Employer brand image of Kämp Collection Hotels

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Abstract

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This study examines different areas that influence employer brand image and attractiveness. The primary objective was to determine how Kämp Collection Hotels is perceived as an employer. Attracting and retaining talent is vital for companies where service quality and customer experience rely highly on their employees. Strategic employer branding could be used to achieve a competitive advantage by attracting and retaining talent, and enhancing performance and efficiency.

This research includes theory and empirical sections. The literature references theory from relevant literature regarding improving employer attractiveness through internal and external employer branding, the importance of recruitment, and the overall brand image effect on employer attractiveness. Additionally, the typical challenges in employer branding are examined. This study is based on a quantitative method, and the survey was conducted as an internet questionnaire, which forty-one respondents answered.

The study results indicate that respondents' willingness to apply to a hotel chain correlates with their opinion of the brand. The results imply that brand image plays a smaller role when an employee is already employed in the company and presents other aspects that become more important. The results showed that the commissioning company is now considered a market leader and, compared to its competitors, is more attractive as an employer. The study showed that former employees with more negative attitudes towards the company are also less willing to apply to other hotel chains. In the case of the commissioning company, the onboarding process and induction could be improved to amend the employee experience.

There are clear implications that factors suggested in the literature affect employer brand image and the attractiveness of the commissioning company. This study does not take the goals and employer branding strategy of Kämp Collection Hotels into consideration. Therefore, efficacy has not been examined. The conclusions drawn in this study are intended to provide recommendations to the company on how to create an effective employer branding strategy and to deal with the common challenges a company might face.

Keywords Employer brand image, employer branding, brand awareness, employer attractiveness, employer of choice

Table of contents

1 Introduction

This is a research-based bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International business in the major Human Resource Management specialisation at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

This chapter introduces the background of employer branding and its importance in getting the needed talent in the hospitality industry, where the talent shortage is already immense. In the following chapter, the need for new employees in the industry is introduced together with the importance of the research to the commissioning company, the industry in general, and the author. The research question and investigative questions are presented in the subsequent chapter, followed by demarcation, benefits, risks management, and key concepts. The commissioning company is introduced in the end of the introduction.

1.1   Background

Nearly three decades ago, McKinsey & Company Inc. had learned how the best companies build a solid managerial talent pool and whether better talent drives company performance (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, Axelrod 2001). They discovered that better HR processes were not related to how well the company performed. In 1996, the term employer branding was introduced to the lexicon of human resources and marketing (Backhaus 2016) and a year later, McKinsey & Company gave a name to a phenomenon that many people had been experiencing but had not fully articulated – the war for talent (Michaels & co. 2001). Therefore, two related topics got both names and attention, which triggered further research and changes in organisations to achieve competitive advantage. Since then, the importance of a strategic approach to attracting talents and becoming an employer of choice has only grown in all industries due to globalisation and increasing competition.

Like all other organisations, hotel companies try to become attractive employers and it is evident that currently, it is more vital than ever before. According to the hospitality industry union MaRa (2022), Finland's hospitality industry's workforce increased by 46% between 1995 and 2017. Before the pandemic, over 154 thousand people, 5,8 per cent of all employed people in Finland, were estimated to work in the industry in 2019 (Business Finland 2021). The industry grew by about 2500 employees yearly (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2022) but in October 2021, only 75 thousand were working in the sector (PAM 2021). This means that all the positions, which were closed due to pandemic, will have to be filled again. Openings of new hotels and restaurants,

especially in the Helsinki region, is creating even larger gap between the workforce need and availability. Additionally, the hospitality industry has been usually characterised by long hours and low pay. The pandemic provided many workers with the reason and possibility to change to a different field. As the countries have opened their borders again, travelling and tourism is seeing rapid growth, and more positions are to be filled than there are people out there to fill them. The essential resource for the hospitality industry is human capital, and this resource is currently very scarce. As employer branding plays a vital role in getting the needed employees, a clear overview of where the company stands, and which areas should be focused on, can significantly influence future success.

The author finds the topic of employer branding very important and exciting and has seen over the years various ways employer branding is used effectively in the company but also witnessed the lack of strategic employer branding. As the competition increase in the industry over time, it is essential to evaluate the company's current image and form strategies to have a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining talent in the future. As a result of the research, the company will get a detailed overview of how the company is perceived as an employer now, what is most important for potential employees when choosing a company, and which areas should be focused on to improve the employer brand image. Additionally, the whole industry can have more insights into what the potential employees on the field value and what could be done to become a more attractive employer.

The author has worked in the hospitality industry for more than 16 years and has good knowledge about the industry in general. The research will give the author a better understanding of employer branding in general and all the areas that affect employer brand image. Through the research, the author will get a better understanding of the current and potential employees' perceptions of the company as well as the areas that play a role in application decisions. The knowledge can then be used in the author's current role as a team leader and possibly help in future roles as a professional of human resource management.

1.2   Research Question

The thesis aims to research how the commissioning company Kämp Collection Hotels is perceived as an employer and what employees value when choosing a place to work.

The international aspect of the thesis is filled by the commissioning company belonging to a large global hotel chain Nordic Choice Hotels. Furthermore, the company employs

people from all over the world and therefore needs to consider international aspects when forming its employer branding strategies.

The research question for this study is "How is Kämp Collection Hotels perceived as an employer?". The research question is divided into five investigative questions (IQ) as follows:

IQ1: How attractive is Kämp Collection Hotels as an employer compared to its competitors?
IQ2: How do Kämp Collection Hotels' brand image and awareness affect potential employees' willingness to apply?
IQ3: What aspects of a workplace are valued by the potential employees?
IQ4: How is employees' experience influencing perception of employer brand image?
IQ5: What could the company do to improve its attractiveness as an employer?

Table 1 below presents the investigative questions, theoretical framework components, research methods and results chapters for each investigative question. Investigative questions one to three are answered in the results and fifth in conclusion.

Table 1. Overlay matrix.

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods **	Results
IQ1. How attractive is Kämp Collection Hotels as an employer compared to its competitors?	2.1. Strategic employer branding 2.1.1. Employer branding as a tool to become an employer of choice	A quantitative survey	4.2. Kämp Collection Hotels' attractiveness as an employer
IQ2: How do Kämp Collection Hotels' brand image and awareness affect potential employees' willingness to apply?	2.1.2. The relation between internal and external employer branding and employer brand image 2.2. Employer branding in the hotel industry 2.4. Corporate brand and employer brand image	A quantitative survey	4.3. Brand image and brand awareness influence on willingness to apply 4.3.1. Brand positioning and willingness to apply 4.3.2. Familiarity with the company's services and products
IQ3. What aspects of a workplace are valued by the potential employees?	2.3.1. Aspects that employees and job candidates are looking for in a company	A quantitative survey	4.4. Aspects valued at the workplace 4.4.1. Factors valued at the workplace and different employment levels

IQ4: How is employees' experience influencing perception of employer brand image?	2.3. The impact of recruitment and selection on employer brand image	A quantitative survey	4.5. Employees' experience effect on employer brand image 4.5.1. Existing, former and potential employees' attitudes towards the brand
IQ5: What could the company do to improve its attractiveness as an employer?	2. Creating an attractive employer brand	A quantitative survey	Conclusion

1.3 Demarcation

This research concentrates on how potential and current employees perceive Kämp Collection Hotels as an employer. The study will investigate external employer branding areas such as brand awareness, potential employees' willingness to consider the company as an employer, and employer brand image. This research will not analyse the company's current goals, strategies and actions nor how current employees percieve the company as an employer.

1.4 Benefits

The research outcome will help the company better understand its position as an employer compared to other hotel operators in the Helsinki region. Knowledge can then be used in forming new employer branding strategies to increase employer attractiveness. The existing employees will always be influenced by the employer branding, whether by immediate actions or by the long-term reputation of a workplace, which can affect the importance of an employee as a professional. When looking into the long-term consequences of using effective employer branding strategies, a good reputation as an employer will attract professionals who will improve the company's guest experience and financial success. Furthermore, the company can consider this research in the operations and other activities to enhance its employer brand image.

The author will benefit from the research by reading and analysing literature on employer branding and human resource management in general and more in-depth regarding the hospitality industry. Additionally, the author will get the experience of doing and analysing a survey and getting information regarding existing employer brand image of Kämp Collection Hotels.

Employer branding as a strategy is relatively rarely used in the industry, and professionals dedicated to the topic are not often hired by the hotel or hospitality industry. Additionally, the sector relies highly on its workforce, is constantly expanding and was the most influenced by the Covid-19 virus. To become competitive, industry professionals could benefit from this research to enhance their knowledge of the topic and familiarise themselves with the current situation with the employee needs in the Finnish market and possible development needs.

1.5 Risks and Risk Management

The main risk of this thesis lies in not getting enough answers from potential employees to form a realistic image of the current situation and the employer brand image of the commissioning company. This might happen for two reasons: firstly, because author will not be able to reach enough potential employees, and secondly, surveys will not be answered. Another risk can be not evaluating the situation correctly and not being able to ask the questions from the target group that best help to find answers to the investigative questions. To avoid this from happening, author will ask various questions based on the literature and will acknowledge own biases and avoid asking questions based on biases or personal experiences.

1.6 Key Concepts

The key concepts used in this thesis are employer branding, external employer branding, employer brand image and value proposition. To help understand the topic better, the concepts are described below.

Employer Branding constitutes the company's efforts to promote, both within (internal EB) and outside (external EB) the firm, a clear view of what makes it different and desirable as an employer (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Every company has an employer brand, whether they have knowingly or unknowingly created it and whether it is what they aim for or not. The term employer branding is often referred to as the strategic approach to attract suitably qualified and skilled employees (Guderngar & Lings 2010) with the primary objective to build the image of the organisation which: cares about the interests and needs of its employees, invests in their professional development, as well as observes and responds to trends emerging on the labour market (Figurska & Matuska 2013, 37).

External Employer Branding is addressed to active professionals, students, graduates and other stakeholders. It is implemented using modern communication channels, relations with the academic community, cooperation with opinion-leading media and image-enhancing recruitment projects (Figurska & Matuska 2013, 37).

Employer Brand Image is the image associated with an organisation as an employer (Knox & Freeman 2006, 697).

Employer Value Proposition or EVP is a set of associations and offerings provided by the organisation in return for the skills, experiences and capabilities an employee brings to the organisation (EBI 2012; Pattnaik & Misra 2017).

1.7   Commissioning Company

Kämp Collection Hotels is a hospitality group comprising Finland's most reputable hotels and luxury spas, operating 17 restaurants and bars as well as 65 meeting venues. Kämp Collection Hotels employs 600 hospitality professionals, and its turnover in 2019 was 90 million euros (Kämp Collection Hotels 2022).

Kämp Collection Hotels' best-known hotels are Hotel Kämp, established in 1887, and the luxurious Hotel St. George, opened in May 2018. Other hotels of the group are the design hotel Klaus K Hotel, lifestyle hotel chain GLO Hotels, including GLO Hotel Kluuvi, GLO Hotel Art, GLO Hotel Sello and GLO Hotel Airport, the exclusive and comfortable Hotel Haven, the elegantly modern Lilla Roberts and the uniquely welcoming Hotel Fabian. (Kämp Collection Hotels 2022.)

