or services

For further comparison, Table 10 shows a list of EVP attributes whose importance or performance mean score differs more than 0,6 points between Ahola Digital and the subcontractor. The higher score is marked as bold. This list shows where the greatest difference between the companies is in regard to the EVP attributes' importance and their performance of these.

Table 10. EVP attributes mean score comparison per company

Importance	Ahola Digital	Subcontractor
5 Exposure to global business and work practices	2,6	3,3
24 Work-life balance	3,1	3,8
Performance	Ahola Digital	Subcontractor
3 Employment benefits and perks (e.g. sport, e-bike, culture, wellness)	2,8	2,1
9 Employees are encouraged to find new solutions and try new things	2,9	3,6
16 Interaction with experts within and outside the organization	2,4	3,2
21 Management is open to constructive criticism	3,1	3,7
26 Public recognition and appreciation from supervisor	2,7	3,5
27 Adequate resources to perform on the job	2,8	3,5
35 Organizational policies are well implemented and followed by all employees	2,7	3,4

5 Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to research what the employees think of Ahola Digital as an employer in the aspect of employer branding. The research question, which will now be discussed, is *“What are the employees’ current perceptions of Ahola Digital’s EVP attributes, and how can these be utilized in an employer branding strategy?”*. The key findings are discussed first in this chapter and they are presented on the order of the objectives that allowed for guidance to both the theoretical and empirical part of this research. Then follows the managerial implications, before giving suggestions for further research and lastly, there is the conclusion for this research.

5.1 Key findings

Objective 1. Identify what employer brand and EVP are, and what advantages and disadvantages there are with these.

The terms *employer brand* and *employer branding* are used synonymously throughout the theory. Drawn upon Majerova et. al (2021) differentiation, employer brand can be seen as the perception and image people have of a company as an employer, whilst employer branding is the actions companies take to differentiate themselves to attract and retain talent. The terms *employer value proposition*, *employee value proposition*, *value proposition*, and *brand promise* are also used synonymously throughout the theory. According to Morgan (2022) employer value proposition is the most suitable term to use as it corresponds to the value the employer offers to the employees, not vice versa.

Employer branding gives companies a competitive advantage. Other benefits are that employer branding improves applicant quality, enhances recruitment, and helps reduce costs in new recruitment. Employer branding helps employees internalize company values, enhances employee engagement, commitment, and retention, and can help lower sickness absences. (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, Cascio & Graham, 2016, Conference Board, 2001 as cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, Majerova et. al, 2021). Disadvantages could be that it requires substantial resources, management support, and focus to be successfully implemented. (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, Barrow & Mosley, 2005).

The employer value proposition can be described as the *what* - what values, benefits, and employer experience the company offers to prospective and current employees, whilst employer branding on the other hand is the *how* – it is the process on how the company markets their EVP, how they brand themselves as an employer, and the actions they take to attract and retain employees. (Adams & Marshall, 2020, Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, Graeme & Sinclair, 2021).

The purpose of this thesis is to research what the employees think of Ahola Digital as an employer in the aspect of employer branding. The discussion will now continue to go through and discuss the questions in the questionnaire that related to employer branding.

Ahola Digital took their new brand into use about two years ago but there was not any specific event for this change instead it was taken into use gradually over time. The old brand is still in use in a few places due to both internal and external factors. Aaker (1991) argues that the more exposures, experiences, and communications there are, the stronger the brand association will be. The result from this research showed that all but one of the respondents relate more to the new brand. We can thus conclude that Ahola Digital has succeeded with their rebranding process internally as a clear majority of the employees relate to the new brand.

The questions for analyzing employer branding: “How satisfied are you overall with your employment?”, “Would you recommend your employer to others?”, and “Do you proudly tell others where you work?” results showed that more than half of the respondents answered with the same number of stars for each question, and the rest with only one star difference between them meaning there is not any clear deviation between any of these questions and one does not stand out in correlation to the others. The respondents were asked to rate their answers to the questions on a scale from 1 to 5 stars, and each question had a mean score between 4,18 to 4,25, meaning the employees are satisfied with their employment overall, they are likely to recommend their employer to others and they proudly tell others where they work.

