Tampere University of Applied Sciences

The Hunt for New Talent
A Case Study on Employer Branding

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis was commissioned by company X to improve the awareness of the company's trainee programme in Finland. The objectives of this thesis were to assess the current state of the employer brand and to find recommendations to improve the employer branding of the trainee programme and tactics used for recruitment marketing to increase awareness.

The research included a SWOT analysis that yielded qualitative data on the company's employer branding and recruitment marketing efforts to determine the current state. A benchmark analysis has been performed using secondary quantitative and qualitative data to identify industry trends and compare the case company's efforts to three competitors. Semi-structured qualitative interviews with three former trainees were conducted. The participants were asked questions about their trainee experience and the company's employer brand to gather new insights and recommendations.

The research found that to increase awareness, the external employer brand of company X would need to be realigned to the internal employer brand and the candidates' expectations. Competitors' biggest advantage over company X is better clarity on the employer brand proposition. The recruitment marketing content is very similar and could be seen as an opportunity to change the content posted on digital channels for a unique brand experience. The recruitment marketing efforts needed to increase awareness should not only focus on digital channels but further invest in more traditional channels and direct cooperation with universities across Finland to promote the trainee programme. Based on the research findings, a series of recommendations on the employer brand and recruitment marketing tactics and strategies for the trainee programme has been developed that would permit a positive development in the awareness of the employer brand if implemented.

Keywords: employer branding, talent recruitment, recruitment marketing, employer value proposition

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

AI	artificial intelligence
BU	business unit
EB	employer branding
EVP	employer value proposition
HR	Human Resources
KPI	key performance indicator

1 INTRODUCTION

Human Resources professionals worldwide face the same problem: how can we attract young professionals and talents to work for us? Demographic changes in the labour market caused by the retirement of older generations have created an imbalance, as there are not enough young professionals to replace retired professionals. This scarcity also explains today's hunt for those young talents in Finland. Many young talents can choose the company they want to work for that fits their values, needs and aspirations. Offering a competitive salary or relying on a brand alone is not enough anymore to attract talent. A company needs to rely on employer branding to stand out from competitors. Effective employer branding not only helps to attract top talents but also gives them a reason to stay.

For these reasons, employer branding has become increasingly important also for company X. With their trainee programme, the company is not only giving some students their first work experience but is also trying to retain talent within the company. Company X is a legal entity of a multinational corporation. The company employs around 370 people in Finland and has offices in Helsinki and Jyväskylä. The core business in Finland lies in the activities of business unit Y, a separate business entity of the parent company. It operates as an independent company with its separate business plan and vision but is of strategic importance for the whole business group and the parent company. Business unit Y operates in the public safety business. It is a European and global player in the critical communication business with customers in over 80 countries.

1.1 Thesis topic

This thesis was commissioned by company X. The author proposed this topic to the Human Resources department because of personal interest in the subject during the author's marketing traineeship at the company. During a joint project with the HR department, the author noticed that the data on employer brand perception and awareness in Finland is incomplete. This information gap re-

quired an investigation of the employer brand offered by this thesis project. This research is of significant importance for the HR department of the case company for the promotion of the company cases' trainee programme and the attraction and potential retention of new young talents to the company. Additionally, the recruitment marketing plan can be updated with the help of the research findings and the recommendations made by the author.

1.2 Thesis objective, purpose, and research questions

This thesis aims to aid the case company in improving its brand awareness and recruitment marketing efforts in Finland. There are two different purposes of this thesis. The first is to research external employer brand awareness and perception amongst the target group. The second one is to give recommendations based on the research findings to improve recruitment marketing.

The objectives can be summarised as the following research question:
- How to improve company X employer brand awareness among young talents in Finland?

The following sub-questions complement the main research question:
- What is the brand identity of the current employer brand?
- What is the current state of the employer brand of company X in Finland amongst students aged 18 to 30 years of age?
- What is the current state of the recruitment marketing efforts of company X, especially on digital channels?
- What do former trainees of company X think of the case company's employer brand now?
- What are competitors' digital recruitment marketing efforts in Finland, and how effective are they?
- How to improve the online visibility of the employer brand via digital channels?

The sub-questions are an essential part of the research as they help identify the current marketing and branding efforts and distinguish between the company X

brand and the business unit Y brand. A comparison with the competition in the shape of a benchmark allows accessing what tactics, methods and trends are currently utilised across the industry. The research helps to decide which elements of the employer brands are better to highlight for recruitment marketing.

1.3 Key concepts

1.3.1 Branding

Branding is a concept that has and is still evolving with the arrival of new technologies, trends, and branding methods. Experts in branding literature have given various definitions that tend to be rather abstract. According to Kotler and Keller (2015, 146), "Branding is the process of endowing products and services with the power of a brand". The global brand consultancy Interbrand might be giving one of the most straightforward definitions. Interbrands' Hertioga & Christensen (2022) define branding as " the sum of all expressions by which an entity (person, organisation, company, business unit, city, nation, etc.) intends to be recognised."

Brands perform five main functions, according to Randall (2001):

- Identity: To identify the related products and services and the company unambiguously.
- Shorthand summary: To summarise the information available to the consumer with the help of the brand identity.
- Security: To reassure the consumer when purchasing via a familiar brand as it guarantees a similar outcome in expectations of the product or service.
- Differentiation: To be different from competitors to be perceived as unique in the eyes of the customers.
- Added value: To offer more than the primary service or product that gives the customer a reason to purchase from one brand over the other.

(Randall 2001, 9–12.)

This concludes that the aggregation of all these tangible and intangible assets can be seen as the brand, including employees and the efforts of the company to appeal to future applicants.

Suppose branding is a collection of tangible and non-tangible items to be recognisable to different stakeholders. In that case, the company creates the brand identity to differentiate itself from the competition. It is created and managed by the company and organisation. There are various models to map brand identity. However, for this thesis, only Kapferer's model will be explained as it will be used to analyse the employer brand elements of company X.

As seen in Figure 1, the Brand Identity Prism has six different sides representing different aspects of a brand which are

- Physique: Physical and visual features, including logo, colours, and design.
- Personality: A brand's attitude is described through human personality traits delivered by the typeface, the colours, and other factors.
- Culture: Values of the brand. It can be linked to company culture.
- Relationship: The type of relationship between clients and the brand. It can be serious, playful, relaxed or a combination of all.
- Self-image: Introspective view of the reflection side. How customers see themselves in a brand. It is linked to personal needs.
- Reflection: How the brand is portraying its customers, the kind of image is being reflected at them when utilising, consuming, or owning the product or service of the brand.
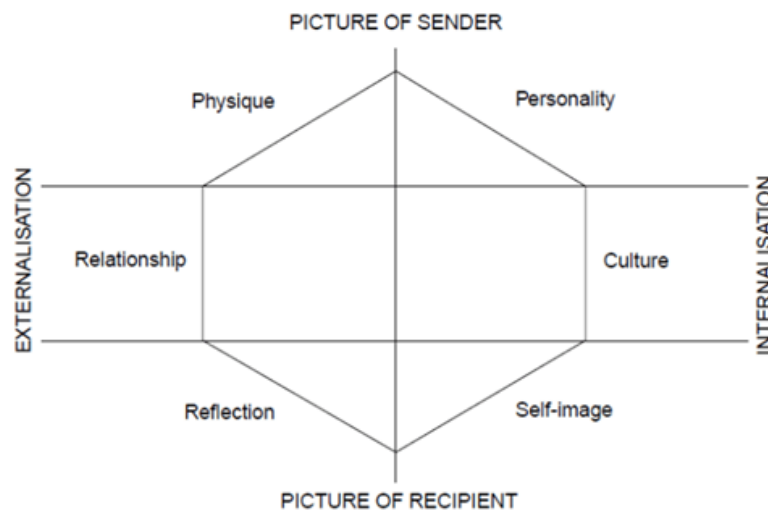
(Kapferer, 1992.)

FiGURE 1. Brand Identity Prism by Kapferer (Kapferer 1992, 38)

1.3.2 Recruitment marketing

It is important to stress that recruitment and recruitment marketing are different disciplines that play different roles in talent acquisition. As defined by Emma Snider from TechTarget, a network of specialised websites for professionals, "recruitment marketing is the combination of strategies and tools used by an organisation to engage and nurture potential talent in the pre-applicant phase". (Snider 2019.)

As seen in Figure 2, Talentlyft defines four main recruitment marketing goals. The first is to increase the awareness of potential candidates regarding the company's new open positions. The second is to spark interest in the company. The third is to make the candidates consider the company as a future employer. The fourth would be to motivate and trigger talent to apply for open positions. (Talentlyft n.d.)