Kämp Collection Hotels changed ownership in October 2019 (Kämp Collection Hotels 2022). The new owner, Nordic Choice Hospitality Group (soon the Strawberry Group), has over 200 hotels in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Lithuania (Nordic Choice Hotels 2022).

2   Creating an attractive employer brand

The technological advancements and globalisation force companies to positively differentiate themselves as employers from the competitors. This is even more evident in competitive labour markets where the main challenge for service-based organisations is to attract and retain talents (Knox & Freeman 2006). Therefore, companies are aiming to create more attractive employer brand image and increase competitive advantage through employer branding activities.

Employer branding and employer brand image have gained more attention only in recent decades, and literature on employer brand image suggests that it results from external employer branding (Lievens & Slaughter 2016; Staniec & Kalinska-Kula 2021). However, the employer brand image is a result of not only external employer branding, which is used to knowingly and strategically shape the image, but also many other factors. Other factors include internal employer branding activities and results, as well as corporate brand.

Corporate brand image refers to consumer perceptions and beliefs about the brand (Nandan 2005), which are the result of experience and knowledge from different sources. Similarly, employer brand image is shaped by the wide range of areas. Parts of external employer branding, such as career site, employer value proposition, application process and job advertising, are perhaps the most obvious aspects shaping the image as an employer. However, there are also other areas strongly influencing potential employees' perception of a company and many of these areas are not part of the external employer branding or even not covered by strategic employer branding or employer branding activities at all.

Areas that are not part of the external branding activities influencing the employer brand image are customer experience, corporate brand awareness, current employees and social networks. To illustrate company's activities affecting employer brand image and all the areas affecting how the company is perceived as an employer by potential employees, the author has created an integrated model. The model shows that employer brand image could be seen as a result of many areas that are either intentional or unintentional result of branding, operations and employer branding.

The areas affecting the employer brand image do not have an order, and the influence can be highly subjective and vary based on time and perception. Therefore, no one aspects more important than another. The illustration is presented below.
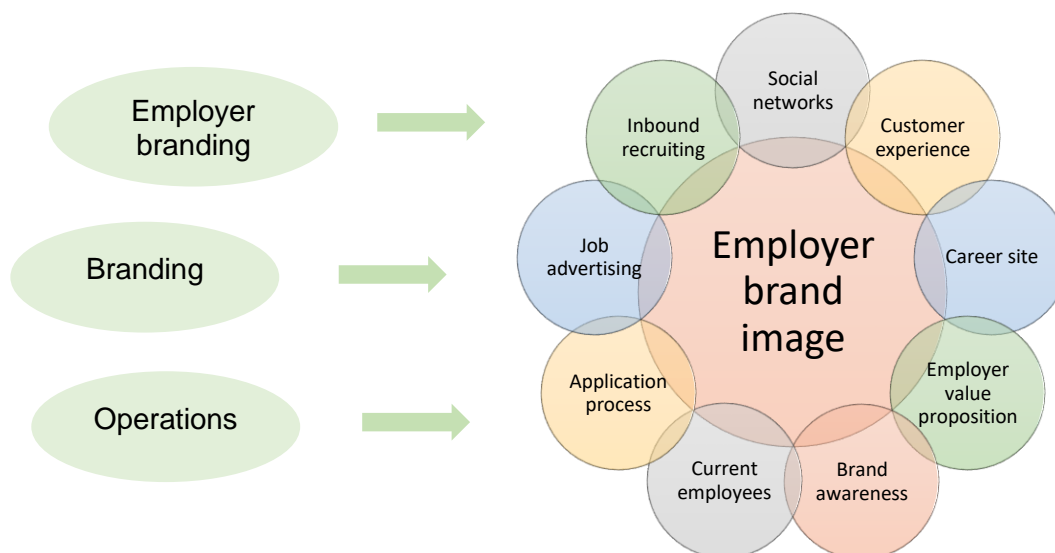

Figure 1. Areas that form an employer's brand image

The following chapters present literature findings connected to employer branding and different areas that influence employer brand image. Employer attractiveness, as one of the leading indicators of competitive employer brand image, is investigated further through the aspects potential employees are looking for in a company and ways to make an organisation more appealing as a workplace. Furthermore, employer branding in the hotel industry is presented based on the literature findings and the importance of brand awareness to employer brand image.

2.1. Strategic employer branding

As the world and industries develop rapidly, there is a constant need for employees with specific skillsets and labour and skill shortages have become a real concern for companies. According to ManPower Group research, as much as 54 % of international businesses polled reported skill shortages (Bolden-Barrett 2020), and according to a survey conducted by Finland's Chamber of Commerce, 70 per cent out of 1300 companies surveyed in Finland reported that skills shortage is limiting their growth (Yle News 2021). Predictions (Korn Ferry 2018) show that by the year 2030, there will be a talent shortage of 85 million people globally. This kind of talent shortage is creating a need for all companies to consistently review and develop their approach to people

management to achieve a competitive advantage in effectively attracting and retaining the needed talent. However, for delivering benefits, it is essential that the employer brand is not merely rhetoric restating the organisation's values but reflects the employees' experience (CIPD 2021). That means that successful employer branding strategies cover not only the external image of a company but reflect the reality of existing employees' experiences (Boella & Goss-Turner 2019, 123). According to Boella and Goss-Turner (2019), activities that should be carefully considered in terms of employer brand are the following:

1) Recruitment processes, vacancy advertising, the online application process, choice of media and social media content
2) The selection process criteria for selection and methods for selection
3) Career websites
4) Employee handbooks/guides, welcome packs
5) Induction and orientation programmes
6) All training and development schemes
7) All HRM events, including team building activities, interface with the organisation
8) Leadership and management styles and approaches
9) All communication with employees
10) Compensation and benefits strategies
11) Physical working environment issues
12) All public relations and communication channels
13) Performance management systems

As seen from the list above, employer brand image is affected by almost all employee-related activities, not only external advertising content. Additionally, as the customer might become an employee and vice versa, how customers perceive the working place and existing employees will also play a role in forming the employer brand image. To create a desired employer brand image, all areas need a strategic approach aligned with the company's core values, mission and goals.

Various areas of employee-related activities as well as the need of being knowledgeable in marketing, evidently creates a complicated task in managing employer branding and employer branding strategy. Besides the knowledge in marketing and human resource management, it will also need industry-specific knowledge to understand the challenges in specific fields and workforce itself. Moreover, it requires continuous cooperation with other decision-makers in the company as well as common and clear goals for future so that the employer branding strategy supports the overall goals. Additionally, key stakeholders would need to support and enforce employer branding strategies through their own actions and decisions in the company.

Overall, employer branding is complex and faces many challenges. Huhta and Myllyntaus (2021) have combined their experience and David A. Aaker's list of challenges in creating a brand and formed a list of ten main challenges that a person or group responsible for employer branding management might face. These ten challenges are as follows:

1) Organization is under pressure to recruit quickly and compete for employees only with higher salaries.
2) There are many and different recruiters in various work groups.
3) The labour market and communication channels are fragmented.
4) Organisation's branding strategies and hierarchies are complicated and there are many stakeholders.
5) Management changes strategies every now and then.
6) People have the tendency to resist changes.
7) Other decision-makers in the organisation have a narrow understanding of the employer brand and its benefits, which easily follows e.g. the pressure to reduce the budget and change the resourcing of the employer brand.
8) The responsibility for employer branding might be fragmented between different departments or people.
9) Organisation needs to maximise profit in a short time.
10) More effort is put into what is said than done.

To be effective in employer branding strategies, all the challenges mentioned above must be considered and addressed in one way or another to avoid later complications and failures. By forming a strategy that will already consider these possible challenges, the company can increase its likeliness of success.

The following chapters explain how employer branding is used as a tool and external and internal branding roles in forming an employer brand image. Additionally, the use of employer branding in the hotel industry is presented based on the relevant literature and studies.

2.1.1 Employer branding as a tool to become an employer of choice

Regardless of the size of an organisation and the number of employees, all companies are assessed by potential employees based on their image as an employer. Suppose the employer's brand image is rated highly on the talent market. In that case, the company becomes the employer of choice (Figurska & Matuska 2013). As we saw earlier, employer brand image is affected by many different aspects and therefore, many factors will influence the employer's attractiveness.

To increase the company's attractiveness as an employer, companies can offer various benefits to their employees. Mckinsey & Company (2001) has identified four benefits that help attract and retain the right talent. Based on this, current and potential employees are

drawn based on the benefits that they receive from the employer. The four benefits groups are:

1) emotional benefits (culture, empowerment and teamwork)
2) rational benefits (working conditions, career path, career development potential and training offerings)
3) tangible associations (products, services and organisational success)
4) intangible associations (organisational roots, organisational vision, mission and values)

All these benefits should be analysed and considered whenever a company starts forming its employer branding strategy.

To further elaborate how to become and employer of choice, Aboul-Ela (2016) proposed a BLCG Branding Framework. BLCG are abbreviations from Bloom-Live-Connect-Grow, where "bloom" would represent the external factors seen by the public and potential employees and the rest of the dimensions related to existing employees. Dimensions are explained further below:

a) Bloom dimension includes prestigious employer image, corporate social responsibility practices, the positive image conveyed to the general public, the scope of international operations, comprehensive website, being a market leader, range of products and services, employer's ability to differentiate itself from competitors, vision, mission and core values.

b) Live dimension represents the work environment, including total rewards, workplace and corporate culture and safety practices.

c) Connect dimension revolves around the interactional relationship between the employer and employee. It includes caring about the employees' wellbeing, adopting teamwork and team spirit practices, certain management styles and branded products matching employees' personalities. Connect as an external factor is realised through existing employees and their shared experience with the external community.

d) Grow dimension is concerned with the aspects related to an employee potential growth, self-development, training, feedback for employees' development and job security. (Aboul-Ela 2016.)

This framework emphasises the complex nature of creating a successful and attractive employer brand image as well as shows that becoming an employer of choice is not generated by singular areas but should be approached with an holistic view as internal and external factors are important and interlinked. A strategic approach to all mentioned activities is necessary to help tackle the skills shortages and increase the talent pool available for the company.

2.1.2 The relation between internal and external employer branding and employer brand image

External employer branding is often considered in the field of marketing science. It is directed to professionals, students, graduates and other stakeholders (Stuss & Herdan 2017). It is also generally assumed that external employer branding has the same theoretical foundations and tools as consumer branding and corporate branding (Macalik & Sulich 2019) and that the most important target group of external employer branding are potential company employees (Moroko & Uncles 2008). Similarly to any other strategy, so does employer branding strategy need a consistent and systematic approach to fill the current needs and anticipate future developments in human resource management.

The role of external employer branding is to communicate enterprise values (employer value proposition – EVP) and attract desired candidates by doing so (Macalik & Sulich 2019). That means that external employer branding aims to improve the employer's brand image and enhance the company's attractiveness as an employer.