Of the hypotheses, H1, the more satisfied employees are with their employment overall the more likely they are to recommend the employer to others, was supported, whilst H2, there is a difference in how proud newer employees and employees who have worked for the companies for a longer time are, was rejected as there was no difference between

these. The result of these employer branding questions altogether indicates the company has strong employee advocacy, which according to Graeme and Sinclair (2021) is a capital asset in the organizational reputation.

The answers from the open-ended optional question where the employees were asked to describe what it is like working at their company showed that the employees value the flexibility, independence, responsibility, and freedom they have, that the work is challenging, innovative, dynamic, and exciting, and that they work in a positive, friendly and cooperative environment. This is confirmed by the result from the EVP attributes, where the attributes with the highest performance score are flexible work schedule, work-life balance, feel trusted, people are treated with respect and trust, and good work environment, thus validating the questions.

Objective 2: Identify Ahola Digital's key EVP attributes for retaining current employees and attracting new talents which could be their unique EVP to market, and key EVP attributes they need to work on and give suggestions for improvements to these.

There was not one distinctive EVP attribute that stood out the most. Instead, the attributes with the highest importance and or performance were the following attributes: people are treated with respect and trust, good work environment, work-life balance, and flexible work schedule. Furthermore, most of the attributes found within the group keep up the good work are from the social value and work value dimensions. Dabirian et. al (2019) identified the values that IT professionals care about the most in their study, which were social value, interest value, economic value, management value, and brand image.

The EVP to market could however be based for example upon *balance* as work-life balance was one of the EVP attributes found within keep up the good work, but the data shows also that the company has a balance of supportive leadership and independence where the employees can influence their own work and are encouraged to find new solutions and to try new things. The employees have thus responsibility but also freedom, furthermore, they can work independently but also cooperatively, their work assignments are challenging but the work environment is stress-free, and there is laughter but also quiet. The company seems to have found a good balance in many different aspects for the employees.

The attributes the company needs to work on are the ones that have a higher importance score but lower performance score within the concentrate here group. These are competitive salary and compensation, opportunities to develop new skills through training, and opportunity to work across multiple technologies. Interestingly, the other EVP attributes within the economic value dimension are found within the low priority group. These attributes were healthcare benefits, employment benefits and perks, as well as free coffee, fruit, snack, etc. This indicates that the employees value salary more than surrounding benefits which is contradictive to Bussin's (2008) argument of EVP being the total employment experience including what the company offers in return for the skills and capabilities the employee brings to them, not only the monetary benefits the employees receive. However, salary is probably the one factor everyone would suggest needs improvement, whomever you ask, especially in this economic situation the world is in right now with an energy crisis and high inflation rates. The company should continuously ensure that the salaries are at, or above the market rate to optimize retention.

Regarding opportunities to develop new skills through training, this can also be seen as a positive thing as it indicates that the employees want the opportunity to learn more and increase their knowledge and skills. Especially considering that the employees are working within the software industry where a wide range of digital skills are needed, and new technologies are constantly created. Development opportunities were also one of the factors Styvén and Näppä's (2021) study showed are important for employees to feel content with their employer and remain at their workplace, and skills development was one of the top criteria for selecting a new company according to Talent LMS (2021). The company should check each employee's interest in learning as these can differ. Some might want to get a new degree, take a course, attend training days or do independent learning through online video material, whilst others might be interested in more challenging work tasks with the support and guidance of a senior employee.

Regarding the opportunity to work across multiple technologies, as mentioned in the introduction of the software industry we are now in the Industry 4.0 era where the line between the physical, digital and biological spheres of production is blurred out and the revolutions differ from previous ones in speed, scale, complexity, and transformative power. (Bongomin et al., 2020). This requires, but also creates, new technologies, and in a fast-phased continuously changing environment it is important to keep the skillset up to

date. The company should continuously evaluate the technologies used to ensure that the ones used are relevant and beneficial for them, and that the employees know how to utilize the technologies in their work.

Three out of four EVP attributes from the economic value dimension are found within the low priority group and one within the concentrate here group. Seven out of nine EVP attributes from the social value dimension are found within the keep up the good work group and two within the low priority group. Whereas attributes from the development value, work value, and employer reputation dimensions are found within all groups. Interestingly, when analyzing the mean of EVP attributes based on their dimension, they fall within either concentrate here or keep up the good work in the IPA grid. Economic value and development value need to be focused on whilst social value, employer reputation, and work value are performed well.

