Adapting Employer Branding Strategies to both Students' and Managers' Needs

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Att anpassa employer branding till både studenters och chefers olika behov

av

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive labour market, employer branding has become a means for companies to attract, recruit, and retain talented employees. However, few studies have examined how the organisational reality might complicate the implementation of employer branding practices. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate problems that can occur in an organisation when the different needs of students and managers are to be combined in an employer branding strategy. Additionally, it aims to propose measures that can help encounter the problems and improve the overall employer branding.

In order to achieve the purpose, both primary and secondary data was collected from semi-structured interviews and an archival study of Universum’s student survey respectively. Subsequently, three problem areas were identified in the material. First, the students and managers appear to have different views of what is attractive in an employer, increasing the risk of mismatch. Second, the managers appear to be strongly influenced by their organisational culture and conception of leadership, which decrease their adaptability. Third, the company’s divisional subcultures have been identified to cause communication problems between units and the parent organisation, complicating the implementation of a common employer branding strategy. Consequently, it is suggested that the student offering should be concretised, alongside offering additional, non-work related activities that relieve pressure from managers to adapt. Also, extended internal communication and training is needed to raise awareness of the company’s employer branding goal.

Key words: Employer branding, organisational culture, leadership, subculture
Att anpassa employer branding till både studenters och cheferns olika behov

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Sammanfattning


Nyckelord: Employer branding, organisationskultur, ledarskap, subkultur
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1 Introduction

In recent years, it has become widely popular for companies to develop employer branding practices in order to attract, recruit, and retain talented employees. To illustrate the growing interest in this field, searching for ‘employer branding’ on Google in 2004 would generate about 3,000 hits (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Now, thirteen years later, searching for the exact same words generates astonishingly 4,720,000 hits.

Defined as ‘the application of branding principles to human resource management’ (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p. 501), employer branding can be seen as the marketing efforts of a firm’s brand as an employer towards both prospective and current employees. In other words, the employer brand entails the identity of the firm as an employer (Ahmad and Daud, 2016) where employees can be seen as internal customers, as compared to a product brand, which aims to appeal to consumers. Furthermore, several studies account for the positive correlation between well-implemented employer branding practices and employee satisfaction, as well as a higher company performance (Fulmer et al., 2003, cited in Biswas and Suar, 2016; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Moroko and Uncles, 2008).

A reason for the increasing prominence of employer branding in organisations is that talented employees are viewed as an invaluable asset to the company and an important factor of success (Berthon et al., 2005; Alniacık and Alniacık, 2012). According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), this is particularly important to companies that are knowledge-driven, such as consulting firms, where much of the success relies on the expertise of the employees. While products and services almost unrestrictedly can be copied, a company’s talent capital cannot (Biswas and Suar, 2016).

Moving forward, this study will focus on the Swedish technology and consulting industry as an outlook for investigation. Relying heavily on technical expertise, the main target group for recruitment to such companies is trained engineers. However, the forecasted, future shortage of qualified competence threatens to limit many companies’ development. Importantly, SCB (2013) reported that the high retirement rate until year 2030 might cause a shortage of about 51,000 formally trained engineers, particularly those with a Bachelor of Science degree or technical college degree. Moreover, a number of large, Swedish infrastructure projects that are to be carried out in the coming years place a higher demand on engineering skills (Forsberg, 2014). Therefore, attracting and retaining the short supply of qualified employees through employer branding will become a critical ability to the future growth of knowledge-driven companies in what has been deemed as ‘the war for talent’ (Alniacık et al., 2014; Gold et al., 2016).

There are various ways that employer branding strategies can be implemented in order to attract prospective employees, in this case engineering students. First of all, the company must choose how it would like to be perceived by its target groups and emphasise these attributes in the employer branding. For example, a company might want to emphasise its ‘friendly work environment’, ‘development opportunities’, or ‘high salary’. Nonetheless, how the importance of different attributes are ranked is suggested by employer branding scholars to depend on individuals’ different demographics and backgrounds, for why it is necessary for companies to adapt their employer branding efforts to different target groups, or segments (Moroko and Uncles, 2009).
Second of all, the company must also choose which communication channels or activities they wish to appear in. Similarly to the attributes, different channels and activities have been discovered to have varying levels of impact on students’ intentions to apply to a particular company (Collins and Stevens, 2002). Additionally, there are differences in how effective different channels are in marketing the overall corporate image versus, by Lemmink et al. (2003) called, the ‘employment factors’. Such factors include knowledge of the actual work tasks, responsibilities, and organisational benefits that often are harder to grasp from an external view. Altogether, the corporate image, employment factors, and how they are communicated affect the application intention. However, while the corporate image may be marketed more easily through traditional advertising, it is argued that employment factors are more effectively communicated through direct interaction with potential recruits (Lemmink et al., 2003). As an example, several knowledge-driven companies in the United Kingdom are paying students to be ‘brand ambassadors’ as well as offering other part-time work in order to gain access to the best talents (Clegg, 2004). Simultaneously, this gives the students the possibility to gain first-hand insight to their potential employers’ business and work environment.

1.1 Problem formulation and purpose

Naturally, this raises the question of why not all companies are establishing these employer branding strategies that offer students part-time work opportunities, although research clearly has demonstrated the benefits of having direct interaction with potential recruits to inform about employment factors. From an organisational culture perspective, scholars have argued that different cultures, due to their implicit values and assumptions of reality, are more or less fit for the implementation of a particular strategy (Scholz, 1987). Even more so, managers, who are chosen on the basis of the culture (Schwartz and Davis, 1981), might be more or less prone to adapt to particular strategies. Rather than changing the culture, which is considered a complicated task, Scholz (1987) argues that the strategy itself needs to be formulated with regards to the organisational culture.