However, employer branding starts from the existing employees. Gehrels and De Looij (2016) explain that the first step is to identify clear vision and all team members should become aware of the importance of the brand. Developing clear internal programme of engagement and defining what the future looks like, how the company is planning to achieve it and how the employees can help. And only thereafter create the communication plan, internally and externally. (Gehrels & De Looij 2016)

According to internal employer branding, employees are perceived and treated as clients, and their interests are at the centre of attention. This is achieved by enabling them to self-define, improve their qualifications and adequately motivate them to work efficiently. (Staniec & Kalinska-Kula 2021.) The goal is to convince employees that their organisation is an excellent place to work, to retain them and to ensure their understanding of the organisation's goals and commitment to them in a way that they become guardians of the brand image and hopefully turn into genuine believers and advocates for the brand (Kimpakorn & Dimmitt 2007). Motivated employees will stay longer with the company, reducing staff turnover costs and working towards offering a better customer experience and ultimately improving organisational performance. Motivated and professional staff will positively affect the employer brand image and attract other talents and can be used in external employer branding activities like social media advertisement.

Team buildings and proper interactions between employees are viewed as essential elements of internal employer branding (Herman & Gioia 2001; Garcia, Gonzales-Miranda, Gallo & Roman-Calderon 2019). Other important factors influencing employee engagement are coaching sessions, training and career growth (Mihalcea 2017; Staniec & Kalinska-Kula 2021). Staniec & Kalinska-Kula (2021) emphasise the importance of creating an environment where employees are provided with opportunities to learn and develop, feel safe, and participate in the organisation's management and are motivated to achieve their goals. Suppose these conditions are created together with appropriate support. In that case, employees are more engaged and committed, and this will have a positive effect on customer experience, productivity, financial results, brand image and employer brand image, which then, in turn, helps to attract talented and motivated employees and will help reach competitive advantage in attracting talents and in operations.

However, when company fails to connect its employees to their brand promises, employees tend to be less proactive, to act inconsistently, and to care less about their work (Lucas & Temkin 2016). If the company does not have the suitable systems and processes to support the experience promised in their communications, not only will candidates become disillusioned after arriving at the organisation, but existing employees will also look the other way with cynicism (Minchington 2021). Therefore, investing in current employees and their experience within a firm is important part of creating employer brand image. As Gehrels and De Looij (2016) explain, a company should periodically measure the employee experience and look at ongoing engagement data, pulse surveys, recruitment surveys and employee focus groups. For the company to succeed in its employer branding strategies, all employee-related activities should be according to what has been communicated.

2.2   Employer branding in the hotel industry

The hospitality industry has experienced a shortage of skilled professionals due to a poor image and competition from other sectors (Gehrels & de Looij 2011). As the job requires a high level of human capital, it constitutes a primary quality factor. Additionally, Covid-19, which affected the tourism sector the most, caused many employees to change the industry, and rather a rapid reopening and constant openings of new hotels have even more increased the competition to get the needed skilled employees.

Hotel service effectiveness is often linked to enough personnel, individual qualities, and efficient human resources management (Velissariou & Amiradis 2014). Employer

branding has the potential to deal with some of the problems through innovative concepts (Gehrels & de Looij 2011). However, employer branding as a strategy is not often used in the hotel industry: in 2011, Gehrels and de Looij interviewed 23 senior hospitality decision makers and found that not only was employer branding not used in the industry, but in many cases, it was perceived as "job advertisement pimping" rather than a strategy. Even though the study was conducted over ten years ago, there has not been a significant change in employer branding in the industry.

Moreover, Kimpakorn and Dimmit (2007) concluded in their study that luxury hotels would benefit the most from engendering alignment to service brand value from its employees by the adoption of top management support, human resource management and development, cross-functional coordination, organisation culture, internal service and marketing programs and a coordinated internal and external branding program. Even though the study was conducted among luxury hotels, it applies to the whole industry as enhancing the employer brand image has become more critical than ever due to the high level of competition and lack of workforce in the industry.

2.3   The impact of recruitment and selection on employer brand image

Recruitment and selection are among the essential parts of human resource management and directly and indirectly influence employer brand image. Unlike some other activities that could not be done in a company, recruitment and selection are inevitable in all companies when hiring new employees. Gupta and Mohan (2018) note that acquiring the right talent and creating a positive brand pull is becoming very important. The focus should be making a positive candidate experience across all stages of the recruitment cycle as a catalyst to boost the organisation's employer brand.

The recruitment process can be categorized in multiple ways and is mostly divided into five or six stages. In this research, the process is described through five steps, and the illustration of the stages is presented and described in more detail below.
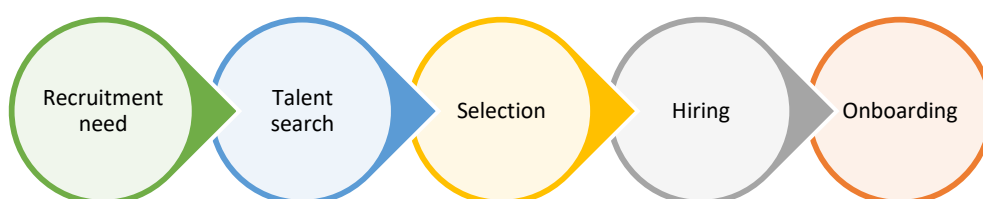

Figure 2. Recruitment stages.

The first step in the recruitment process is deciding the need for a vacancy to be filled (Rees & French 2013, 180). As Rees and French have pointed out (2013), in case an employee leaves, managers can also take the opportunity to review the work itself and decide whether there can be an alternative way for the job to be done differently, such as part-time, flexitime or automated. In fast- changing world where technology and other developments can and are changing the way work is conducted, managers, regardless of field, should make this kind of review often to guarantee effective work and keep up with changes.

Next stage of the recruitment cycle is talent search, and one important objective is to realise an appropriate number of suitable candidates within reasonable cost of restraints (Rees & French 2013). Pilbeam and Corbridge (2010) note that there is no ideal number and no single best way to recruit applicants. In some cases, it might be more cost-effective to hire and agency to headhunt the best possible candidate and in other cases wide search that brings high volume of applicants might be the best option (Rees & French 2013).

The third stage, and probably most visible and time-consuming, is the selection. Selection includes the choice of methods by which an employer will reduce a shortlisted group following the recruitment stage, leading to an employment decision. However, many organisations still rely almost exclusively on the outcome of interviews to make selection decisions. To have value, interviews should be conducted or supervised by trained individuals. (Rees & French 2013.)

The fourth and fifth stage, hiring and onboarding, play an important role in the applicant experience and employee retention. Onboarding can and should be far more than a glorified orientation program incorporating an array of content, including what Stein and Christiansen (2010) refer to as the four organising pillars—early career support; orientation to the firm's culture and its performance values; insight into the firm's strategic position, intent, and direction; and activities and experiences that enable the new hire to build beneficial relationships. They argue that if companies continue hiring without effective onboarding, they experience longer new hire time-to-productivity, higher attrition, frustrated hiring managers, and a mediocre return on investment.

As employer brand image is influenced by many factors such as customer and employee experience, brand image and applicant experience, experiences in any of these areas will

inevitably affect the employer brand image. Ineffective recruitment will lead to poor performance, reduced productivity, low-quality products or services, dissatisfied customers or other stakeholders, including other employees and low employee morale (Rees & French 2013). Additionally, if the selection process is handled unprofessionally, then applicants who are not hired might leave with a negative feeling about the brand overall, and this, in turn, will have a negative effect on the whole organisation as a brand and might even result in losing customers. Positive experiences, on the other hand, will positively affect the brand image and might bring both new employees and customers to the company.

As it can be seen, recruitment can have a significant impact on an employer brand image, which in turn has a major impact on the willingness to apply in the first place. In the next chapter, aspects that candidates are looking for in a company will be introduced.

2.3.1 Aspects that employees and job candidates are looking for in a company

A study conducted in United States by Gallup (Wigert 2022) searched the most important aspects when employees consider taking a job in a different organisation. The study showed that 64% would change jobs if there is a significant increase in income, 61% when there is a greater work-life balance and better personal well-being, and 58% if they get to do what they do best. Other important factors were greater stability and job security (53%), Covid-19 vaccination policies that align with employee beliefs (43%) and diverse and inclusive organisation (42%). Even though pay was the leading factor, other non-financial aspects play a significant role in motivating employees to apply.

Another survey, conducted among Swedish civil engineering students, found that the most important factors for increasing employer attractiveness were learning opportunities, self-development and independence (Lindgren & Skarped 2008). As the study was conducted only for a very limited group - students in one field, it does not reflect the factors in general and the factors motivating people of different age groups, might also be different. On the other hand, this study is relevant to this research because more than half of the employees in a hotel are under 35 (Elkehwsky & Barakat 2018), and the factors mentioned earlier are more likely to be important for younger employees regardless of field.

The factors important for employees can also be divided into four categories which have been identified by Ha and Luan (2018) as having the most significant impact on the intention for job application are as follows: social media, interesting value, fair value and

developmental value. These areas or factors would have to be used and considered when creating a employer value proposition for the potential employees.

According to their explanation, an interesting value shows that employees are attracted by an exciting workplace and that employees perform better if the working environment supports innovation and high-quality work; social value attracts employees if Corporate Social Performance (CSP) will transmit signals of a great working environment and social responsibility cooperates with social activities; the economic value consists of compensation with benefits as well as fair policy, values in employee's effort, brainpower and ability; the developmental value measures the level employer provides the employee with recognition, self-worth and confidence and it helps employees have a strong background to achieve success in their careers in the future.

Ha and Luan (2018) argue that in the age of digital technology, using social media platforms will give the company the possibility to build a stronger employer brand by creating the desired reputation and positive image. Therefore, the use of social media is needed for effective employer branding and creation of attractive employer brand image.

After the company has succeeded in attracting talent, it is vital to invest in motivating employees and creating a workplace with excellent culture, which is aligned with the employer value proposition communicated earlier to the candidates. As Sabir (2017) has pointed out, highly motivated and engaged personnel are a tremendous asset to any organisation. He concluded in his study that the main factors that attract and retain talents are the following:

1) Recognition
2) Having interesting work to do
3) Being heard by management
4) Having skilled managers
5) Having good communication flows
6) Being provided with opportunities for advancement

Additionally, it is important to note that candidate experience will influence the employee and alumni experience. Interaction between employer and employee will start well before the employment contract is signed (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021.) Miles and McCamey (2018) argue that a positive candidate experience will result in strengthening of the employer brand and improving recruitment and business outcomes. Additionally, Huhta and Myllyntaus (2021) explain that former employees might be the best people to recommend the workplace and might be turning back to the company themselves.

In conclusion, employees expect much more than financial rewards, and motivated employees will be more productive and dedicated. They will prioritise organisational performance when engaged and feel that their work has meaning. Furthermore, candidate experience will play an important role in the future performance and engagement of an employee as well as play a significant role in the overall experience of the employees, including the alumni experience, which might strongly affect the employer's brand image and future applications. Therefore, every business should evaluate constantly their strategy of employer branding and put high importance on engaging their most valuable and unique assets starting well before they sign the contract.