Recruitment marketing aims to affect the early stages of the applicant's journey. It creates awareness via different touchpoints to increase the applicant's attraction and interest. Once the applicant is further in the process of actively apply-

ing, recruiting takes over to go with the candidate from the application phase to the hiring stage, ending the talent acquisition pipeline. This thesis will focus merely on the recruitment marketing process.
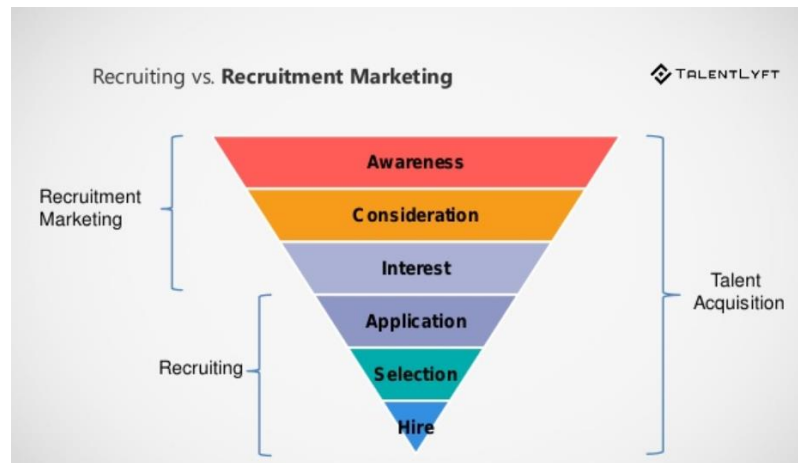
FIGURE 2. Recruiting versus Recruitment Marketing (Talentlyft, n.d)

Recruitment marketing uses the external employer brand when creating content for the target audiences. The external EB and reputation will primarily influence future potential talents in applying. Recruitment marketing is only the vessel for it. The EVP must be communicated through those marketing efforts to promote the brand. Below is a list of communication channels often utilised in recruitment marketing (Mosley 2014, 167–184):

The traditional channels

- Physical billboards: Outdoor structures often located in dense population areas traditional way of advertising a product or a company. Good for awareness.
- Traditional/Event Sponsorships advertisement: A company supports an event with, for example, monetary funds. In exchange, the company gets brand awareness and advertisement space.
- Recruitment fairs and career events: A place where potential candidates meet employer s to get more information about current job offerings and other information.

- Employee referral programs: A way to attract talents by letting employees refer people from their personal/professional network to open positions. If the talent gets hired, the employee often gets a monetary incentive.

The digital channels

- Company/ career website: Key to the EB, it is the place to communicate the EVP, the company culture and post employee stories. It is the channel all other channels need to link towards for the candidates to apply to the open job positions listed on the page.
- Job search engines and job forums: Websites to discover available job openings from many different companies.
- Online Partnerships: Partnerships with 3rd party websites are helpful to get more awareness and traffic towards other channels and the career webpage.
- Corporate Alumni networks: A network for graduates or employees that have left the company. It allows them to stay connected and reconnect with people and the company. It can offer information, news, updates, and physical/online events to the network.
- LinkedIn: The most significant social media network for professional networking and job search.
- Instagram: Social media network that focuses on images and videos.
- Twitter: A social networking site focusing on news by sending short text messages called tweets.
- Facebook: Allrounder social media network, initially utilised for information within personal networks (family, friends). It can be utilised for any media. The platform's popularity is declining, especially since younger audiences are using Facebook less and less.
- TikTok: Social media network that focuses on sharing short videos. Its popularity has been rising over the COVID-19 pandemic and is used by a large population of younger audiences.

1.4 Working methods and data

In order to answer the research questions, the author followed the first stage of the 7-point plan by Universum. This employer brand management framework is explained in detail in section 2.4. In the 7-point plan, the first stage is about understanding the current employer brand and its internal and external factors. The first step is to conduct an internal audit to understand the current status of the EB to determine strengths and weaknesses. The second step is to analyse external factors such as EB trends and the competition on how they are positioning themselves.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to answer the research questions using data from both primary and secondary sources. First, a SWOT analysis was created to assess the current state of the employer brand of company X from different internal and external information sources. The primary sources have been yielded from interviews with former trainees of the case company to gather completely new insights on the internal employer brand, the company culture and recruitment marketing ideas. The semi-structured interviews were done with three individuals online via Microsoft Teams. The transcripts were then analysed and coded using ATLAS.ti, a tool for qualitative research. The benchmark analysis of three competitors extracted quantitative and qualitative data from the different digital communication channels. The career pages and social media channels were analysed on the presented content and its performance.

A more detailed explanation of the working methods for each analysis can be found in their respective chapters, namely chapters 4, 5 and 6.

1.5 Thesis process

In chapter one, the author introduces the topic and commissioner of the thesis. It explains furthermore the thesis plan, including the objective and purpose of the thesis. This chapter also reveals relevant theories and concepts and presents the data collection methods. Chapter two consists of a detailed literature

review on employer branding, the most important theoretical concept for this thesis, and also explains related terms such as the employer value proposition.

The next chapter presents the current state of the employer brand of the case company with a SWOT analysis. Chapter four presents a competitor benchmark analysis focusing on three competitors and their digital recruitment communication and marketing tactics. Chapter five presents the research data from the semi-structured interviews with former trainees to find new information on the employer brand and the trainee programme. Finally, in chapter six, the author concludes the thesis with recommendations on how to improve the awareness and visibility of the employer brand.

2 EMPLOYER BRANDING AND THE EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION

2.1 Employer branding

Employer branding (EB) is a relatively new term in Branding and Marketing literature that appeared in the late 1990s. Nonetheless, it has rapidly evolved over the years. One of the first definitions is the one from Ambler and Barrow. They define EB as: "The package of functional, economical and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow 1996, 187). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, 502) emphasise the importance of having a unique identifiable employer identity that differs from the competition.

Mosley, one of the most recognised researchers in employer branding literature, defines EB as "the process of creating a distinctively great place to work and then promoting it to the talent whose knowledge and skills are needed by the organisation to meet its business goals and objectives". (Mosley & Schmidt 2017.)

Rosethorn is expanding the co-dependency in her definition as being a joint agreement. She explains the EB requires active participation and engagement from the employer and the employees/ potential employees: "An employer brand is in essence the two-way deal between an organisation and its people – the reasons they choose to join and the reasons they choose – and are permitted – to stay". (Rosethorn 2009, 76.)

Employer branding has three aspects that need to be taken into consideration. The first is the corporate brand. According to Mosley and Schmidt, it is "The reputation your company is seeking to build based on its purpose (the reason for its existence, beyond making money), vision (what it's striving to achieve), and values (guiding principles)". (Mosley & Schmidt 2017.)

The second is internal employer branding. It is the aspect of employer branding created within the company for its employees and communicated most of the

time through the hierarchical structure in a top-bottom approach. The approval of top management is essential for the implementation and communication (Rosethorn 2009, 76).

The third is external employer branding. It is created for anyone outside the company, including potential new employees and future talents. The most significant difference is that the internal brand is focused on retention, whereas the external brand is focused on attraction (Wachtel 2021). As the two have different target groups, they should not be precisely the same but share the same core proposition in the employee value proposition. In the scope of this thesis, aspects of the corporate, external, and internal employer brand will be analysed through interviews with former trainees.

Rosethorn also explains that two parts form the EB, which can be seen in Figure 3. First is the employee value proposition (EVP), which consists of the promises the organisation makes to the potential talents and the reality of the experience from the talents' perspective (Rosethorn 2009, 20). The result of this equation is the EB. If the organisation cannot deliver on its promises, meaning the reality is not what the talent was expecting, the EB might be perceived as unfavourable. If the experience surpasses the expectations based on the promises made, the EB will be seen as much more positive in the eyes of the candidate. This needs to be considered when creating the EB.

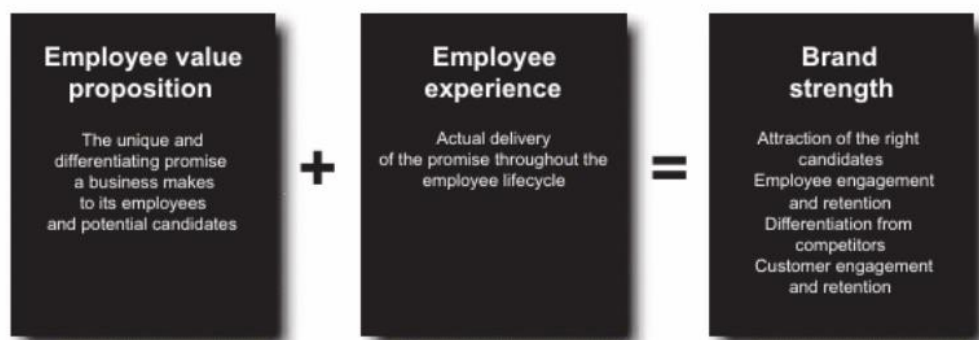| Employee value proposition		Employee experience		Brand strength
The unique and differentiating promise a business makes to its employees and potential candidates	**+**	Actual delivery of the promise throughout the employee lifecycle	**=**	Attraction of the right candidates Employee engagement and retention Differentiation from competitors Customer engagement and retention

FIGURE 3. The employer brand in action (Rosethorn 2009, 20)

Mosley and Schmidt (2017) draw parallels with consumer branding, where the pull model is often utilised. A positive reputation or experience makes people want to purchase from or work for a company.

It is important to note that pull branding and pull marketing require many resources, such as human and monetary capital, to keep the talents looking for the brand and engaging with it (Pushninja.com n.d).

Success in EB requires long-time investment and careful planning to create a positive reputation and a strong employer brand. The methods and the amount might vary depending on the target group and generation. Nevertheless, the investment might be worth the effort in the long run, as explained in the next section.