Deepa and Baral's (2019) research on the other hand showed dimensions within each group, and none of the dimensions are within the same group as for the case company. To be noted though, the attributes used in this research are not identical to their research, the total number of attributes used as well as the number of attributes within each dimension differs, and also the regional differences are to be considered as their research was done in a completely different employment market.

Objective 3: Analyze if there is a difference in how the company's own employees and subcontractor's employees perceive the employer brand and EVP attributes.

There were some differences in how Ahola Digital's own employees and subcontractor's employees perceive the EVP attributes. The greatest differences in the mean scores, over 0,8 points, are from the importance score attribute 24 (work-life balance) and from the performance score attributes 16 (interaction with experts within and outside the organization) and 27 (adequate resources to perform on the job). When taking the other score (performance or importance) into account for the IPA grid then attribute 24 is found within possible overkill for Ahola Digital and warning for the subcontractor, attribute 16 is found within improve for Ahola Digital and low priority for the subcontractor, whereas attribute 27 is found within concentrate here for Ahola Digital and possible overkill for the subcontractor.

Furthermore, based upon the IPA model the attributes standing out the most in the groups keep up the good work and concentrate here differs between Ahola Digital and the subcontractor. The differences could be investigated further, as for the subcontractor, is the reason for the differences due to the fact that they are a different legal company, or are they not integrated well enough to the way of working with Ahola Digital, as the concentrate here group's attributes that stood out the most were organization treat all employees equally and organization's focus on high quality products and/or services. Although, the differences can also be due to regional differences as they are based in different countries. Evans et al. (2011) argue that EVP should be different based on the employee target group and their geographic market. The differences between the companies could be taken into consideration if regional EVPs are to be marketed.

5.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this research from the theoretical framework indicate that EVP must come from within to have credibility (Barrow & Mosley, 2005), and what to expect from working for the company must be clearly articulated and illustrated when marketing the employer brand (Adams & Marshall, 2020). Employer branding can be a valuable concept generating a substantially different effect when HR and branding activities are coordinated into one strategy instead of performing these alone (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding can enhance recruitment and employee engagement, and lead to a competitive advantage increasing customer satisfaction, company profitability, and retention (Conference Board, 2001 as cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, Barrow & Mosley, 2005, Cascio & Graham, 2016).

This research can be seen as one of the first steps in creating an employer branding strategy. The findings from this research show what EVP attributes are working well and the open-ended question gave an indication of how the employees would describe working for the company. The *from within* is thus fulfilled and this information can be used to create a compelling EVP. The following step would then be to decide how this EVP should be marketed internally and externally. The company can create a marketing and communications plan for this purpose. Internally they can communicate the message and EVP at their company info events and on their internal websites. Externally they can audit their online presence, keep consistency in updating as well as keep the EVP and employer branding strategy into consideration when posting.

Another important step in the employer branding process is to develop measurement standards for following up the success of their EVP and other employer branding actions the company takes. Regarding other branding actions, the findings from this research also show what EVP attributes the company still needs to work on, the ones that the employees find important, but the company does not perform well enough. These were: competitive salary and compensation, opportunities to develop new skills through training, and opportunity to work across multiple technologies. The company should put more effort into these, investigate further why the employees think the performance is not up to par, and make necessary improvements accordingly.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

Employer branding is a vast subject but also increasingly popular and it can be researched from many different aspects. This thesis focused on how current employees perceive Ahola Digital's employer brand and EVP attributes at a specific moment in time. Further research could investigate why there is a difference in the result between Ahola Digital and the subcontractor. Other suggestions for further research are to investigate what previous employees who have left the company think about the brand today, what factors made them leave, and if they would recommend the company as an employer or not. Applicants' perception of the employer brand and the company's recruitment process can be investigated, as well as prospective employees' perception of the employer brand and if it corresponds to how the current employees perceive working there. Employer brands' effect on customer satisfaction and employee productivity can also be researched, this one perhaps over some time to see what actions have what kind of effect.

5.4 Conclusions

Employer branding is increasing in popularity and with a shortage of talent within the software industry, it is becoming more important for employers to stand out and distinguish themselves from the competition. This research's findings showed that the employees are satisfied with their employment overall, they are likely to recommend their employer to others and they proudly tell others where they work. The result of these questions indicates strong employee advocacy.