2.4   Corporate brand and employer brand image

A corporate brand is critical to competitive strategy and provides direction and purpose. It can enhance the image of individual products and help firms recruit and retain employees, and provide protection against reputational damage. (Greyser & Urde 2019.) Hatch and Schultz (2001) have pointed out that in order to create a successful branding strategy, three essential elements have to be aligned: vision, culture, and image. Furthermore, they explain that aligning these elements will require managerial skill and will, and that each element is driven by different stakeholders of the company:

- Vision is the top management's aspirations for the company.
- Culture is the organisation's values, behaviours and attitudes – the way all employees in the organisation feel about the company
- Image is the outside world's impression. This includes all external stakeholders – customers, shareholders, the media and the general public.

Employees at all levels of the company must understand the big-picture view of the customer experience and the overall corporate objectives as well as the specific brand touchpoints (Everett 2016). When employees are well acquainted with the brand and company's values as a brand, it will become easier to motivate and move towards the common goals.

Additionally, the corporate brand is strongly connected to customer and employer brands and are influencing each other. If a company has a positive brand image and high brand awareness, applicants might be more likely to consider the company as an employer. Moreover, a positive brand image positively influences talent retention and employee engagement, and an overall good reputation will make the employer more attractive to outsiders. The result of talent attraction, engagement and retention shows the effectiveness of the employer branding and will lead to better organisational performance.

To illustrate how organisational culture is influencing performance through employer branding and how customer, corporate and employer brands are interlinked and part of organisational culture, Gehrels and de Looij (2011) created an integrated brand model. According to this model, all brand images are part of the organisational culture and directly affect employer brand reputation. This affects attractiveness to outsiders but also current employees' identification with the brand. The latter one, in turn, directly influences talent retention and engagement. All of which will impact the effectiveness of the employer brand and organisational performance. The illustration of the integrated brand model by Gehrels and Looij (2011) is presented below.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│         ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE       │
│      ┌──────────────────────┐        │      ┌──────────────────┐
│      │   Customer brand     │        │      │  Organisational  │
│    ┌─┴────────────────────┐ │        │◄─────│   Performance    │
│    │   Corporate brand    │ │        │      │                  │
│  ┌─┴──────────────────────┴─┴──┐     │      └──────────────────┘
│  │      Employer brand         │     │
│  └─────────────────────────────┘     │
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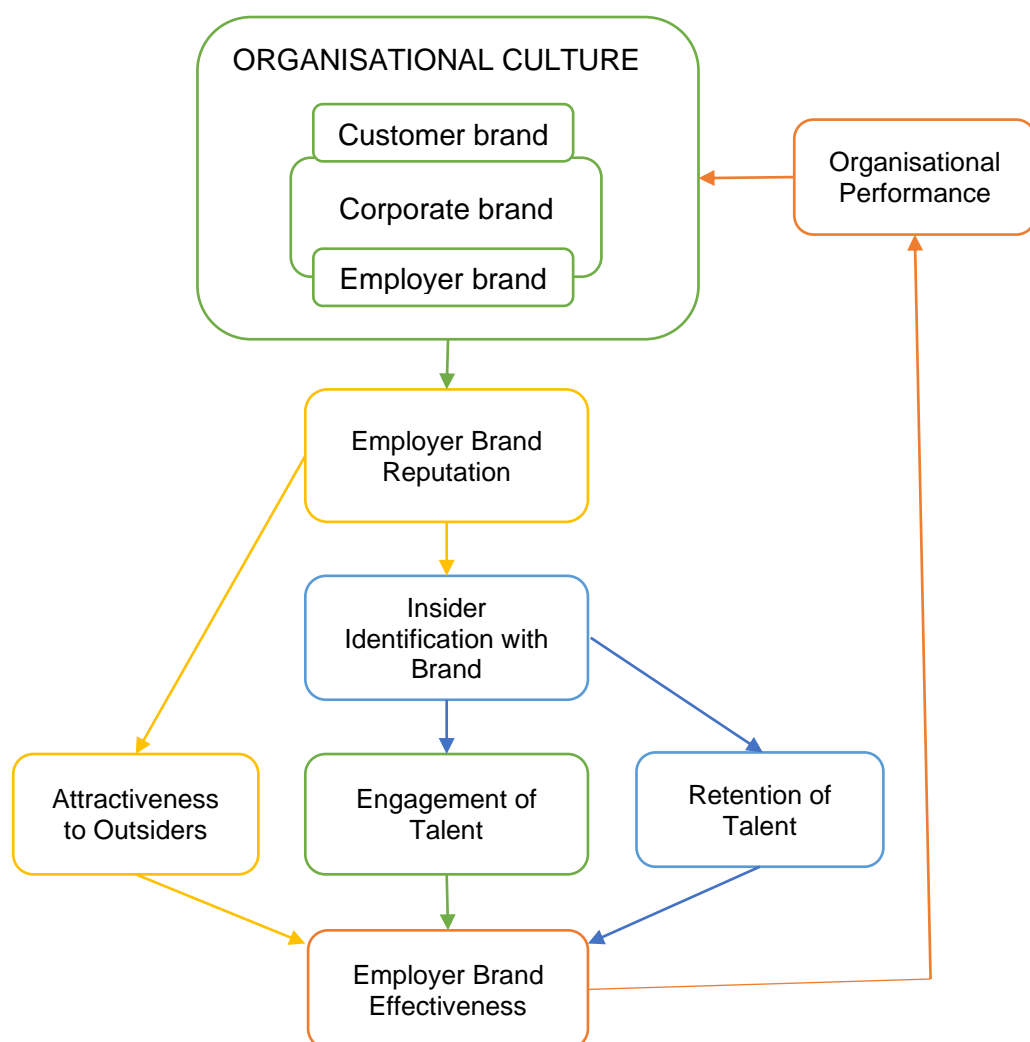
Figure 3. Integrated brand model by Gehrels and De Looij (2016)

As this model emphasizes, the organisational performance depends on the employer brand reputation, and therefore it is important that company invest in forming and implementing effective employer branding strategy that is aligned with the corporate brand and organisation's goals.

However, there are many challenges in aligning different elements to create effective branding strategy. Main challenges include gaps between the elements. Hatch and Schultz (2001) present three possible gaps that can become obstacles in effective branding strategy: the vision-culture, the image-culture and the image-vision gap. The vision-culture gap develops when senior management moves the company in a strategic direction that employees do not understand or support. They explain that this gap usually emerges when senior management establishes a vision that is too ambitious for the organisation to implement. This results often in managers blaming employees for resisting change and employees react with cynicism and suspicion.

The image-culture gap leads to confusion among customers about what a company stands for. It usually results from company not practicing what it has promised. To identify image-culture gaps, what employees are saying about the company should be compared to what customers and other stakeholders are saying. The image-vision gap is a conflict between outsiders' images and management's strategic vision. This obstacle emerges when company has not fully understood who their stakeholders are and what they are expecting from the company. (Hatch & Schultz 2001.)

Similarly, employer branding strategy also faces the challenges of possible gaps between vision, culture and image. In order to succeed in its employer branding strategies, the company needs to understand its employees and key stakeholders and create a clear vision of the company's goals and constantly re-evaluate the current situation. To achieve a competitive advantage, the company needs to continuously review and effectively re-evaluate and re-create their human resource strategies. That includes internal and external employer branding as they strongly influence the employer's brand image and attractiveness, which will inevitably contribute to the company's performance. Moreover, a positive employer brand image will positively influence the corporate brand image.

To understand whether the commissioning company has succeeded in creating an attractive employer brand image and to investigate what could be done to increase its attractiveness as an employer, research was conducted. The survey was conducted online, and there were existing, former and potential employees among the respondents. Research design, methods, data collection and analysis are introduced in the following chapters.

3 Research Methods

This chapter is dedicated to explain possible as well as chosen research and sampling methods based on the relevant literature. Moreover, the approach for this research as well as design are presented. Data collection is explained through the duration of the survey, amount of people it reached and number of respondents. Data analysis, reliability and relevance are explained further.

Research is the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data to understand a phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod 2001; Williams 2007). There are various options in terms of a research methods and the choice is made based on the research goal. Furthermore, research originates with at least one question about phenomenon of interest (Williams 2007). In this case, the research question was "How is Kämp Collection Hotels perceived as an employer?".

There are three common approaches to conducting the research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative approach helps to respond to research questions requiring numerical data, the qualitative approach for research questions requiring textural data, and the mixed methods when both numerical and textural data are needed. (Williams 2007.) This research was made using quantitative approach.

Quantitative research method could be broadly classified as experimental, causal-comparative, or descriptive (Leedy & Ormrod 2001). During experimental research, the researcher investigates the treatment of an intervention in the study group and then measures the outcomes of the treatment. In causal-comparative research, the researcher examines how the independent variables are affected by the dependent variables and involve cause and effect relationships between the variables. (Williams 2007.)

Williams (2007) argues that the descriptive method examines the situation as it exists in its current state and involves the identification of attributes of a particular phenomenon based on an observational basis or the exploration of the correlation between two or more phenomena. Therefore, the descriptive method is the chosen method for this research. In the following chapters, the research design, sampling and data collection are explained.

3.1   Research Design

The research question "How is Kämp Collection Hotels perceived as an employer?" was turned into five investigative questions. To answer the questions, a descriptive quantitative research method was chosen and a smaller-scale internet survey was conducted. The survey was shared on various social media channels to author's networks and encouraging to reshare. To encourage people to answer, a valuable prize was put out by the commissioning company. Time to answer the survey was sixteen days.

The survey was mainly aimed at people who now or soon would possibly be applying to the company – students of the hotel and restaurant industry, and employees working in the different organisations in the same field. However, current employees were also surveyed as the brand awareness and their recruitment and onboarding experience have a strong effect on the employer brand image. Additionally, as the alumni might apply again, and might be the best advocates for the company and play important role in creating an attractive employer brand image, former employees were also included in this survey.

3.2   Sampling

Since we cannot study the entire population, a sample of the population is selected to represent the larger population. Sampling techniques are broadly classified as probability or non-probability samples. Probability samples are the gold standard in sampling methodology and for ensuring generalisability of the study results to the target population and it means that everyone in the population has an equal chance of being selected in the study. Probability sampling allows the researcher to generalize the findings of the sample to the target population. (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena & Nigam 2013.)

Acharya & co. (2013) argue that non-probability samples are those in which the probability that a subject is selected is unknown and results in selection bias in the study.
In this research, there were two non-probability sampling methods used: convenience/purposive sampling and snowball sampling. In case of the convenience/purposive sampling, the sample is chosen based on the convenience of the investigator. As the target population, people interested in or working in the hotel industry did not have equal chance to be part of the survey due to limitations in sharing the survey with people other than the author's network; non-probability sampling was the sampling method for this study.

In the snowball sampling procedure, the initial respondents are chosen by probability or non-probability methods. Then, additional respondents are obtained by information provided by the initial respondents (Acharya & co. 2013). In this study, the survey was reshared by the initial respondents to create a snowball effect.