2.2   The importance of employer branding

The importance of employer branding in an organisation is often underestimated. In many organisations, it might be seen as not worth the monetary risk to invest in research, branding, HR and marketing to create a strong EB without an imminent return on the investment (Mosley & Schmidt 2017). The usefulness of the EB might not even be understood companywide, except for the HR and marketing departments (Rosethorn 2009). Without proper processes, measuring the actual ROI might be difficult, hence the hesitation of many organisations to fully invest in EB.

Nonetheless, a strong EB brings an organisation many benefits and advantages. A strong employer brand correlates to:
- A higher brand equity
- A higher retention rate of quality employees
- Less absenteeism and more staff satisfaction

(Kotler, Amstrong & Parment 2012, 228; Barrow & Mosley 2005; Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 502)

But those benefits are only the start of a potentially positive reaction chain. Additionally, for HR, a strong EB also increases quality referrals from current employees, making the recruitment process faster and less costly than traditional recruiting. (Mosley & Barrow 2014.)

Due to increased job satisfaction and decreased absenteeism, employees tend to be more efficient. Rosethorn explains that a strong EB helps employees "to meet key performance indicators around sales, service and productivity, all of which are key commercial concerns" (Rosethorn 2009, 163). This means that the EB can influence business results positively. Altogether, it leads to higher profitability in the long run (Kotler et al. 2012, 228). Companies that are profitable and have optimistic economic forecasts tend to be more attractive to employees due to the appearance of growth and stability that may give the impression of a more secure working environment and employment.

Internal and external employer branding can be affected by a bad image or reputation of the brand. With social media, news reach and speed can make it difficult to control the external employer brand. Bad employment experiences can be posted online via different communication means. They can be formal as a formal written review on rating websites such as glasdoor.com or in an informal short story video format on TikTok. With a weak employer brand, it is more difficult to control the impact of a bad reputation, rating or public outrage. On the other hand, a strong employer brand might not feel the impact at all.

Hence having a strong employer brand protects not only the recruitment possibilities but also the company. With the current scarcity of talent in the job market, a strong EB might give an additional advantage to stand against the competition regarding recruiting efforts. EB has more advantages than disadvantages, especially in the long run.

2.3   Employer Value Proposition (EVP)

The EVP is the foundation of the EB. The term defines, according to Mosley, "the qualities you'd most like to be associated with as an employer. It provides current and future employees with clear reasons to choose and stay with an employer ". (Mosley & Schmidt 2017.)

Jouany (2022) defines it as "an ecosystem of support, recognition, and values that an employer provides to employees to achieve their highest potential at

work." Employee Value Proposition: The Complete Guide to Building a Great EVP. According to the Branding consulting firm The Higher Mix (n.d), the EVP is the value talents attach to employment in exchange for their labour. As with the benefits of a strong EB, a strong EVP leads to more attraction and retention levels (Mosley & Schmidt 2017).

According to the consulting firm Universum, specific characteristics make a good EVP. The EVP needs to be

- True – to what the mission and vision of the company is and is offering
- Credible – to ensure the brand can keep its promises on what it offers as an employer
- Relevant – that the job offers are attractive and relevant to top talents
- Distinctive– to be different from the competition
- Aspirational – to communicate to top talents that growth possibilities exist.

(Universum 2021.)

In 2018, the consulting firm Mercer researched a new way of designing the EVP that aligns the development of businesses with the EB while putting the employees at the centre of this evolution (Sreenivasan, 2021). As seen in Figure 4, the result of the Thrive Research is a pyramid based on Maslow's famous Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's pyramid is a five-tier model that utilises motivation theory to define human needs. The tiers are from bottom to top: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem, and self-actualisation. (McLeod 2007.)

The bottom tier lists the needs that are the most fundamental needs to survive: water, food, and shelter. The higher the tier, the more the needs change from purely physiological to psychological. At the highest tier lies self-fulfilment, which can be translated into personal growth and achieving one's potential. Each lower tier needs to be satisfied before moving to the higher tier (Fenting 2019).
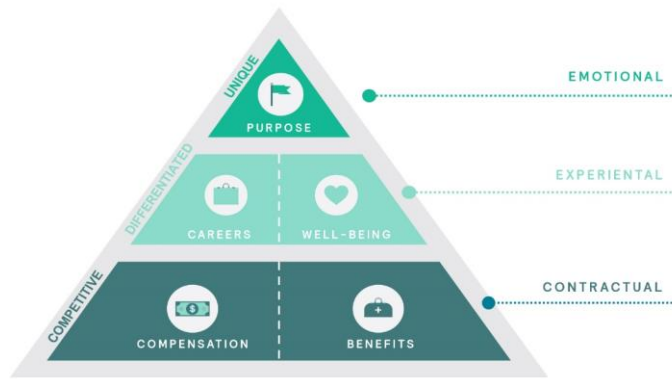
FIGURE 4. The EVP pyramid by Mercer (Swani, 2018)

The EVP pyramid (Figure 4) utilises the same principles. The most fundamental needs of an employee are compensation (for example, pay) and benefits (for example, healthcare). The fulfilment of these basic needs is part of the operating agreement and contract between employer and employee. At this stage, the company is in fierce competition with other companies. In order to attract talents and keep employees, the compensations and benefits need to be at market level or higher than what the market offers. This tier is not meeting any psychological needs of the employee, and it might be challenging to build employee loyalty based on only contractual requirements (Sreenivasan 2021).

The following tier is about employee experience. The company can differentiate itself more from the competition than in the previous tier. Career progression, learning opportunities, working culture, well-being and related services make an employee stay at the company. The next tier will make the difference between an average EVP and an excellent EVP. To meet the self-fulfilment need in Maslow's pyramid, the company needs to give its employees a purpose that will connect them to the company on an emotional level. This need covers the emotional need of the employee. The purpose tier "is driven by connecting the dots of the employee lifecycle to the vision and mission of the organisation." (Sreenivasan 2021).

To summarise, a company can have a well-designed EVP when all three tiers in the pyramid, including the wants and needs of the employees and future applicants, are aligned with the company's unique, credible, and realistic offering to fulfil those needs.

2.4   A Framework for building the employer brand

Building an employer brand requires a process that follows multiple steps, as many different aspects and stakeholders need to be considered. The framework made by Universum, as seen in Figure 5, gives a clear overview of the steps required to create a strong employer brand.

FIGURE 5. The 7-point plan, an employer branding framework by Universum (Brooke 2015)

The first step is understanding the current employer brand status and what the target audience wants (Brooke 2015). It might also be advantageous to look at current EB trends and benchmark the competition to evaluate the strengths and flaws of the company's own external EB.

This step also requires an introspective view of the internal aspects of the employer brand. The review first involves clearly defining the organisation's goals, objectives, and visions. (Brooke 2015). Then the current employer brand and efficiency need to be analysed. If necessary, interviews or surveys with current employees give a better understanding of the state of the internal employer brand and if it aligns with the company vision of the employer brand.

After understanding the EB, the next step is to plan the implementation. In this stage, the employer brand and communication strategy are adapted to the internal and external target audiences. (Brooke 2015).

The EVP must be carefully designed by aligning the organisation's vision with the wants and needs of the internal and external target audiences.

It is essential to have a different communication plan for the internal and external audiences since the channels are very different (Brooke 2015). Internal channels include Intranet, email newsletters, and posters at the office. External channels include social media, the company website and advertisements. Also important is mapping all the processes before launching the EB to internal and external audiences via the communication channels.

The execution stage is pictured as one phase. However, the rollout of the new EB should be executed in two steps. The implementation of the new EB should be tested first internally. Then after a successful internal implementation, the external communication plan can be executed. The two-step approach would avoid the creation of a misalignment between already established employees and new recruitments regarding the employer brand.

After the execution stage, the results need to be measured to see how successful the EB is (Brooke 2015). The KPIs will then be reevaluated and adjusted based on the achievement of set targets. Since the framework is designed as a circle, it allows for as many repeats of stages as necessary.

2.5   EVP Touchpoints

The touchpoints in the candidate's journey will shape the potential candidate's experience. The more touchpoints the EVP has, the more likely the EB messages will reach the talent and guide them towards the recruitment stage. Figure 6 displays an example of the entire candidate's journey, starting with the awareness phase and continuing through the employee's lifecycle at the company and even beyond through corporate graduate or alumni programmes.
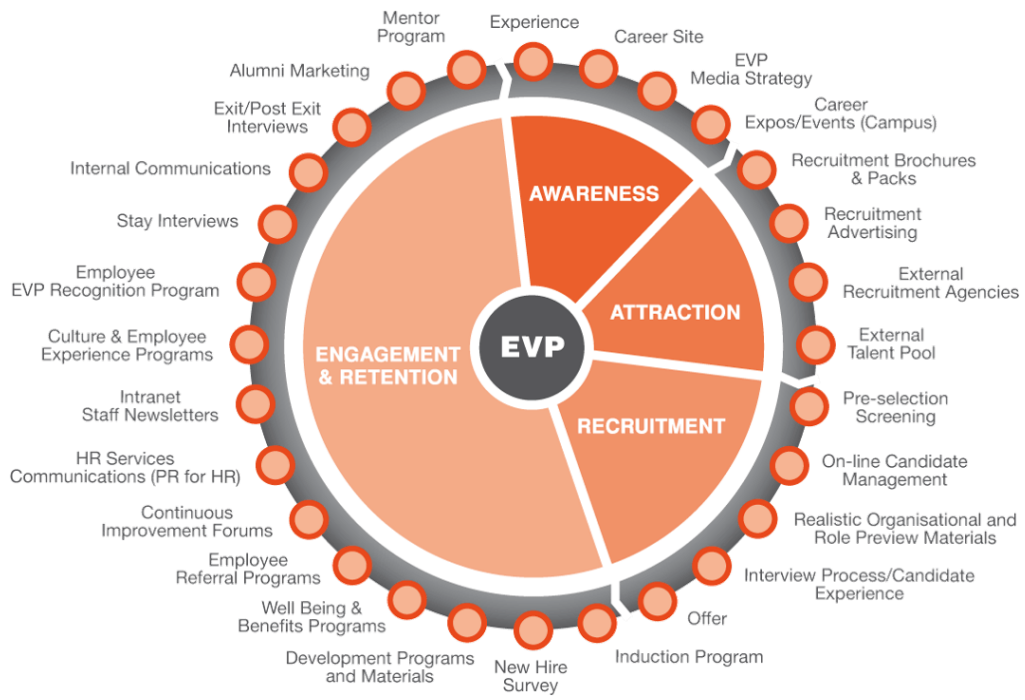
FIGURE 6. EVP Touchpoints in the candidate's journey by the Higher Mix (n.d)