The employees' current perception of Ahola Digital's EVP attributes is that there was not one distinct but several EVP attributes within social values and work values they succeed with. These combined with the result from the open-ended question where the employees were asked to describe what it is like working for the company can be used to create a unique and compelling EVP. The research also showed the EVP attributes Ahola Digital needs to work on, these were the ones that the employees find important, but the company does not perform well enough. The company should put more effort into these and make necessary improvements to optimize employee satisfaction and retention. There were some differences between Ahola Digital and the subcontractor and these need to be taken into consideration if there is a need for a regional EVP and for improvements that need to be made.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire form

Employer branding and Employer value proposition survey

Dear participant,

The purpose of this survey is to research what you, the employees, think of your employer in the aspect of employer branding, and what your perceptions of the company's employer value propositions are.

Employer branding can be described as the efforts taken towards recruiting and retaining the best possible human talent within an employment environment that is becoming increasingly competitive (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer value proposition (EVP) are "the unique set of valued benefits that employees can expect to find from their employment experience". (Graeme & Sinclair, 2021).

The survey will be analyzed with the Importance-Performance model and the employer value propositions are thus divided into two sections where importance is measured first (page 2), followed by performance (page 3). Please answer all questions as honestly as possible from your personal perspective. All responses are anonymous, and the data collected will be treated confidentially for the purpose intended.

The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Leave your contact information after the questionnaire to get a chance to win a gift card to the value of 30 €.

Thank you!
Ida Prest

First there are some general questions:

Employer branding

1. Where do you work?

- Ahola Digital Oy Ab
- Subcontractor

2. How long have you been working for the company?

- 0-2 years
- 3-7 years
- 8 or more years

Then a few questions regarding employer branding:

3. Which brand do you relate more to today?

Ahola Digital

Attracs

4. How satisfied are you overall with your employment?

Scale: 1= Very dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very satisfied



5. Would you recommend your employer to others?

Scale: 1 = No, very unlikely, 2 = Unlikely, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Likely, 5 = Yes, very likely



6. Do you proudly tell others where you work?

Scale: 1 = No, I do not tell at all, 2 = No, I rather not tell, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Yes, 5 = Yes, absolutely



7. **Optional:** Please describe what is it like working at your company, in one sentence?

Enter your answer

Next

Page 1 of 3

Page 2 of the questionnaire is measuring **importance** on the scale: Not important, Less important, Important and Very important.

Employer branding and Employer value proposition survey (draft) ...

Employer Value Propositions - Importance

Below is a list of attributes divided into the following segments: economic, development, social, work and employer reputation. What do you value in your employment experience? Please answer how important do you think each of these employer value propositions are?


8. How important do you think the following employer value propositions are? (economic value)

	Not important	Less important	Important	Very important
Competitive salary and compensation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The full list of EVP attributes used in the questionnaire can be found in appendix 2.

Page 2 ends with an optional open-ended question:

13. **Optional:** What do you think in general about the employer value propositions presented above? Is there anything missing that you value?

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Page 3 is measuring **performance** on the scale: Poor, Fair, Good and Excellent.

Employer branding and Employer value proposition survey (draft) ...

Employer Value Propositions - Performance

Below is the same list of attributes as on the previous page, but here we want to know how Ahola Digital and Subcontractor are performing these in your opinion.


14. How would you rate Ahola Digital & Subcontractor's performance on the following employer value propositions? (economic value)

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Competitive salary and compensation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Back Submit Page 3 of 3

After submitting their response, they can decide if they want to enter the draw by filling out their company e-mail address in a separate form (for anonymity purposes).

Employer branding and Employer value proposition survey (draft) 📄

 **Thanks!**

Thank you for your response!

Enter the draw for a gift card here:
<https://forms.office.com/r/form123>

Appendix 2. List of EVP attributes used in the questionnaire

Economic value

- 1 Competitive salary and compensation
- 2 Healthcare benefits
- 3 Employment benefits and perks (e.g. sport, e-bike, culture, wellness)
- 4 Free coffee, fruit, snacks etc.