3.3   Data Collection

Data was collected from 3rd of October 2022 until 18th of October 2022 on Webropol platform. The questionnaire was opened 296 times and answered by 41 people. One of the reasons why many might have not answered was because it was mainly aimed at the people working in the hotel and restaurant industry but was shared on author's social media and many people in author's networks are working in a different field. Therefore, people in author's network might have opened the survey and then decided not to answer after reading the introduction that clearly stated that it is aimed on the people working now or possibly willing to apply to hotel or restaurant business. If this is the case, then the answers from people from different field would have not have added real value to the research.

Additionally, as the questions were very specific about the chain and the hotels, the lack of knowledge about these might have reduced the willingness to respond. Therefore, the research faced the challenge of not knowing the population and possible respondents.

The original deadline to answer the survey was 16th of October. By the 15th of October there were 30 answers, which did not include any students. Students, especially in the field of hospitality, were essential for the survey because they are the potential employees in the future and their perception of the company is essential. Therefore, author used LinkedIn to reach some hospitality students and sent them the questionnaire directly with recommendation to reshare it. By doing so, the research was answered by six hospitality students.

Questions of the questionnaire were based on five investigative questions to answer the main research question. To evaluate the employer brand image of a commissioning company, five background questions and eight survey questions were formed. Background questions were following:

a) "Do you have experience with Kämp Collection Hotels as an employer?"
b) "What is your age?"
c) "What is your current employment or study status?"
d) For people who answered that they are employed: "What is your employment level?" and "In which department do you work?".

Survey started with the question about the respondent's employment experience with the commissioning company and was followed by the survey questions. The rest of the background questions were left to the end of the survey. Full survey is attached as Appendix 1.

To find out how attractive is the commissioning company as an employer compared to its competitors, a Likert-scale question was created. The question asked to rate the willingness to apply to each of the biggest hotel chains in the Helsinki region. Additionally, respondents were asked to rate their willingness to apply to all different hotels that belong to Kämp Collection Hotels as well as state how familiar they are with the offerings.

3.4 Data Analysis

Analysis of the answers were run in SPSS and Excel. Data was analysed by first investigating the frequencies of the background information and then relations between the background variables and target questions as well as the frequencies of target questions. Data was analysed with nonparametric tests, descriptive statistics and by comparing means. It aimed to find out whether there are any statistically significant differences between the employment experience, age, employment level and attitudes towards the company.

Additionally, the analyse aimed to investigate the importance of different aspects at a workplace. The answers of the respondents about the most important factors when choosing a workplace was compared with the importance of different aspects at the workplace. Moreover, the perception of the overall brand using brand attributes was compared with the willingness to apply. Willingness to apply was also compared with the familiarity with the company's offerings.

3.5 Reliability, Validity and Relevance

For research to have a value, it needs to be relevant, and results need to be reliable and valid. Information collected through one or more survey modes is valid, or trustworthy, to the extent that it produces information that answers the research questions posed by the researcher, accurately describes the sample or population at hand, and, if appropriate, can be extended to individuals beyond the participants of the survey. Reliability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be replicated. (Anders 2012.) The reliability, validity and relevance of this study are explained in this chapter.

For the results to be trustworthy, it was important to include as many people in the survey as possible. To achieve maximum number of answers, quantitative survey method was chosen for the research. The total of 41 answers gives the chance to analyse and compare different groups to give valid results. However, the relatively small number of responses for quantitative survey might not reflect the reality fully and larger number would be needed to be certain that the answers of the given sample describe the whole population and could be extended to individuals outside of the survey.

Respondents were asked only information relevant to the research and the questionnaire was designed in a way that gives the possibility to express different attitudes without leaning towards certain options. Questions were formed in a clear way to ensure that respondents would answer the same if asked again. The questionnaire was available for everyone on social media, not to limit the answers only to people familiar to the author and to the company. It is likely that if this study was to be replicated in similar way and similar conditions, the results would be similar, therefore the study is reliable.

This survey incorporates the needs of more understanding of employer brand image of the commissioning company. Moreover, it will accommodate the need for general understanding of current trends and attitudes of potential employees. As the hotel industry was strongly influenced by the pandemic and the industry is growing rapidly, the competitive advantage is gained through effective human resource management and employer branding. This research gives timely and relevant information on what the employees are looking for, how attractive is the commissioning company as an employer and what could it do to improve it. Therefore, this study is timely and relevant.

4 Results

This chapter presents results and relevant findings of the survey. Various graphs and tables are presented in addition to the most important findings. The background of the respondents is presented based on their age, study or employment status, employment experience with the commissioning company and employment level. The results are presented in terms of Kämp Collection Hotels' attractiveness as an employer, brand image influence on willingness to apply and brand awareness effects on employer attractiveness. Moreover, factors that employees value at the workplace as well as employment experience effect on employer brand image are presented.

4.1 Background of the respondents

The internet questionnaire was answered by 41 people and most of the participants were between the age of 26 and 40. Four respondents were between the age of 21 and 25, and one was 51 or older. The figure below presents the representation of different age groups in this survey.
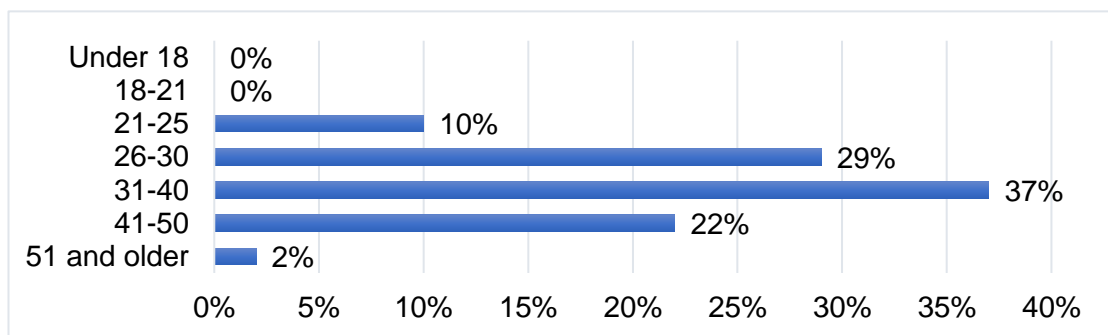
Figure 4. Age of participants.

Out of all the respondents, 6 were students and one of them worked in a hotel. Twenty-four were working in the restaurant or hotel industry, ten working in a different industry, and one was an entrepreneur.

In terms of experience with the commissioning company as an employer, ten respondents are currently working in the company and eleven have worked and would consider applying again. Six respondents answered that they have worked and would not consider working in the company again. Four people have applied for a job in the company but are without employment experience, and ten people have no prior experience.

The following table presents the frequency of the respondents in terms of employment experience with the Kämp Collection Hotels.

Table 3. Respondents' experience with Kämp Collection Hotels as an employer.

Statement	Frequency	Percent
I am currently working at Kämp Collection Hotels	10	24,4
Yes, I have worked there and would consider it again	11	26,8
Yes, I have worked there and would not consider working again	6	14,6
I have applied for a job at Kämp Collection Hotels	4	9,8
I have no prior experience	10	24,4
Total	41	100,0

Of the working people, 32 answered about their employment level. All of the employment levels were represented by a minimum of 5 (supervisors) and a maximum of 12 (operations staff) people.

Table 4. Frequency of different level employees.

	Number	Percent
Operation staff	12	37,5
Supervisor	5	15,6
Mid-management	7	21,9
Management	8	25,0
Total	32	100,0

Out of the 26 respondents working in the industry, eleven were working in restaurant service, seven in management, three in the sales department, two in reception, two in housekeeping and one in the kitchen.

Table 5. Respondents' division in the hotel departments.

Department	Number
Reception	2
Housekeeping	2
Sales department	3
Restaurant service	11
Restaurant kitchen	1
Management	7
Total	26

4.2 Kämp Collection Hotels' attractiveness as an employer

To understand how attractive Kämp Collection Hotels as an employer is, the respondents were asked to rate their willingness to apply to different hotel chains. The five chains were Kämp Collection Hotels, Clarion Hotels, Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Radisson Hotels and Sokos Hotels. Respondents were presented with the following options: would not apply, probably would not apply, might apply, interested in applying, or plan to apply or have applied.

To compare two groups: potential employees with and without prior experience with the company were grouped under one category. That way, the preferences of potential employees could be compared based on whether they have previous employment experience with the company. In the following figure, all the preferences and differences in the respondents' willingness to apply are based on whether they have prior employment experience with the company.
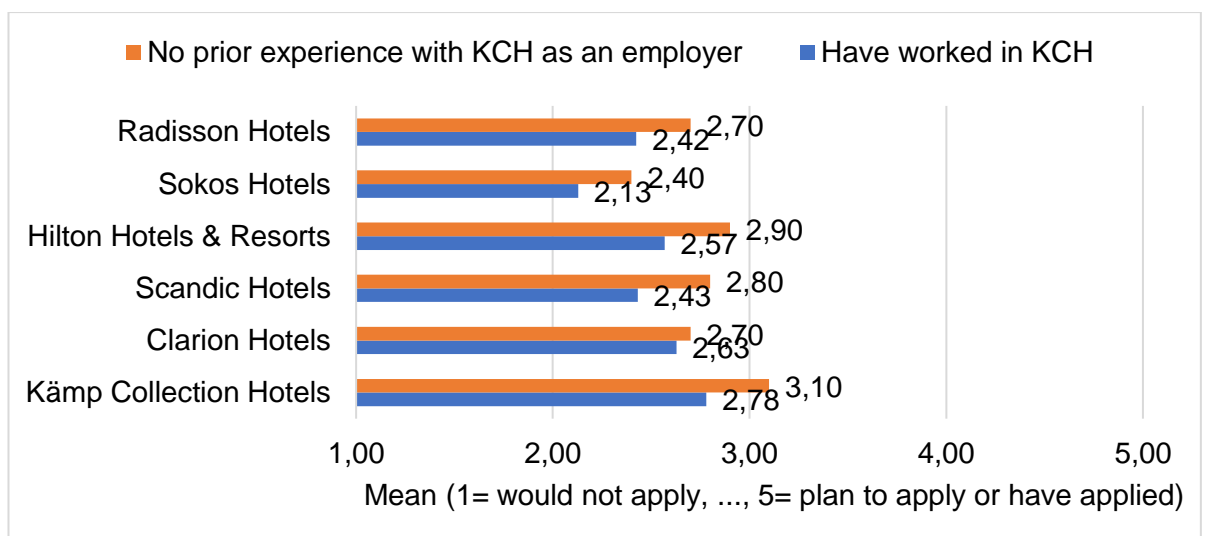
Figure 5. Potential employees' willingness to apply to different hotel chains.

Respondents without prior experience with Kämp Collection Hotels tend to be more willing to apply to different hotel chains than the ones with working experience. People who have worked in the commissioning company are most willing to apply to Kämp Collection Hotels, secondly to Clarion hotels, which also belongs to Nordic Choice Hotels and is therefore in the same group. The third preference for people with employment experience in the commissioning company would be Hilton Hotels & Resorts. To people without prior experience, Kämp Collection Hotels was also the most likely choice for applying, followed by Hilton Hotels & Resorts and Scandic Hotels.