3 THE CURRENT STATE OF THE EMPLOYER BRAND AT COMPANY X

3.1 The employer brand at Company X

According to the 7-point plan by Universum, it is important to understand the current state of the employer brand before implementing a new EB (Brooke 2015). This allows to identify all aspects of the EB before giving recommendations on improving the awareness of the EB amongst young talents for the trainee programme.

Before going through the state of the EB, it is essential to understand the ownership of the EB within the company. The company's HR department is the owner of all employer branding and recruitment marketing efforts. The company's LinkedIn page used for EB is managed by HR. For content creation, the department is supported by Marketing for generating content ideas and producing videos and visuals, as HR does not have the resources or equipment for audio-visual tools. The Marketing team primarily focuses on product marketing and has little involvement with branding or employer branding, as this is being managed by the central HR department of the group.

The employer brand at company X for the Finnish talent market is not clearly defined. It is mainly due to the overall structure of the parent company and the HR teams. New materials and guidelines are coming from the parent company's central HR team that are created to fit all divisions. This standardisation has the advantage of keeping the EB's unified look and feel across the different businesses. However, it makes it less dynamic and adaptable to trends in EB and local markets. Even with guidelines and materials made for the company X division, these would still need to be adapted to the local labour market, which requires additional time and resources.

The author has created two brand identity prisms to answer the research question on the key elements of the employer brand. It allows to visualise and compare the external employer brand assets of the parent company and the Business Unit Y. The author's brand identity prism figures are not displayed in this

thesis. The brand elements and data have been found on internal and external company websites. Both employer brands showcase many similarities, especially in the corporate culture aspect of the brand. As for more external aspects, such as visuals and the EVP, the two employer brand identities diverge the most.

The parent company wants to portray itself as a technological leader that offers ambitious work for intelligent and bold people. The company also offers purpose and meaning by making the world better, safer and secure with these technologies. Current branding guidelines state that the parent company EVP needs to be included in the EB efforts of the whole corporate group. Specificity can be added via additional taglines to target based on country, position, and target group.

In the case of company X, the guidelines and the EVP are not entirely aligned with the reality of the local market and business. Company X's primary business lies in the public safety business and differs drastically from what the parent company is most known for. For the EB messaging, company X claims to help save lives via the technology they offer. It is similar to the messaging they use to market their products, but the wording is not always the same. These messages differ widely depending on the platform they have been published on. Overall consistency in the EB is missing.

3.2 The current state of the recruitment marketing and the communication channels utilised by company X

Recruitment marketing relies mainly on digital channels, as they are the most cost-efficient to run and give fast access to a broad target audience. The Employer branding LinkedIn channel for company X is continuously growing, gaining over 300 new followers in a year. Overall, the engagement rate per post is around 5-6 %, which is acceptable. The most popular posts are trainee profiles and other trainee-related content. Job advertisements, for example, do not get as much attention.

Linkedin is also the company's only social media channel; expanding to other channels is not planned as other channels are not seen as influential among the company's target groups. The company has its own webpage for the trainee programme that includes all the information about the offered programme, the company, and open trainee positions. It presents all benefits and opportunities for the candidates and has trainee profiles for different departments about their experience and the company culture.

Company X is also making use of partnerships to spread brand awareness. The collaboration with Duunitori, one of the biggest recruitment platforms in Finland, yielded satisfactory results. The cooperation with Yliopistomedia will help raise brand awareness in Finland and advertise the trainee program on multiple campuses in a very targeted approach.

However, company X is not only active on digital channels. The company also participates in student trade fairs to physically promote the EB and the trainee program. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these activities had to be stopped and are planned to be resumed at the end of 2022. An established graduate network for graduate trainees is not in place yet, but it has been discussed as one initiative that could improve the overall EB.

Different channels are being utilised to reach future talents in as many touchpoints as possible. These initiatives are positive, but the lack of resources (time, budget, and people) limits the potential impact of improvements. The state of the EVP being unclearly defined only adds to this problem.

3.3   SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis was conducted to answer the research question on the current state of company X's employer brand. A SWOT analysis is a framework that analyses external and internal factors to find the strengths and weaknesses of the company but also the opportunities and threats. This framework can be used to find competitive advantages, disadvantages, and elements representing a business's growth and risks. (Peterdy 2022.)

For this thesis, the SWOT analysis was used to understand some of the factors affecting the employer brand as this framework is, according to Peterdy (2022), "one of the most useful tools available for strategic planning". The SWOT analysis was based on company internal information. Additionally, externally available information from the company's web pages and external communication on the company's digital channels have been used. A summary of the SWOT analysis can be found in Table 1.

Strengths

Airbus Defence and Space Oy is a company with roots in Finland. The main business has been developed in Finland. The international aspect is attractive to talents, candidates, and current employees. Due to the nature of the industry, the company can be seen as a relatively stable employer. The company has no negative reputation that could damage the employer brand.

Weaknesses

The biggest weakness is the lack of clear guidelines for employer branding and the dissonance between company X, the parent company, and business unit Y. The recruitment marketing efforts on social media are weak due to the lack of resources within the HR team and investments in hardware and software to produce content. Finding employees willing to take the time and effort to participate in projects to promote the EB is also challenging. Communication about sustainability topics is also missing in the EB. It can be a weakness as it has become an increasingly important part of the EB for many competitors.

Opportunities

Leveraging the parent company's employer brand could be an opportunity, especially for brand recognition. An international company whose primary language is English opens the doors to a bigger talent pool of international talents that often find it challenging to find jobs in Finland because of the language barrier. The working culture is seen as positive by employees. This could be an

opportunity to promote it more externally. The current partnerships with third-party providers such as Duunitori and Yliopistomedia are good initiatives since it targets the right target group. With an additional EB expert in the HR team in Finland that would primarily focus on the internal and external EB, the overall EB would be improved and profit from more recruitment marketing.

Threats

Only sticking to the employer branding messages of the parent company gives an unclear image of company X since the businesses and operations here in Finland are quite different. The messaging could be misleading by inflating the expectations of future candidates. Competitors are putting more resources into recruitment and communicating their trainee/ internship /graduate programmes. This development leads to losing more and more valuable talent to competitors. Deleting the LinkedIn account without another communication channel as a re-placement would cut the possibility of displaying the EB in Finland and hurt the EB long-term.

TABLE 1. SWOT analysis of company X's employer brand

Strengths	Weaknesses
Company X has a positive reputation. It is a company with heritage, meaning, and purpose. It is also a growing company with new talents joining. The trainee programme works well. Employees enjoy working at the company.	There are no clear guidelines in place for employer branding. Company X is not very well known in Finland because of a lack of resources and investments in employer branding. Social media efforts are weak. It is complex to create content with employees due to a lack of participation.
Opportunities	Threats
Possible to leverage the more known parent company brand and name externally. The employer brand's attributes include excellence in technology, innovation, international mindset and openness. These values could be integrated more into the messaging and communication.	Competitors put more resources into recruitment and trainee/ internship programmes. Utilising the parent company employer branding gives not a clear image of the company in Finland. Deleting the LinkedIn account without a replacement would reduce the possibility of communicating the EB in Finland. This might lead to a reduction in overall awareness.

4 COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

4.1.1 Definition

Competitor analysis is a process to gain market insights by assessing competitors' strengths and weaknesses to understand the company's positioning (Indeed.com 2020). Competitor analysis can help determine many aspects, such as the company's financial health, future industry trends, and growth opportunities.

4.1.2 Process and methodology

The next step in the 7-point plan (section 2.4) to better understand company X's employer brand is "market intelligence". In order to optimise the visibility of the case company's trainee programme, a comparison with competitors of related industry fields can give insights into current trends and effective tactics in recruitment marketing efforts. Also, a benchmark would help to identify specific EB Communication patterns already existing in the industry to determine where company X needs to update their communication style for the promotion of the trainee programme.

A list of criteria was set to find companies to analyse. These criteria were:
- The location of the HQ needs to be in Finland
- The company needed to be in a related field to company X, such as IT, Network Management or high-tech.
- Trainee opportunities must be mainly marketed towards students/graduates studying in Finland.