Development value

- 5 Exposure to global business and work practices
- 6 Opportunities to develop new skills through training
- 7 Opportunity to apply what was learnt
- 8 Opportunity to teach others what was learnt
- 9 Employees are encouraged to find new solutions and try new things
- 10 Empowered to take decisions
- 11 Challenging and interesting work assignments
- 12 Career growth opportunities
- 13 Possibility to change roles or department within the company
- 14 Opportunities for teamwork
- 15 Opportunity to work across multiple technologies

Social value

- 16 Interaction with experts within and outside the organization
- 17 Supportive and encouraging colleagues
- 18 Culture of supportive leadership
- 19 Organization treat all employees equally
- 20 People are treated with respect and trust
- 21 Management is open to constructive criticism
- 22 Good work environment
- 23 Team-building and other out-of-work events
- 24 Work-life balance

Work value

- 25 Role clarity
- 26 Public recognition and appreciation from supervisor
- 27 Adequate resources to perform on the job
- 28 Work relevant to one's strength, competency, and interests
- 29 Possibility to influence one's own work
- 30 Given responsibility
- 31 Feel trusted
- 32 Creativity at work is encouraged
- 33 Good working methods
- 34 Stress-free work environment
- 35 Organizational policies are well implemented and followed by all employees
- 36 Informal work culture
- 37 Transparent work culture
- 38 Working in an exciting environment
- 39 Job security & stability
- 40 Flexible work schedule
- 41 Periodic feedback on performance

Employer reputation

- 42 Possibility to make a difference
- 43 Management value their employees
- 44 Competent and fair leadership
- 45 Innovative and forward-thinking employer
- 46 Organization's focus on high quality products and/or services
- 47 Organization's focus on environmental and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities
- 48 Organization's reputation of being ethical

Appendix 3. EVP result by importance in descending order

ID	EVP Attribute	Importance	Performance
20	People are treated with respect and trust	3,61	3,39
22	Good work environment	3,61	3,39
19	Organization treat all employees equally	3,57	3,18
11	Challenging and interesting work assignments	3,54	3,25
44	Competent and fair leadership	3,50	3,36
18	Culture of supportive leadership	3,50	3,25
46	Organization's focus on high quality products and/or services	3,50	3,07
1	Competitive salary and compensation	3,50	2,79
39	Job security & stability	3,46	3,29
43	Management value their employees	3,46	3,29
7	Opportunity to apply what was learnt	3,43	3,07
40	Flexible work schedule	3,39	3,57
31	Feel trusted	3,39	3,43
17	Supportive and encouraging colleagues	3,39	3,29
24	Work-life balance	3,36	3,57
21	Management is open to constructive criticism	3,36	3,32
27	Adequate resources to perform on the job	3,36	3,07
6	Opportunities to develop new skills through training	3,36	2,71
34	Stress-free work environment	3,32	3,18
33	Good working methods	3,32	3,14
15	Opportunity to work across multiple technologies	3,32	2,86
9	Employees are encouraged to find new solutions and try new things	3,29	3,21
28	Work relevant to one's strength, competency, and interests	3,29	3,11
29	Possibility to influence one's own work	3,25	3,14
45	Innovative and forward-thinking employer	3,21	3,36
30	Given responsibility	3,18	3,29
10	Empowered to take decisions	3,14	3,18
48	Organization's reputation of being ethical	3,11	3,07
36	Informal work culture	3,11	3,36
37	Transparent work culture	3,11	3,14
42	Possibility to make a difference	3,11	3,04
2	Healthcare benefits	3,11	3,00
35	Organizational policies are well implemented and followed by all employees	3,11	2,96
32	Creativity at work is encouraged	3,07	3,21
14	Opportunities for teamwork	3,07	3,18
47	Organization's focus on environmental and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities	3,00	2,86
12	Career growth opportunities	3,00	2,68
4	Free coffee, fruit, snacks etc.	3,00	2,21
23	Team-building and other out-of-work events	2,93	2,89
16	Interaction with experts within and outside the organization	2,93	2,68
25	Role clarity	2,89	2,86
5	Exposure to global business and work practices	2,86	3,11
41	Periodic feedback on performance	2,86	2,89
26	Public recognition and appreciation from supervisor	2,82	3,00
38	Working in an exciting environment	2,82	3,00
8	Opportunity to teach others what was learnt	2,82	2,96
3	Employment benefits and perks (e.g. sport, e-bike, culture, wellness)	2,75	2,54
13	Possibility to change roles or department within the company	2,39	2,57