4.3   Brand image and brand awareness influence on willingness to apply

To measure the brand image and how the company has succeeded in creating a desired brand image, the semantic differential scale was used. The company's goal is to be perceived as luxurious and unique; therefore, these were included as attributes. Additionally, the price, innovativeness and service quality were asked to measure overall brand image. The scale measured where potential employees place the company on the following scales:

- a) From mediocre to luxurious
- b) From cheap to expensive
- c) From dull to innovative
- d) From low service quality to high service quality
- e) From ordinary to unique

Respondents' opinions regarding the five attributes measuring the brand image showed that respondents find the commissioning company to be luxurious and expensive and with relatively high service quality. Uniqueness and innovativeness were considered to apply less to the company. The table below shows the average means in terms of five attributes measured, where one would be the lowest and five highest.

Table 6. Respondent's perception of the commissioning company's brand

Luxuriousness	Price	Innovativeness	Service quality	Uniqueness
4,22	4,15	3,71	4,10	3,88

There were no notable statistical differences in terms of the overall perception of the brand between the groups based on their employment experience. However, people who have worked in the company and would not consider working again tended to rate all attributes, except the price, lower than other respondents, therefore exhibiting a certain negative attitude towards the company.

4.3.1   Brand positioning and willingness to apply

To understand the brand positioning, respondents were asked who the market leader is. 20 out of 41 answered that market leader is Kämp Collection Hotels. Hilton Hotels & Resorts got 6 votes, Scandic Hotels and Sokos Hotels got both 5 votes. One of the respondents marked Prime Hotels as a market leader with the option "other". In order to understand how different employment experience affects the brand image, experience with the company was compared with the chosen market leader. Table 7 presents the

number of times each hotel chain was chosen as the market leader and how many times based on respondents' work experience with the company.

Table 7. Market leader and work experience at Kämp Collection Hotels.

Work experience at Kämp Collection Hotels	Market leader					
	Kämp Collection Hotels	Clarion Hotels	Scandic Hotels	Hilton Hotels & Resorts	Sokos Hotels	Radisson Hotels
I am currently working	7	0	0	0	2	1
Have worked and would consider it again	8	0	1	0	1	0
Have worked and would not consider working again	0	0	2	2	1	1
I have applied for a job	1	0	0	3	0	0
No prior experience	4	2	2	1	1	0
Total	20	2	5	6	5	2

From existing employees, seven answered that Kämp Collection Hotels is a market leader, whereas two chose Sokos Hotels and one Radisson Hotels. From alumni, who would consider applying again, eight chose Kämp Collection Hotels as a market leader, one chose Scandic Hotels and one Sokos Hotels. People who have worked and would not work again chose chains that do not belong to Nordic Choice Hotels. One of the people who have applied for a job there, marked Kämp Collection Hotels as a market leader and three marked Hilton Hotels & Resorts. People without prior work experience with the company, chose Kämp Collection Hotels four times, Clarion Hotels and Scandic Hotels two times, and Hilton Hotels & Resorts as well as Sokos Hotels were chosen once.

To learn whether market positioning affects employer attractiveness, respondents' willingness to apply was compared with their answers to the question who the market leader is. In case of Kämp Collection Hotels, Clarion Hotels, Sokos Hotels and Hilton Hotels & Resorts, people who marked these as a market leader, were also most willing to apply to the chosen chain. People who marked Scandic Hotels or Radisson Hotels as a market leader rated willingness to work in these chains second highest. Respondents from these chains were more willing to work in Hilton Hotels & Resorts. Table 8 presents the average mean of willingness to apply to different chains in case of each chosen market leader.

Table 8. Willingness to apply and market positioning.

Market leader	Willingness to apply					
	Kämp Collection Hotels	Clarion Hotels	Scandic Hotels	Hilton Hotels & Resorts	Sokos Hotels	Radisson Hotels
Kämp Collection Hotels	3,85	3,00	2,70	2,65	2,15	2,15
Clarion Hotels	3,50	4,00	2,00	3,00	2,00	2,50
Scandic Hotels	2,60	1,40	3,00	2,80	1,40	2,60
Hilton Hotels & Resorts	3,00	2,33	3,17	3,17	2,67	3,17
Sokos Hotels	3,00	2,60	2,20	2,20	3,40	2,60
Radisson Hotels	3,50	3,50	1,00	1,50	2,50	1,50
Other (Prime Hotels)	3,00	3,00	3,00	3,00	2,00	2,00

4.3.2 Familiarity with company's services and products

To find out how familiar respondents are with the company's offerings; they were asked to make a choice on scale of not familiar at all to know very well. All hotels of the commissioning company's chain were asked. Hotel St. George and Hotel Kämp were most familiar where over 60% of the respondents answered that they know very well or know quite well what kind of services and products company is offering.
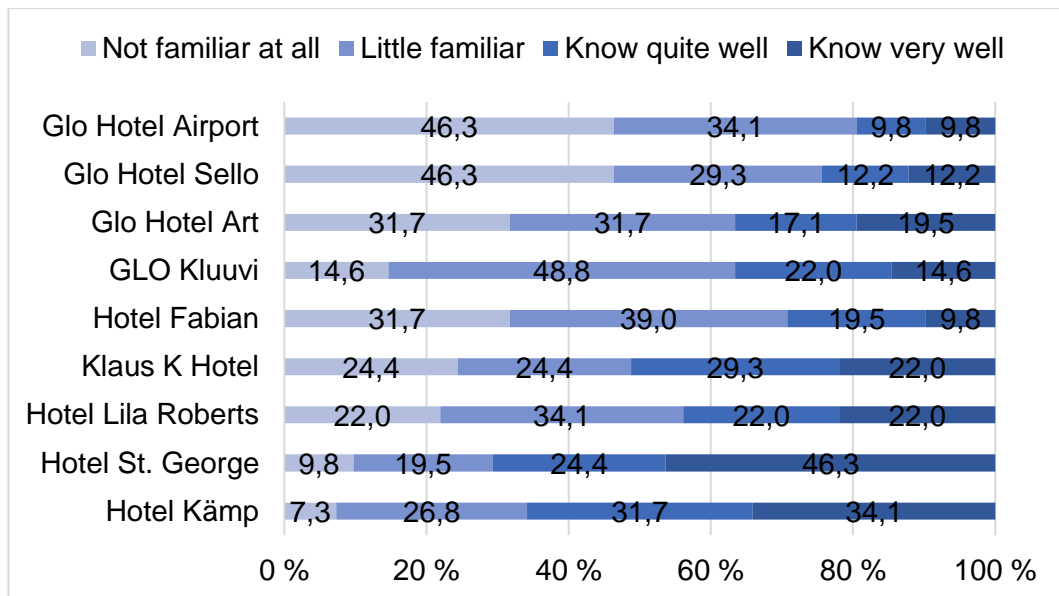
Figure 7. Familiarity with the company's offerings.

When comparing how familiar respondents are with the offerings of different hotels of Kämp Collection Hotels, answers were analysed by comparing the familiarity with employment experience, age and employment level. When comparing experience with the company and the familiarity with the company then respondents who have applied to the company or have no prior employment experience are not very familiar with the offerings.
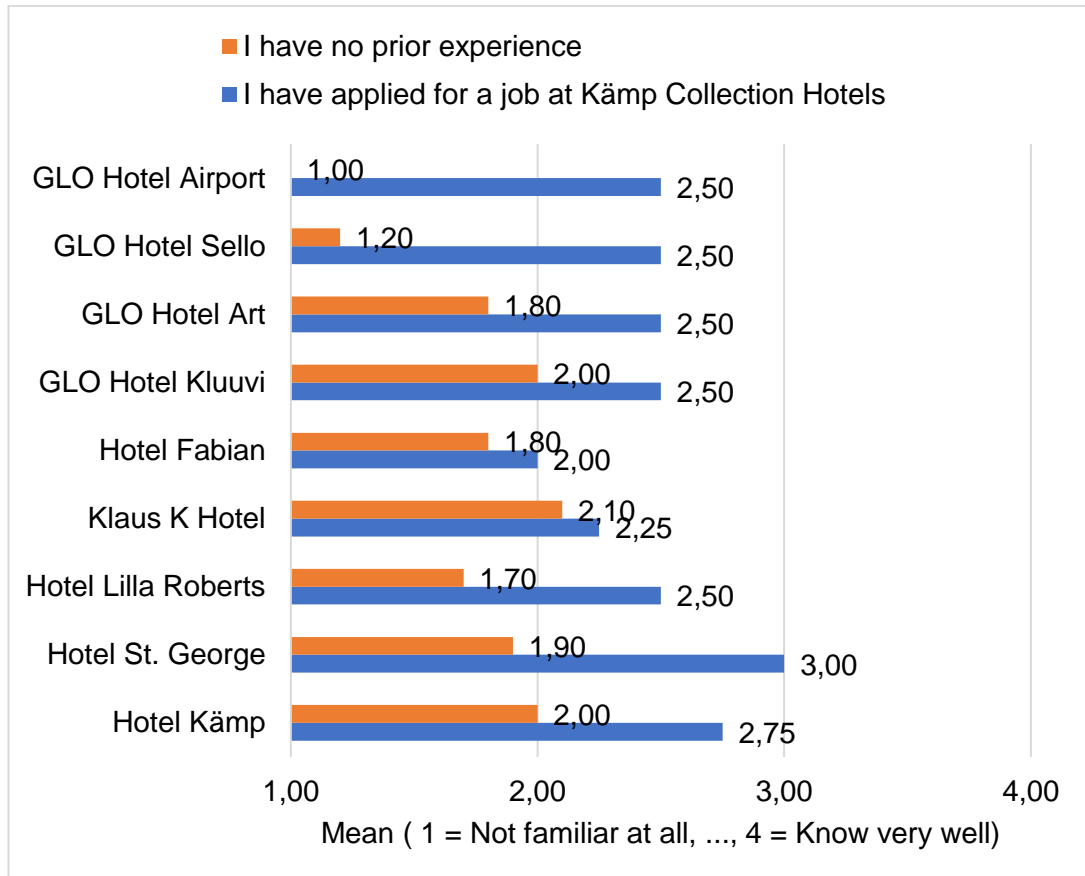

Figure 8. Potential employees' familiarity with companies' offerings.

Comparison of the familiarity of the offerings and employment or study status or different employment levels did not show any correlations or statistically significant differences.

4.4   Aspects valued at the workplace

To find out what the respondents value at the workplace, two questions were asked. One question was open answer question, asking the respondents to give reasons why they would apply to the company or companies they answered in the previous question. The second question stated different factors relevant to the workplace and their importance on the scale of four.

To the question about the reasons what makes them choose a company to work for, there were total of 31 answers. Company's brand image or brand reputation was mentioned nine times, benefits, and salary seven times, career progression or growth opportunities six times. Other aspects mentioned were employee satisfaction, friendly working environment, good management, company valuing its staff members, stability, leading according to values and high-quality offerings. Full list of answers is attached as an Appendix 2.