Based on these criteria, three companies have been selected: Companies A, B and C, as seen in the table below (Table 2).

TABLE 2. Table with the criteria for benchmarking analysis

	Company A	Company B	Company C
Industry	Telecommunications and Network	Tech and coding	Industrial high tech
Trainee/graduate programme available	Yes, but not marketed as such in Finland	Yes, graduate programme	Yes, summer trainee programme
HQ Location in Finland	Espoo	Helsinki	Helsinki
Size of the company	+6000 in Finland	+3000 in Finland	+5000

The media presence analysis compares their online presence, positioning, and impact (Mosley & Schmidt 2017). For this thesis, the assessment of the competitor's digital presence utilising qualitative and quantitative data from the company website, career pages and social media channels will be the base for the competitor benchmark. Special attention will be given to analysing each communication channel's content and analysing marketing key performance indicators (KPIs).

The data sets for the analysis were collected on 24.09.22 and updated on 12.10.22. Two KPIs have been measured for this assessment. The first category counts reach KPIs such as follower count. The second category was the social media engagement KPIs. Likes, comments, shares, and average engagement rate have been measured and assessed. The average engagement rate has been calculated by dividing the totality of Comments, Likes and Shares by the total number of followers and multiplying by a hundred to get a percentage rate. (Olafson 2021.)

Measuring these allowed the assessment to determine active or passive engagement with the social media channel and to see what content engages the users the most. The results were summarised in a listing of the strengths and weaknesses of each competitor (the first two steps of the SWOT analysis).

Then, these results were compared to the case company's own efforts to determine what measures can be implemented to boost recruitment marketing.

4.2 Limitations of the analysis

The quantitative analysis was mainly based on visible indicators such as public follower count, likes, and public shares. The social media audit platform trendHERO has been used to retrieve the available data. The amount of promoted posts or paid posts could not be measured directly. This might have affected the accuracy of the indicated average engagement rate and reach of the social media content.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Company A

Career webpage

The career page is intuitive and designed with care. The EVP is highlighted on the page and is the first item potential candidates see. Underneath are three sections of subpages that applicants are the most interested in: the company culture, the current job openings, and the student opportunities at company A. All the web pages have the same structure and feel, making the experience more seamless. Company A also provides features on their webpage, such as an artificial intelligence chatbot/virtual assistant, to ameliorate the applicants' experience in finding shortcuts and quick answers, avoiding candidates quitting the page too soon. The other feature is called "insider page", where candidates can connect with current employees and ask questions about their life at company A, which gives an approachable feeling to the applicants' experience of the career pages.

The trainee page for Finland explains very briefly the purpose and goals of the company as well as the actual work opportunities. Then three sites and their

focus areas are being presented. Below this text is a section named "meet our talents" that shows the latest vlogs of the trainees. Overall, this page is not as informative as other career pages and does deliver little detail on the actual opportunities and benefits.

Even though company A has around 500 trainees each year in Finland, there is no mention of a trainee program, nor is it marketed as such. A video section with more "meet X employee" can be found on the career page for Finland. Also included are employees' quotes on the purpose and enjoyment of their work, focusing on the high-tech aspect. At the bottom of each page is a section with the social media accounts and the most recent post, which invites the user to view and subscribe to the different channels. Instagram is especially highlighted here.

Social media

Instagram

Company A's main corporate Instagram channel is the one that is visible on the career page and has almost 1 million followers. It is also used as the primary EB Instagram channel. This analysis will mainly review the more local account for Finland that was created recently in May 2022. The account has 107 posts, 1,911 followers and an average engagement rate of 6,3 %, which is considered an above-average engagement rate. Videos reach an average of 738 views per video. Post frequency is very regular and averages five posts a week. The account also has a steady follower growth, with a gain of 143 followers in the last four weeks. The account primarily uses its created hashtags that focus on company culture-related topics and reflect the EVP.

Company A wants to portray itself as inclusive and fun with an active community. Rather than showing the products or solutions of the company, the account focuses on employees, teamwork and events. There are a couple of videos where trainees talk about their position and what they are working on, but most of the pictures show group pictures and team activities at events outside doing sports.

The posts are primarily in English, but some are in Finnish. As for the visuals, there is a visible inconsistency as some images are not very recognisable for the brand. Perhaps there is the intention to make it less corporate and more about the experience of the visuals. Company A also utilises sponsored posts about their open trainee positions that show in between Instagram stories to widen the reach and attract as many potential talents as possible.

LinkedIn

Company A's LinkedIn channel has a following of 1,4 million. This account is the corporate company Account. They share information about the company, business and product-related content, employer branding, and recruitment content. Employer branding-related content averages around 200 views per post and is the least popular type of content when only considering the number of likes. The EB content has a recognisable style, visual identity, message, and hashtags that consistently reflect the EVP. They also repost content and posts made by employees on their Linkedin page, often relating to social events and community. EB-related posts are being shared and posted by the social media marketing and talent attraction teams. There is also visible, active participation from managers across the company to promote EB and recruitment content which helps to widen the reach and visibility utilising LinkedIn's networking system.

Youtube

The main Youtube channel is currently actively used at 387K followers and almost 14 million views. This channel includes interviews, podcasts, short videos about events, products, employer branding, and recruitment marketing content. The "meet X employee" videos are posted on this channel. These videos are around 1 to 2 minutes long talking and are mostly in English. Some videos are in Finnish with Finnish subtitles. The format is always the same, with the same set of questions. Employees and trainees talk a bit about themselves, their position at the company, their experience and why they applied. These videos get an average of 270 views per video and a number of likes at around 15. The old-

er employee vlogs published between 2017 and 2021 were more personal and showed more of the employee's daily activities. This content was well received, averaging 2500 views and 50 likes per video.

Other social media channels

The Twitter account for recruitment-related content has 15,9K followers. Content-wise, it is very similar to the main Instagram channel, and overall engagement is relatively low. The content posted on this channel is related to recruitment marketing for different target groups, including established professionals, students, and graduates.

The company's Facebook page has around 150K followers and faces the same issues. The Twitter and Facebook accounts here are used to widen the reach and awareness of the already-made content. No new content is created specifically for these platforms. These channels are just reposting or repurposing other content from the main communication channels.

In May 2022, the company created a Tiktok account with 8,7K followers and 8,7K likes, with an average engagement rate of 5 %. Employees share what it is to work at Company A, especially how it is to be a coder using TikTok trends and trending music as background to increase the reach and visibility of the content. This account also follows the brand guidelines the least to appeal to the audience of this platform. Company A wants to be seen as a fun and open-minded company in the eyes of the younger generation, meaning upcoming university students still in high school or new students just starting university.

4.3.2 Company B

Career webpage

The career website of Company B provides a good amount of information for everything a candidate needs when opening the page. It states the EVP clearly, and in the "get to know us more" section, there are links to other pages, such as

the application process, the vision and mission of the company And what the company is offering. Between these subpages are quotes from employees on the company culture or the mission that can be read when clicking on the different statements. There is also a contact form where questions can be sent directly to the recruitment team, making it easier for the candidate to find the right contact person. If candidates are scrolling through the first page and not clicking on any links, all essential information is on this first page to get an overall feel of the corporate culture.

After the main section, there is a separate section for the graduate program that leads to a separate page on the different graduate programs they have in Norway, Sweden and Finland and their two track options: the specialist track and the rotation track for tech students. It also explains what is included in the program, such as networking events, personal mentoring, and other activities. Company B also displays blog posts of graduates with a common theme: learning and technology. The following section includes images of the after-work parties, events and parties being displayed to show the relaxed atmosphere working at the company.

After the trainee section, there is a summary of what the company has to offer, a section called "Meet our people" with blog posts of employees talking about how they work. The focus here is on problem-solving and innovation. The following sections focus on the open job positions with an overview of the latest openings. There is the possibility to sign up for the talent community that updates future applicants with new positions and recruitment events. As for the graduate programmes, there is one separate for Norway, Sweden and Finland.

At the bottom of the page, a section with Instagram posts is visible. The other social media accounts are linked on the right side of the page, visible for everyone to connect and visit company B's social media pages. The Youtube channel link is hidden at the very bottom of the page.

Social media

Instagram

Company B's main corporate Instagram account currently has 4,4K followers, and the posts are mostly related to employer branding, company values and company-related news. Apart from that, each business location has its own Instagram account with targeted country-related information. This strategy is also followed by company C.

The account made for Finland has 1,4K followers. It has a low engagement rate of 2,4%, 41 likes per post and 305 views per video. However, the account is continuously gaining followers. The post frequency is irregular, with sometimes weeks between two posts. The content is heavily focused on employer branding content with a very distinctive visual identity matching the brand to promote the graduate programme. Other content posted on this channel are events related to showcasing the community aspect of the company. The content and text matching the posts are mainly in Finnish since it targets the Finnish audience. The company is not utilising many hashtags in their positions that relate to the EVP or employer branding; if they do, it is not systematic. They have takeover stories where an employee takes over the account and shares videos or photos with followers about their life and job at the company. They also share videos or pictures of their employees at work to showcase the team spirit and a less corporate image. Overall it is very similar to the content posted by company A.

Linkedin

Company B's corporate LinkedIn page has 232K followers. They have a large variety of content relating to company information, events, product and service-related advertisement and employer branding. The language used is English, but posts in Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian and German can also be found on the page. They heavily promote their graduate programme on Linkedin and frequently post "meet X employee" career stories that link to their webpage. Overall, the employer branding content consistently and precisely portrays the EVP and the employer brand in general and focuses a lot on the role of women in IT.

In terms of engagement, this type of content reaches around 50-100 views per post, which is very similar to the other content the company is posting on Linkedin. Marketing and HR teams are also promoting employer branding and recruitment content on their LinkedIn profiles to increase reach and visibility, even if the amount of likes per post is meagre.

Other Social media channels

The global Facebook page has 32K followers and 31K page likes. The content is the same for Company B's LinkedIn but focuses more on employee profiles and stories. The posts are direct copies of what can be seen on LinkedIn.

On Twitter, they follow the same strategy as on Instagram by having country-specific accounts. The Finnish account has 2,4K followers, and the content is exclusively in Finnish even if it is primarily a product and business-focused account, it has some employer branding content. Employee profiles are being shared, but the graduate programme is not promoted.

Company B's YouTube channel is very small, with under 1K followers. This channel is mostly for product marketing, live streams, webinars about their solutions, and event-related content. Company B is not utilising many videos on their career page and other communication channels as they do not have any videos relating to employer branding on its YouTube channel.

The tendency to prefer photos over videos is noticeable with company B. Photos require less effort in creating and editing. However, it is easier to respond emotionally and connect with the content of a video than with a photo.

4.3.3 Company C

Career webpage

Company C's career page has a different structure than companies A and B. The first section displays a search box for open jobs by job title or location. After

the EVP is introduced, a call to action is prompted to make page visitors follow the different social media channels. A corporate employer branding video visualises the mission and values of the company and the people working at company C. Underneath the video is a section with links to different subpages dedicated to the growth opportunities within the company, the social values and workplace values and the recruitment process. The section named "opportunities" has a subpage for different professional levels. Each page shows open opportunities, employee stories and other relevant content depending on whether applicants are professionals, entry-level or students. This makes it very which makes it very targeted and personalised.

The career opportunities for students and graduate pages show what job opportunities they offer and clearly state what they include and the application periods. But when comparing the Finnish career page in Finnish language to the global one, there is a visible lack of content regarding the trainee employee stories and open positions in Finland. The available positions and trainee stories are on other pages that are not as easy to find and can be overseen by potential candidates.

The career page gives the most conservative impression and is closely linked to the company's corporate image. The career page utilises an AI chatbot similar to company A that helps answer the most popular questions and find a personalised job recommendation based on a set of questions. Compared to companies A or B, company C does not include any social media posts directly on their pages and relies only on a call to action to go to the different social media channels.

Social media

Instagram

Company C has an Instagram account dedicated to global career and recruitment content with 12,5K followers and over 455 posts. Similar to company B, company C has country accounts for targeted content. The account for Finland has almost 3K followers in total but has the lowest engagement of the three

companies with 1,3%. The posts are getting an average of 32 likes per post and 512 per video. Even with low engagement, they have gained almost 300 followers in the last four weeks, which shows the channel is growing. The content mixes business and product content with employer branding elements. Post frequency is two or three times per week. Their profile has two story elements about the summer jobs and talent-related content to highlight. They have a variety of content relating to the intern/trainee programme, with videos and photos of specific trainee events and activities. But compared to companies A and B, the casual aspect is missing. Also visible are the trainee stories in video format, as an Instagram story or as a link to the career page. Company and country-specific hashtags are systematic and linked to the employer branding message. Overall, the message and image they want to portray are that the company values their employees as professionals by developing their skills and working towards a common goal, with the main focus being sustainability. The language used in the posts and texts is English and Finnish.

LinkedIn

Company C's LinkedIn account mainly focuses on product and solution marketing and sharing company-related information or company value-related posts about inclusivity and diversity. The account has a big following of 2,8 Million. Employee stories, job openings career related posts profiles are not visible. Instead, the content is mainly shared by the recruitment and talent team and managers on their own Linkedin profiles. Therefore, measuring the amount of engagement and reach is not easy. Company C is offering training and certification to become a brand ambassador. They also use a Talent ambassador programme which helps to raise awareness and promote the employer brand across multiple channels, not just Linkedin.

Youtube

Company C's channel for Finland is relatively small, with less than 1K followers. They post content relating to product and solution marketing, webinars and rarely employee and trainee stories. Only a couple of these videos are on the Youtube channel. These videos are 3 to 4 minutes long, longer than the ones

from companies A and B, and typically have an average of 250 views per video. These videos are in Finnish language with a fixed format as company B. Even the questions that were asked in the video are very similar.

Other social media channels

Company C has a global career page on Facebook with 21K followers. The average amount of likes is around 20 per post, which is a very low engagement rate. The content is the same as for the global career Instagram page. Even though there are more followers on Facebook, the audience is engaging more with the content on Instagram, reaching over 150 likes on average per post.

The Finnish Twitter account with 380 followers uses the same content type as Linkedin: primarily product marketing and business-related news. A specific Twitter account for global careers does not exist.

4.4   Conclusion

To summarise this chapter, the first two dimensions of the SWOT analysis were used to determine each company's strengths and weaknesses based on the qualitative and quantitative data from the competitor's digital channels mentioned in this chapter. The findings are summarized on the following page in Table 3.

All three companies publish the same content for their recruitment marketing and employer branding to attract talent; their methods and strategies differ. An overall weakness is that the online talent journey for Finnish talent is not as seamless as it could be; related channels are sometimes not efficiently and effectively interconnected to create an omnichannel experience.

TABLE 3. Strengths and weaknesses of the online employer banding presence of competitors A, B and C

	Company A	Company B	Company C
Strengths	Engaging content that is in line with the EVP. Strong portrayal of the community aspect. The company puts employees in the spotlight.	Clearly describing the development opportunities for graduates and interns. Continuous visual branding throughout the different communication channels	Talent ambassador program to increase awareness.
Weaknesses	The quality of content varies from platform to platform. Visual branding is not always aligned with set brand guidelines.	Underexploiting the usage of video format for their employer branding content.	Employer branding content is not actively promoted on the main social media channels.

Compared to company X's digital presence and recruitment marketing, competitors have a more straightforward strategy for the employer brand. As mentioned in section 3.1, the fact that there is no clearly defined EVP and EB message for the case company makes the digital presence appear weak compared to the three mentioned competitors.

An advantage that company X has over the competition is that it is easier to create a seamless digital experience by linking all communication channels. This could be optimised even further with an update of the career page that could directly showcase the case company's Linkedin channel.

Competitors are using many different social media platforms, whereas the digital presence of company X is more concentrated on only one primary social media channel, Linkedin. But as seen in the findings, social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook do not yield that much engagement. They are used primarily to repost posts from either Linkedin or Instagram. This can be explained by the reduction of usage by teenagers and young adults as these platforms have been compared to more popular ones, such as Tiktok and Instagram (Auxier & Anderson, 2022).

Overall, more similarities than diversities can be observed in the communication style of competitors' employer brands. There might be an opportunity for company X to be more distinctive in the messaging (and related visuals) regarding the career page and social media to stand out from competitors of similar or related industries.

5 INTERVIEWS

5.1 Interview design, setting, methodology

Interview design

For the collection of primary qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were chosen by the author. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher sets the themes and questions, but these might vary depending on the course and direction of the interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 320). It allows the researcher to focus on specific themes and questions and better understand selected topics. The interviews held were explorative. Explorative studies are used to get information on past events and find new insights (Saunders et al. 2009, 138). Questions for this interview were about Company X's employer branding, company culture, and the trainee programme. An interview guide has been created as a guideline for the semi-structured interview (Appendix 1).

The selected former trainees were from different trainee programme editions to see if the time would change the perception of the employer brand. Interviewee 1 left the company a couple of months ago; interviewee 3 left more than a year ago. For interviewee 2, it has been over two years since their last day as a trainee. The length of employment of the interviewed former trainees was also a selecting factor, with the shortest being four months and the longest over a year. This would allow seeing if the length of the traineeship affected the impression of the employer brand.

Interview setting

Four online interviews were planned with former trainees of company X using Microsoft teams. The interview duration was between 45 minutes to a maximum of an hour. Before the interview began, a set of important information regarding the interview purpose, process and data protection measures was read out loud by the author to the participants. The interviews were all recorded with the permission of the participants.

Out of the four planned interviews, only three were conducted. One had to be rescheduled and cancelled because of the participant's health. A replacement could not be found in time, but the author deemed it to have enough data to derive satisfactory results that can be presented.

Methodology for the analysis

To develop the employer brand of the trainee programme, interviews with former trainees were conducted to get both internal and external aspects of the employer brand. The advantage of interviewing former trainees over current trainees working at the company is that they are more honest about their experience. Current employees might fear speaking up because of the repercussions that might be linked to it, even in an anonymous setting (Kakkar & Tangirala, 2018). Ex-employees can speak more freely about their experience as they are no longer bound to the company. Another advantage is that they can compare the employer brand experience of company X with their current employer experience, as was the case for interviewees 2 and 3. The interview questions were not only about their experience as a trainee but also focused on how they think about the employer brand and what they would change about it to increase awareness for the EB. As the former trainees belonged to the target group of the trainee programme, their impressions and recommendations are valuable as they see the employer brand now from a different point of view while still having an understatement of the company culture and brand. This helped to determine the strength and weaknesses of the trainee programme, the employer branding, and the recruitment marketing of the trainee programme.