The question measuring the importance of different factors of the workplace, was mandatory and therefore answered by 41 people. Results indicated that the most important aspects are opportunity to grow, work-life balance, opportunity to learn new things, teamwork and relationship with colleagues. Level of responsibility, opportunity to participate in decision-making, modern work environment, company's offerings and benefits were less important compared to other factors. The opportunity to work from home was the least important factor, however, eleven respondents marked it as very important. The means for all aspects varied between 2,73 and 3,76.

4.4.1 Factors valued at the workplace and different employment levels

When factors among the respondents, regardless of background, did not have too much variety in terms of importance, then comparing different employment levels, the results showed some differences. The least important aspect, the opportunity to work from home, was more important among the operations staff and mid-management than among supervisors and management. Work-life balance was almost equally very important among all levels of employment. Relationship with co-workers was more important to management members than to any other level of employment, and relationship with supervisors was most important for supervisors (or shift leaders). Supervisor level employees also marked customer satisfaction as a noticeably more important factor than other levels.

The importance of benefits decreased as the employment level increased, meaning that operational staff found benefits as most important and management level as least important, compared to different employment levels.

Opportunity to grow and learn new things were most important for supervisor and mid-management level employees. The modern work environment was most important for

mid-management level employees. Next figure illustrates the importance of all aspects to different level employees asked in the questionnaire.
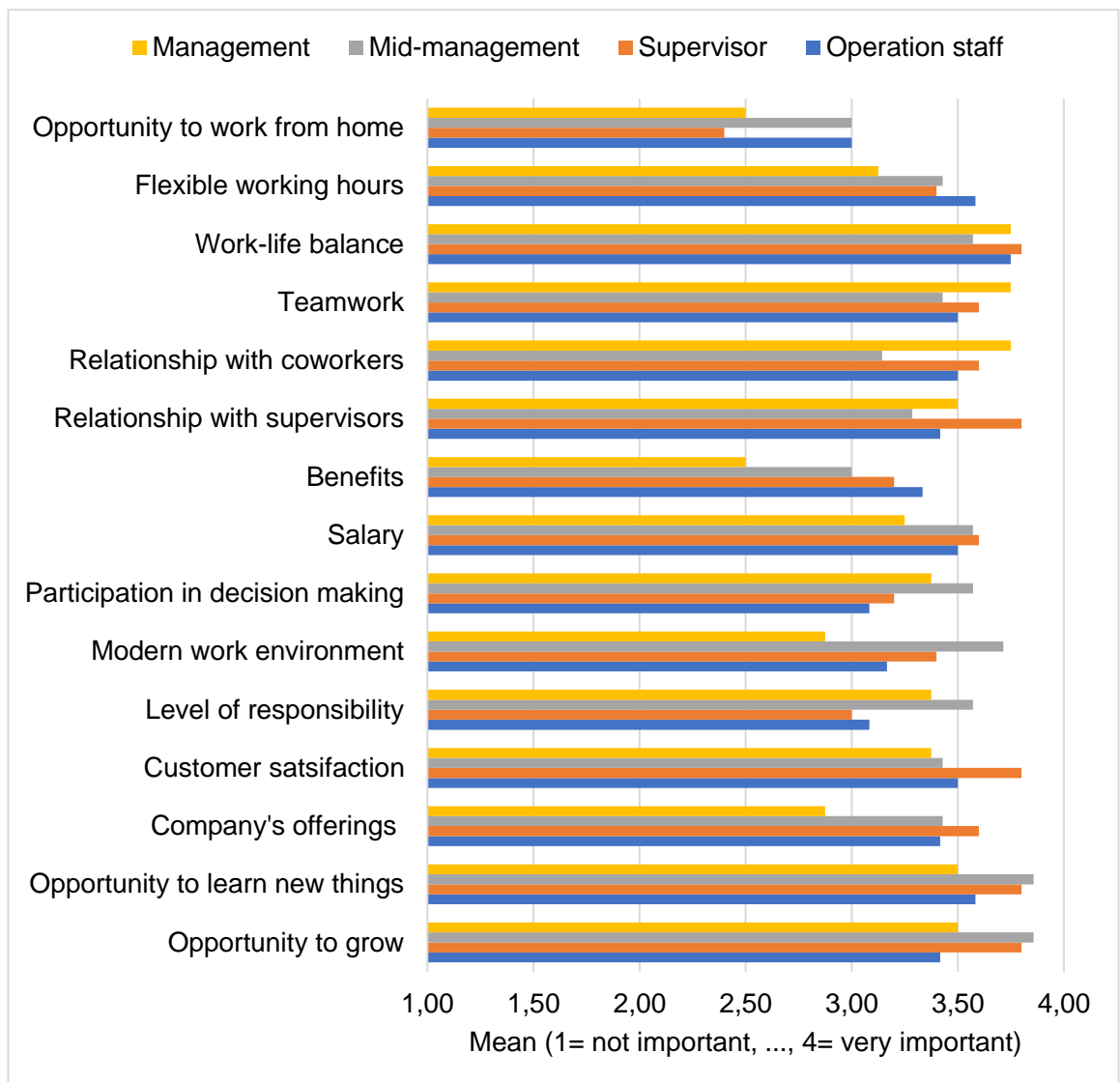

Figure 9. Importance of the workplace factors to different level employees

4.5   Employees' experience effect on employer brand image

In order to understand what alumni think about the company and whether company has succeeded to make and keep former employees as advocates of the company, it is important to investigate their perception of the company.

To learn how employees' experience influences their perception of Kämp Collections Hotel, the employees with employment experience were asked to rate their agreement with statements about their onboarding and recruitment process. As we saw from the first

question, there are some people who could possibly consider the company again for applying and there were also the ones who would not apply again.

The onboarding experience was not mandatory and was answered five times. Respondents were presented with following statements: I had a positive experience during the recruitment process; I became more motivated during the recruitment and onboarding process; The reality in the company is what was communicated during the recruitment; I was given all necessary tools and knowledge when introduced to the job; The onboarding process was well organised; I would invite or have invited friends to work in Kämp Collection Hotels. The question was a Likert-scale question and measured the agreement level with the statements. Options were strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree and unable to assess. The latter one was excluded from the analysis, therefore the scale was one to four.

The statement "I had a positive experience during the recruitment process" was rated either with "somewhat agree" and "strongly agree" and total mean was 3,60, which was the highest of all the statements. However, statements "onboarding process was well organised" was rated with all different agreement levels and had the lowest mean – 2,60. All necessary tools and knowledge given when introduced to the job is connected to the onboarding process's organisation and was also not rated highly in all cases. However, this statement did not receive "somewhat agree" option at all. The statements regarding the reality in the company being what was communicated during the recruitment process and willingness to invite friends to work had an overall mean of 3, and "I became more motivated during the recruitment and onboarding process" was also one of the highest means – 3,40. Table 5. Presents the agreement level for statements about onboarding.

Table 5. Mean of agreement level for statements regarding onboarding

Statement	Mean
I had a positive experience during the recruitment process	3,60
I became more motivated during the recruitment and onboarding process	3,40
The reality in the company is what was communicated during the recruitment	3,00
I would invite or have invited friends to work in Kämp Collection Hotels	3,00
I was given all the necessary tools and knowledge when introduced to the job	2,80
The onboarding process was well organised	2,60

4.5.1 Existing, former and potential employees' attitude towards the brand

To find out what former employees think about the brand in general in terms of different attributes, attitude towards the brand was compared with employment experience. Employment experience was asked in five categories but was in this case made into three groups: current employees, former employees, and people without employment experience with the company.

Results show that current employees rate the company slightly more luxurious and notably more unique and pricier than other groups. Figure below illustrates how different groups, based on their working experience, perceive the overall image of Kämp Collection Hotels.
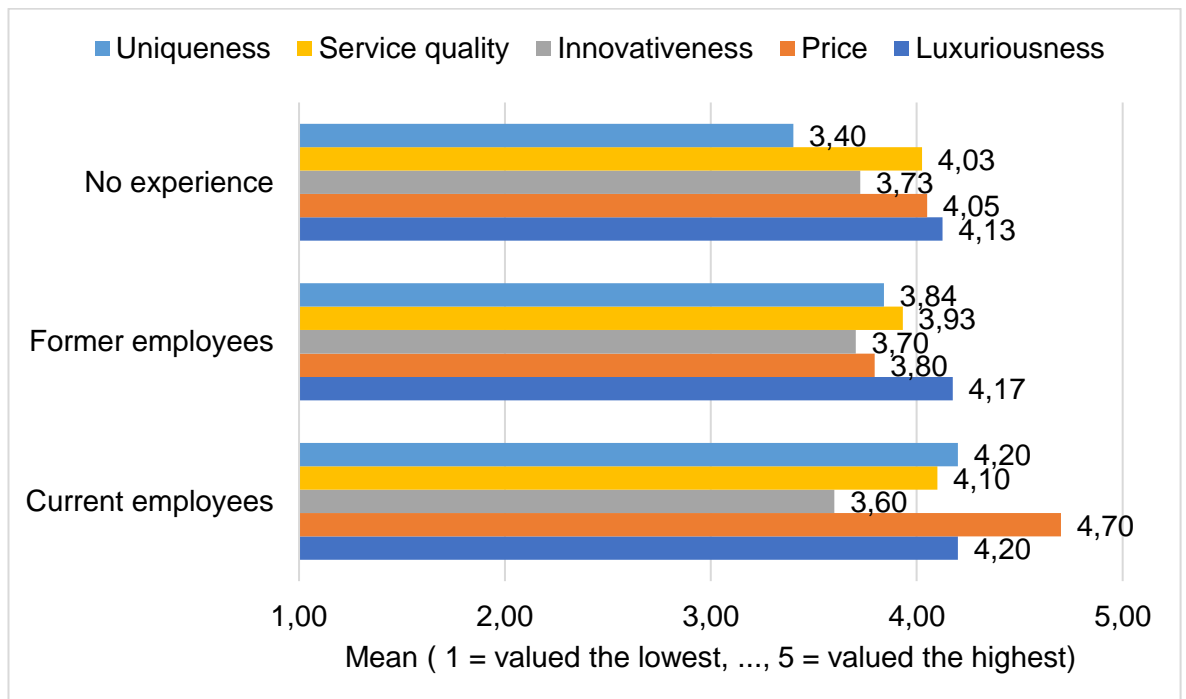
Figure 10. Employment experience comparison with the brand attributes.

Results were based on 41 answers that are relatively small amount. Results will give some information how the Kämp Collection Hotels is perceived as an employer. Based on the results, it is possible to draw conclusions and make suggestions for the company and for further research, which are going to be explained in the next chapter.

5 Conclusions

The objective of this research was to find out how Kämp Collection Hotels is perceived as an employer, and to gain more in-depth knowledge what constitutes to positive brand image and how it can be created to achieve competitive advantage through attracting and retaining talent. The research mainly covered the area of employer branding generally, but also investigated some specifics in the hotel and restaurant industry. Survey investigated the employer brand image of the commissioning company and different attributes were compared in analysis.

Employer brand image is often considered as merely one part of external employer branding. It is true that the aim of external employer branding is to create positive employer brand image, however, almost all employee-related activities are affecting it. Additionally, there are also other factors influencing, for example, overall corporate brand image and brand awareness, customer satisfaction and experience, alumni experience, recruitment process and existing employees.