A content analysis has been made to retrieve the data from the semi-structured interviews to gather more information on increasing awareness and how former trainees see the employer brand now. Each interview was transcribed and coded into themes using inductive coding and the ATLAS software for qualitative research. The author also made notes during the interviews for observations and themes necessary for the interview analysis.

5.2 Interview results

The brand recognition of Company X and the parent company.

All interviewees were familiar with the parent company brand and the associated main sector the group is known for. All interviewees have had positive associations with the parent company brand. When it comes to company X, the level of brand recognition is much lower. Interviewee 1 was also familiar with the division company x is a part of but did not know the division is also operating in Finland. Interviewee 2 stated that it was not familiar before and explained that their social circle was also unaware of the division.

All three interviewees also mentioned business unit Y and the overall lack of general brand awareness, as the business unit was unknown to them and their peers. Interviewee 3 recalled, "I had to spend a bit more time on the website to be like, OK, what is actually this?". Interviewee 1 mentioned: "based on my experience, most are unaware of the company existing, at least in this industry". Interviewee 2 also stressed this aspect of the Finnish company having little to do with the parent company's activities.

Candidate journey

When asked where they found the position, all three had different answers. Interviewee 1 explained that they first came into contact with the company via an on-campus advert. Interviewee 2 found the job ad on the online job portal Duunitori. Interviewee 3 was made aware of the position by one of their university lecturers. The participation of a company X employee as a guest lecturer also sparked interviewee 3's interest in applying for the trainee position.

This confirms that different entry points exist for the candidate's journey and that the EVP can be promoted through various communication channels, either traditional or digital.

How former trainees feel now about company X as an employer

For the question "How do you feel about company X as an employer ?" the re-action and first answer were significant. Different words were used to qualify their feelings and associations with the company: large, international, corporate, reliable, process-driven, and warm people. The first words used by the candidates were either neutral or of positive nature. One negative association in all interviews was that the company is "bureaucratic", and examples illustrating the mentioned concept have appeared in all three interviews.

The negative attributes mentioned during the interviews would not stop the interviewees from applying again for a position at the company. All three interviewees confirmed they would be open to applying for a position again if the situation arises. The more negative aspects mentioned by the interviewees regarding the position and work culture are not hindering the interest in the company.

Trainee job

Overall, all interviewees said they were satisfied with their job and considered it an overall pleasant experience. All interviewees appreciated their level of autonomy, independence, and trust. Interviewee 1 recalled that it did not feel like being treated just as a trainee but as a respected team member. Interviewee 1 also appreciated the position's flexibility: "it was flexible, so to some extent, I could guide what I wanted to do, and my job task based on my interest and personal knowledge".

The lack of information made the experience less positive for certain interviewees. At the start of the traineeship, Interviewee 1 recalled: "I did not get the big picture. That came later on." When asked what would have made the experience better, interviewee 1 mentioned more people involved in the induction process, clearer documentation for beginners regarding tools, relevant materials, where to find them, and internal points of contact. Interviewee 3 also mentioned the lack of systematic information circulation concerning the wider company or department-specific information to trainees. "It would have been good to get

those emails and that communication that general employees are getting. It would be good to be a part of that, to be more like part of the team in that sense as well."

Trainee programme

As for the trainee programme and its content, most interviewees were satisfied with the activities within the trainee programme. All three agreed that the trainee programme was valuable for their career development.

The "buddy programme" was mentioned the most. Interviewee 2 was the most disappointed about the mentor programme: "I was excited about that when we were introduced that we have this buddy programme, but then I remember I was a little bit disappointed that it was not very structured like it was very much up to the mentor or the buddy how like active they were". Interviewee 1 mentioned it was valuable at the time, mainly because the mentor was often at the office. With the buddy's help, Interviewee 1 could gather more insights into the company and its internal structure. The answers suggest that the value of the mentor programme depends heavily on the mentor itself and how much time they want to invest in it.

Interviewee 2 also mentioned job rotations as part of the trainee programme in 2021. But here also, interviewee 2 stated: "they were not as organised as I thought they would be". Interviewee 2 expressed that it required a lot of independence and organisation from the trainees' side to make it happen and that the structure was missing.

Trainee information sessions were also mentioned. Interviewees 2 and 1 agreed that they were helpful. Interviewee 3 wished there were more in-depth and detailed: "[the information sessions] were kind of superficial". Interviewee 1 wished there were more opportunities to see all the trainees during work and not just for special events, such as training sessions.

When asked about their interest in a graduate network, all three answered that they would find it useful and would join one if it existed. This shows the interest

in being in contact with the company and fellow trainees they met during the programme.

Support during the induction phase and the traineeship

Answers would vary when asked about the amount of support the trainees received. Interviewee 3 felt to have received encouragement and support within their team. Interviewee 2 was satisfied with the support received within their team, "they clearly had thought it through, like how to get me in the team the best, so they have prepared for me to come there."

But Interviewees 1 and 3 also suggested a lack of support during the trainee programme. Interviewee 1 used the term "hectic" to qualify the induction period. Interviewee 3 also contrasted the difference between the onboarding in the local team and the more global corporate aspect. The latter was lacking in support.

Interviewee 3 was disappointed with the lack of support regarding career opportunities for trainees. Interviewee 3 also explained that this lack of development opportunities would damage the company's overall reputation and employer branding.

The variation of answers would suggest that the offered support varies entirely between teams and departments.

The corporate culture at company X

All interviews viewed the international working culture as a positive aspect of the corporate culture. All interviewees mentioned positive qualities such as openness and team spirit. The flexibility of work, meaning the flexible working hours, has been mentioned by interviewee 2 as something rather positive. Interviewee 3 explained that willingness to learn is also part of the culture "[colleagues] were very open to learning."

The size of the company and the hierarchical structure were mentioned by all candidates as being mostly a negative point because of company X's corporate

layer on top of the more local processes in company X. Interviewee 3 said a lack of cross-departmental collaboration. As interviewee 3 stated, there was "less understanding between teams on what they were working towards" because of the company's size. Interviewee 1 mentioned that there are multiple layers to go through to get something achieved. Interviewee 2 also noted that specific projects would get blocked because of strict guidelines and processes set by the division.

On how to improve the company culture

Interviewee 3 said that a change regarding the company culture should be done from a top-bottom approach to be successful "so that when a new hire comes in, they do not have to be told what the company culture is". Interviewee 3 suggested that managers play an essential role in implementing and transmitting the company culture and values.

When asked what could be improved with the hierarchy, interviewee 2 explained it would be advantageous to "be open to change some processes if the team has some ideas how this could be done easier without the hierarchy" and to have a common system where employees could address development ideas. Interviewee 1 suggested a solution to this problem "keep decision-making local" as it improves work satisfaction.

Recruitment marketing

When participants were asked what content they would use to promote the company as an employer, many suggestions came up. One topic mentioned was the posting of employee stories. Interviewee 1 recalled the type of content posted on the different social media channels: "You get to see a lot of technical innovation, […] but you do not get to see the people behind it that much." Interviewee 2 is still enjoying reading the trainee stories posted on the company's LinkedIn and found they are an important aspect of the recruitment marketing efforts. "I am interested in companies where I can see more about their culture, for example, seeing pictures of summer parties or events". "Community is there. I would love to see it (more) on social media".

Interviewee 3 said that LinkedIn is still heavily used in Finland for recruitment marketing and employer branding communication. Interviewee 3 recommended promoting the company online and via more traditional communication channels. These would include recruitment fairs and informal recruitment events for a more personal experience "because everyone can have a nice website, and everyone can have a pretty picture [on their website]". Guest lectures are also something that interviewee 3 recommends: "usually those are highly well attended by students. They are much more interesting than the same professor they see every week". Social media could then back up these more traditional tactics. Interviewee 1 also recommends a more traditional approach of partnering with universities and offering excursions by inviting students to the company premises to discover the company.

On how to improve the employer brand

All interviewees gave a variety of different recommendations. These recommendations below are listed not by theme but by the interviewee.

For interviewee 1, company X should not take itself for granted, as having a good reputation and brand is not enough nowadays. Interviewee 1 mentioned that a company should "start with what they offer [to talents]" when looking for new talents. Realistic job descriptions are also, according to interview 1, very important: "Job seekers would be scared off by an extensive list of knowledge that they have to have because, in reality, it is never a 100 % fit".

One interviewee suggested employer brand messaging. Interviewee 2 stated the employer brand should reflect more on the company's activities in Finland: "The examples on who uses the critical network, that is very concrete and that I used it all the time when I was telling people where I am working at and what our company does. I use these very interesting examples, making them sound as important as it is. So that would be a good angle to take for the employer branding."

Interviewee 3 talked about the career opportunity aspect, saying the company should also work on allowing the graduate programme to be an option in Finland. "Develop that sort of program or early career professionals. There are many kinds of opportunities that you could develop with its sort of mini program."

5.3   Conclusion of the results

The interviews confirmed that there is a general lack of awareness when it comes to the company and the trainee programme in Finland. Overall, all participants' trainee experience has been positive, and the programme was deemed valuable. There are certain negative aspects to their experience, especially the corporate structure. However, it did not damage their esteem of the company, so they would not be interested in applying again for a position. All candidates would be interested in staying in touch with the company through a corporate alum network for trainees. For the company, it would be an excellent opportunity to keep a communication channel open for former trainees to update them on new job openings and other information related to the company. Even if they are not actively looking for a new position, they might inform their peers and network about the opportunities mentioned via the corporate alum programme.

For recruitment marketing, the candidates have given different answers on what measures they think would be best to develop the employer brand. All candidates agreed that it makes the most sense to promote the EB and the trainee programme where the target group is to deliver a personal experience. A proactive approach by being more involved with universities on different projects (of social or educational nature) would have the benefit of creating awareness and ameliorating the company's reputation amongst students at selected universities in Helsinki or Jyväskylä. Digital Marketing can then complement traditional recruitment marketing efforts by posting about recruitment fairs and student visits at the company, for example.

6   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful employer branding gives talents and professionals a clear view of what to expect from a company as an employer. After assessing the current employer brand, it appears that the priority lies in redefining how the company wants to be perceived. Company X is missing this clarity because of the complex corporate structure. Fortunately, there is no need to reinvent the employer brand. To increase the awareness of the trainee programme, the whole external employer brand and messaging for the recruitment marketing would need to be adjusted. As the interviews with former trainees suggested, utilising the parent company brand for its strong brand recognition is the best way to increase brand recognition. Nevertheless, the EVP needs to be adapted to the company's business.

But brand recognition is not enough if there is little awareness of the company operating in Finland. The interviews have revealed that. Once the employer brand has been redefined, a new recruitment marketing strategy needs to be implemented to increase awareness via current communication channels and new ones suggested in the recommendations that would be closer to the target group. Company X cannot afford to be inactive regarding the employer brand and recruitment marketing activities if they want to be seen as an attractive employer to top talents and professionals.

To redefine the overall employer brand, the first element that needs to be agreed on is what brand the company wants to use to promote the employer brand and the messaging. As mentioned in the interviews, the parent company brand might have the best recognition potential compared to the division and the programme unit brand. But to use the wider parent company brand, the messaging needs to be very clear about the business operations the company has in Finland, otherwise, it would create false expectations if applicants and talents were merely interested in the industry the parent company operates in. The current EVP for the division cannot be used in Finland, as it is too specific and vague simultaneously. The connection to the public safety/security business must be clearly stated in the new EVP and messaging.

The recommendation would be going to back to the internal employer brand that is more clearly defined and align it with the external employer brand. Qualities such as the openness of people, the international atmosphere, and the flexible working hours mentioned during the interviews with former trainees should be highlighted more in the external employer branding. This can be utilised on the career page or the company's digital communication channels.

A more general recommendation on the employer brand would be to show what the company is doing in Finland and its positive societal impact and make the public aware of it, as the lack of awareness seems to be the most significant weakness. A local brand ambassador programme could be beneficial to promote the company and its activities in Finland. Involving employees in content creation on social media is a more organic way of increasing general brand awareness. A series of webinars or pre-recorded videos could be created to guide employees on brand guidelines, what and how to post content online and provide ready-made templates to make it easy and fast for employees to create the posts. More active support would require the hiring of an employer brand specialist. Having one contact point for employer branding would also make it easier to prepare many employer branding activities requiring more time and coordination, such as the employee story videos and active coaching for the brand ambassadors.

When it comes to the trainee programme, in particular, several recommendations can be made:

Competitors have more resources to spend on talent recruitment, but this could be an opportunity for company X to stand out from its competitors and try something different for recruitment marketing showcasing the employer brand's strengths. Keeping at least one social media communication channel, such as the current LinkedIn account, is essential. It would be recommendable to open a new communication channel to target younger talents. A recommended channel would be Instagram to use targeted ads and posts to promote the trainee programme to students in Finland, as done by competitors. The targeting could also be done via LinkedIn. However, the daily usage frequency of Instagram is

higher than for Linkedin (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015) and would increase the overall visibility of the paid posts.

Regarding the content, it would be favourable to post more about the people at company X and how they interact with the company and the corporate culture. But as mentioned in the competitor benchmark, the content is very similar in the whole industry. One strategy that would differentiate company X from the competition is to be as authentic and self-aware as possible, mentioning the positive side of things and the aspects the company still needs to improve. The concept of self-awareness or brutal honesty has been seen in marketing across different industries and is especially appreciated by younger audiences. This strategy can benefit both the company and the applicant as it is easier for candidates to see if they fit the work environment and culture. This would make the HR process easier and faster.

One of the big advantages of the employer brand at company X is that there is a real purpose that employees can identify with. This purpose needs to be expressed much more in the recruitment marketing efforts. Since there is a general lack of awareness regarding the company's business operations in Finland, more educational videos should be made to allow outsiders and future applicants to understand the industry and its importance.

The talent's journey should not end with the final day at the company and the exit interview. Even after the traineeship ends, it would be beneficial for the company to keep in touch with the trainees for retention and branding purposes. As the interviews showed, the interest in the company stays even after years of ending the traineeship. These former trainees might be returning to the company or telling friends and social circles about news and opportunities at the company. Therefore, the author would recommend building a corporate graduate network for former trainees. This network can be in the shape of a LinkedIn group administrated by HR that would focus on information sharing and job openings. If there is interest, different activities could be planned for the graduates to reconnect and network with each other. Examples of such activities are informal dinners, parties at the office premises or even specific training regarding personal development.

One aspect that can be developed further is a direct collaboration with universities. Having advertisements on campus is a good first step, but showcasing the company's innovation, expertise, and spirit is better done in person. Employees as guest lecturers bring not only awareness but can also interest people in applying, as was the case for one interviewee. Visits like these demonstrate that the company is interested in innovation and developing the next generation of professionals. Alternatively, the company could invite students to the premises in Helsinki and Jyväskylä to listen to presentations, discuss and ask questions to the professionals from different departments and trainees.

Another approach to partnering with universities is by offering business problems for case competitions to solve. For students, these case competitions are a valuable experience as they are real business problems linked to innovation or future trends. These can be either local or international. With a sponsorship, there is the possibility of getting innovative solutions to specific business problems and strengthening the company's visibility. Multiple business case clubs and competitions exist here in Finland.

For some, the trainee programme is an excellent way to discover the industry, but an open position is not always guaranteed for those wishing to continue in the company afterwards. Maybe the trainee programme would get more traction if there were a more systematic way of including graduates wishing to continue. An example could be offering a special graduate programme in Finland or adding the company to the already existing graduate programme of the parent company. Investing further in training and development creates a sense of stability and belonging and develops employee loyalty (Mentis, 2021). Having a fixed development programme with a clear path might be beneficial for the employer brand, and it might also help with finding the best talents. As this is not something every employer is offering, this might give a competitive advantage to the EVP for the trainee programme.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview guide

Purpose of the research: This research is for my bachelor thesis commissioned by company X. The topic is Employer branding in Finland. I am trying to find out how to develop the Employer brand in Finland to get more awareness for the trainee program. The purpose of this interview is to get more insights into the candidate's experience as a former trainee to see how the candidate remembers the corporate culture, and the trainee programme and give recommendations based on their trainee experience on the employer brand.

Interview procedure: This interview will take 45 min to a maximum of an hour. The participant can ask to skip questions and stop the interview at any time. Questions can be repeated if necessary and rephrased for better understanding. Some questions will be very similar to each other; please answer each one even if it feels repetitive.

Confidentiality: This interaction stays between the interviewer and the interviewee. Names, age, positions will not be disclosed in the thesis, and nothing said by the participant will be attributed to them without consent.

Consent to record: Recording the session would give the interviewer the most accuracy when transcribing the interview to avoid missing any details.

Utilization of the data: The data will be summarized by coding the interviews into themes to find similarities, discrepancies and new insights that would help to develop the employer brand. The transcripts and recordings will be destroyed once the thesis has been completed.

Offer to provide a summary of the thesis findings if interested.

Preliminary questions

What is your name?

What gender do you identify as?

How old are you?

Where do you live?

Are you currently studying? If yes, where?

Are you currently employed? If yes, where?

Interview questions

1. When have you been a trainee for company X, and for how long?

2. How did you find the position? Did you know the company beforehand?

[Probe] What websites/channels have you used for your search?
[Probe] Did you hear anything positive about the company before applying?

3. Have you applied to other companies? If yes, what were the names?

4. What words or feelings come to mind when you think of company X ?

[Probe] Positive?
[Probe] Negative?

5.If you can you recall the onboarding experience, how would you qualify it?

[Probe] Can you describe your first few weeks (what you can remember from it)?

6.Did you consider having enough support during the onboarding phase?

[Probe] What kind of support were you getting? From whom?
[Probe) What did your manager do to support you?

7.What did you like about your job?

[Probe] What were the best parts of your job?
[Probe] What could have been improved?

8.What do you personally value in an employer ?

[Probe] Can you give me an example?

9.What did you think about the company culture in general?

What were the positives?

What were the negatives?

10.Do you think that the trainee experience has been valuable for your career development?

11.Comparing it to your current employer regarding the corporate culture, what is drastically different?

12.Would you be open to work again for company X if the possibility arises?

13.Would you be interested in joining a corporate graduate network if it were to exist?

14.What advice would you give us to improve the company culture and brand?

15.Could you summarize this discussion for me?