Just like any other activity or business process in the company, so does employer branding need a strategic approach. An effective employer branding strategy is important to attract and retain the needed talent and employer branding strategies should cover both external as well as internal employer branding. It is also important that everything that is communicated externally, apply internally. If a company's employer brand is mere rhetoric and does not apply in reality, new employees will be disillusioned and are less likely to stay in the company for a longer time. Moreover, existing employees might view this with cynicism and become less motivated and engaged.

Just like companies are doing market research to find out what are customers' needs and what kind of products and services they are looking for, the interest and motivations of existing and potential employees should be investigated, reviewed, and used in creating employer branding strategies and attractive employer brand image. Employees value not only financial rewards but other physical and non-physical aspects. These aspects include good work-life balance, recognition, having interesting work to do, being heard by management, having skilled managers, having good communication flows, and being provided with opportunities for advancement. All these areas should be targeted in the employer branding strategies and activities.

Hotel operations depend highly on its personnel, their individual qualities and efficient human resource management. Even though employer branding has the potential to deal with some of the challenges of attracting and retaining needed talent, employer branding as a strategy is only sometimes used in the hotel industry. In the following chapters key findings of the survey are presented as well as recommendations for the commissioning company and for further research.

5.1 Key Findings

Results show that about two third of the respondents who have previously worked in Kämp Collection Hotels would possibly consider applying again. Research showed that people with no experience with the company, including students, are generally more willing to apply to different chains. Respondents who had more negative attitude towards applying to the commissioning company were also less willing to apply to other chains. Therefore, their overall attitude towards working in a hotel was more negative than other respondents'.

People with experience working in the commissioning company, would likely apply to Clarion Hotels as a second option. As Clarion Hotels, similarly to the commissioning company, belongs to Nordic Choice Hotels, the results indicate that current and former employees have positive attitude towards the chain. For people without prior employment experience, the first choice would be Kämp Collection Hotels, and the second would be Hilton Hotels & Resorts.

The results of brand attributes show that the company is perceived as luxurious, expensive and with high service quality. The company is perceived less as unique and innovative. When perceptions of the same attributes were compared between current, former and potential employees, current employees found the company considerably more pricy than other groups. Luxuriousness was rated very similarly by all groups. Uniqueness rates are highest among current employees and lowest among people without employment experience with the commissioning company.

A comparison of answers based on work experience with the company and market leader shows that nearly all current employees in the company consider the company as a market leader. Eight out of nine respondents, who have worked in the company and would consider working again, chose Kämp Collection Hotels as a market leader. That is contrary to the ones who would not consider again, who chose other chains, excluding also Clarion Hotels.

When comparing the willingness to apply to different hotel chains and their market position, the results were similar to the employment experience and market positioning – people are more likely to apply to the hotel chains that they consider a market leader.

People without employment experience with the company have very low knowledge of company's products and services. People within the company have more knowledge, but the overall knowledge of the services in different hotels is lower than expected.

When asked the reasons why choosing the hotel chain or chains to where respondents would be most willing to apply, most popular answers were brand image or brand reputation, benefits, salary, career progression and growth opportunities, in the respective order. However, when presented with different aspect at the workplace, most valued are opportunity to grow, work-life balance, opportunity to learn new things, teamwork and relationship with colleagues. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that when applying, the brand image of the company is very important, but when employee is already in the company then other, directly work-related aspects, become more important. Moreover, the importance of different aspects also depends on the employment level.

Onboarding experience results indicate that overall recruitment and onboarding process is handled quite well, and employees are mostly satisfied. However, some employees feel that they were not offered all the necessary tools and knowledge needed for the job, and the onboarding process could have been organised better. Based on the findings of this study, the recommendations for the commissioning company are explained in the next chapter.

5.2   Recommendations for the commissioning company

Managing employer brand is like managing any brand in a way that there needs to be a clear vision what this brand should be and what it should represent. Moreover, the brand should be protected against unwanted changes. And similarly, to branding strategy, the employer branding needs a strategy where goals are clear, and plan thoroughly considered before putting in action. Therefore, the recommendation for the company would be to create a clear vision and a strategy that is aligned with the overall brand strategy and will lead the company towards the desired goal of employer branding. Additionally, there should be clarity regarding who is responsible for the employer branding strategy and realisation.

Many companies leave external employer branding for marketing department because it does have a lot in common with marketing. Despite these having many things in common, there are also differences between branding for customers and branding for employees. Additionally, internal and external employer branding strategies would have to be aligned, therefore, it would be recommended to handle employer branding in cooperation with marketing and HR, and with the cooperation with managers in the hotels.

One of the main challenges of employer branding is that decision-makers in the company have a little or no knowledge and understanding of employer branding and its benefits. Therefore, it would be recommended to first map the decision-makers' understanding of the importance and benefits of employer branding. And after that, create a plan on how to align their understanding with the overall goals and to create strategies and goals together with the managers. Managers in the hotels should be given all the necessary tools and knowledge to handle employee-related activities in a way it enhances the employee experience and employer brand image.

After internal communications and strategies are in place, the company can concentrate on external employer branding. In external employer branding, it is important to have a clear vision of what the company wants to communicate and emphasise, as well as agree on responsibilities as well as tools and channels that are used. Furthermore, the external communications will have to be aligned with the reality in the company.

5.3   Recommendations for further research

Brand image attributes were not asked about the competitors, which would give a chance for comparison. However, as most of the respondents have employment experience with the commissioning company, the overall brand image of the different hotel chains might have yet to show real results and apply to the whole population in case of this study. Therefore, wider research on the brand image and its effect on willingness to apply would be recommended.

Additionally, the research of existing employees' perception of the brand, as well as employee-related activities and their effectiveness, could be measured and evaluated within the research. Moreover, what motivates employees in different fields and different employment levels would be recommendable for further research. Research on how much employer branding as a strategy is used in Finland in various fields would give an insight on how developed strategic employer branding in the country is.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questions of Kämp Collection Hotels employer brand image survey

1. Do you have experience with Kämp Collection Hotels as an employer? *

○ I am currently working at Kämp Collection Hotels

○ Yes, I have worked there and would consider it again

○ Yes, I have worked there and would not consider working again

○ I have applied for a job at Kämp Collection Hotels

○ I have no prior experience

2. Rate your willingness to apply to the following hotel chains. *

	Would not apply	Probably would not apply	Might apply	Interested in applying	Plan to apply or have applied
Kämp Collection Hotels	○	○	○	○	○
Clarion Hotels	○	○	○	○	○
Scandic Hotels	○	○	○	○	○
Hilton Hotels & Resorts	○	○	○	○	○
Sokos Hotels	○	○	○	○	○
Radisson Hotels	○	○	○	○	○

3. When thinking about the company or companies you would like to work at, what is the main reason for choosing them?

4. Which of the hotel chains is the market leader in your opinion? *

○ Kämp Collection Hotels

○ Clarion Hotels

○ Scandic Hotels

○ Hilton Hotels & Resorts

○ Sokos Hotels

○ Radisson Hotels

○ Other

[   ]

5. When thinking about Kämp Collection Hotels, how would you rate each of the following attributes? *

Mediocre	1	5	Luxurious
Cheap	1	5	Expensive
Dull	1	5	Innovative
Low service quality	1	5	High service quality
Ordinary	1	5	Unique

6. How familiar you are with the following hotels and their offerings? *

	Not familiar at all	Little familiar	Know quite well	Know very well
Hotel Kämp	○	○	○	○
Hotel St. George	○	○	○	○
Hotel Lilla Roberts	○	○	○	○
Klaus K Hotel	○	○	○	○
Hotel Fabian	○	○	○	○
GLO Hotel Kluuvi	○	○	○	○
GLO Hotel Art	○	○	○	○
GLO Hotel Sello	○	○	○	○
GLO Hotel Airport	○	○	○	○

7. Please rate your willingness to work in the following Kämp Collection Hotels *

	Would not want to work there	Could possibly work there	Would like to work there very much	Unable to assess
Hotel Kämp	○	○	○	○
Hotel St. George	○	○	○	○
Hotel Lilla Roberts	○	○	○	○
Klaus K Hotel	○	○	○	○
GLO Hotel Kluuvi	○	○	○	○
GLO Hotel Art	○	○	○	○
GLO Hotel Airport	○	○	○	○
GLO Hotel Sello	○	○	○	○

9. Please rate the following factors based on their importance at the workplace. *

	Not important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
Opportunity to grow	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to learn new things	○	○	○	○
Company's offerings (products and services)	○	○	○	○
Customer satsifaction	○	○	○	○
Level of responsibility	○	○	○	○
Modern work environment	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to participate in decision making	○	○	○	○
Salary	○	○	○	○
Benefits	○	○	○	○
Relationship with supervisors	○	○	○	○

	Not important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
Relationship with coworkers	○	○	○	○
Teamwork	○	○	○	○
Work-life balance	○	○	○	○
Flexible working hours	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to work from home	○	○	○	○

10. What is your age? *

○ Under 18

○ 18-21

○ 21-25

○ 26-30

○ 31-40

○ 41-50

○ 51 and older

11. What is your current employment or study status?

○ Student

○ Currently working in restaurant or hotel business

○ Currently working in a different field

○ other

Appendix 2. Main reasons respondents choose a company to work

1) Job related benefits and the overall brand
2) Not sure, maybe other people's reviews of the work place.
3) Meaningful work.
4) Brand image, happy employees
5) Salary, Benefits and Career Progression Program
6) Culture, employer brand, managers
7) The friendly working environment, good management, possibility to advance in career
8) Company Values, good management, caring for staff
9) Reputation, reliability, how they treat their staff, professional development opportunities, and of course salary and other benefits
10) The reputation of the brand. Also, I'd use my connections to learn more about the management team, how they care about the internal environment. Happy employees=happy customers.
11) Position in domestic and international market, reputation within HoReCa professional network (has someone recommended the workplace or shared a good workplace experience/environment). Compensation and responsibility (sustainability, social and environmental issues)
12) How they value their staff. And I feel, that KCH understands how important part of the business the staff is.
13) Employee experience
14) Reputation, uniqueness, how visible is their CSR, brand image
15) Taking care of employees and their well-being
16) Personally, the L&D aspect is the very first factor that I look for. How far I can go and level up my career in that said company.
17) I would not apply to any of them, but by far it has been the best experience working for Kämp Collection Hotels.
18) Working culture
19) Salary and opportunities for growth plus recognition
20) Values and company image
21) Brand image and open opportunities
22) Ability to growth in a team of same alike people with same vision and values.
23) After korona, maybe good to work with large chains, but under normal conditions I prefer family company.
24) Relatable
25) Language and Good employee experience
26) Employee wellbeing and positive teamwork, environment. People make the company
27) Brand image has to be interesting. There must be something different from others.
28) Physical location, good image, professional atmosphere among staff and managers.
29) Stability, values and leading according to those values.
30) "- equality
    - nice staff
    - employee benefits"
31) High quality of service and ingredients