With this in mind, one could ask if there are underlying problems or structures in the organisational culture that obstruct the implementation of employer branding strategies of this kind in knowledge-driven companies. Moreover, how could such a strategy be constructed to meet the demands of the students, while at the same time be implementable in the organisational reality?

To this date, most previous studies within employer branding have aimed to investigate the students and other potential employees’ perspective in order for companies to develop suitable employer branding strategies that will attract desired target groups for recruitment. For example, the findings of Kucherov and Zamulin (2016) suggest that employers need to develop professional training programs in order to attract future IT talents of the Millennial generation, who demand rapid development opportunities. However, little attention has been given to discovering if these strategies are received as intended by the organisation, and especially by its managers, who inevitably have to take part in realising the employer branding work as well.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the problems of combining engineering students and managers’ perspectives and how they can be encountered when implementing an employer branding strategy. More specifically, I intend to apply an organisational culture perspective to the study in order to understand the managers’ standpoint. Ultimately, the ex-
pected contribution of this study is a framework for how companies could adapt their employer branding activities to fit both external and internal stakeholders. This kind of knowledge is particularly interesting for knowledge-driven companies, which arguably are more affected by 'the war for talent' and are searching to improve their employer branding in a more practical sense than has been argued for in previous research.

1.2 Delimitations

Due to the time and resource constraints of this master thesis project, the scope of the study is delimited. Firstly, although an international phenomenon, this employer branding study is geographically delimited to only include Sweden, out of convenience for the author. Secondly, this study aims to investigate engineering students on Master of Science (MSc) level only, delimiting the perspectives of those on Bachelor of Science (BSc) level from the findings. Despite the forecasted, larger shortage on BSc engineers in Sweden, this course of study is motivated in consensus with the commissioning company as MSc engineers are of larger interest for them when recruiting. Thirdly, for the manager perspective, the scope is confined to only include one case company, namely the commissioning company of this study. Hence, this delimits the purpose from comparing how different organisations and industries respond to the implementation of employer branding strategies.

Furthermore, the reasons for why an employer branding strategy succeeds or fails in a company are not apparent in the existing literature. Rather than investigating several trails, the scope is delimited to focusing on factors related to organisational culture. During the initial contact with the commissioning company, the possibility of the culture affecting its managers in this matter was brought up and became of interest as the purpose was formulated. In addition, the complex, economic structure of the commissioning company was brought up as yet another potential explanation, which subsequently was delimited from the study.

1.3 Structure of the report

In Chapter 2, a literature review is presented with the aim of evaluating previous work within employer branding and organisational culture and developing a theoretical framework, alongside positioning the present study and defining the research questions. In Chapter 3, the choice of methodology, as well as the ethical issues and limitations of the research, are discussed. In Chapter 4, the empirical findings are presented and subsequently analysed in Chapter 5. Lastly, conclusions, contribution to knowledge, and limitations and suggestions for future research are stated in Chapter 6.
2 Literature review

This chapter gives a review of the existing literature within the two primary fields that have been identified as relevant to this study: employer branding and organisational culture. Furthermore, the theoretical framework, positioning of the study, and research questions are discussed.

2.1 Employer branding

This section starts by giving an introduction of the basic concepts related to employer branding and why the field has emerged in recent research. Moreover, it presents how the employer brand can be successfully built and measured, as well as how individual and cultural factors can affect the perception. Finally, it discovers how employer branding strategies and activities can be adapted to different stakeholders, with students being of particular interest.

2.1.1 Defining the concepts

Employer branding is regarded as a relatively novel, but rapidly growing field of research. Starting to take form in the late nineties with origin in traditional product brand marketing, Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) appear to have been among the first to define the *employer brand* as ‘the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company’. In other words, the employer brand can be seen as mediating the benefits of the employment experience to an employee, much like the product brand aims to mediate the benefits of choosing a certain product to a consumer. Ambler and Barrow continue to argue for the similarities between employer brands and product brands. For example, both employer and product brands have different ‘personalities’, which can be used in positioning against other brands. Extending on this, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 502) provide with a slightly altered definition of the employer brand as ‘a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors’. By viewing both definitions, the employer brand should entail why it is a better to work for a particular firm, rather than other firms.

Then, what is the definition of *employer branding*? Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) allude to product and corporate branding, meaning that employer branding uses the same concepts but in the context of human resource management. More specifically, they continue to define it as ‘the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity’ (p. 502). Importantly, employer branding should communicate the image that the company is a ‘great place to work’ (Ewing et al., 2002). Seeing it as on a more strategic level, Sullivan (2004) defines it as a ‘targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm’.

By coining the employer brand definition, Ambler and Barrow (1996) claim to have merged the concepts of corporate culture, internal marketing, and corporate reputation into one manageable and measurable term. Furthermore, they argue for the benefits of using product brand marketing practices in human resource management. Berthon et al. (2005) recognise the importance of employer branding in human resource management as it can help coordinating different employee-related activities under one umbrella. Similarly, management scholars can enjoy the benefits of gathering different human resource and marketing approaches into one concept (Berthon et al., 2005).
2.1.2 Why employer branding?

Previous studies seem to be in consensus regarding the reasons for the rise of attention that has been given to the subject of employer branding. 'The war for talent', which was introduced in a 1998 article by the American management consulting firm McKinsey & Company (Beechler and Woodward, 2009), is a phenomenon that has been claimed as one of the causes for practitioners and scholars' recently emerging interest in employer branding (Alniacik et al., 2014). In short, the phenomenon concerns the increasing problem for companies to attract, recruit, and retain talented employees in a time of economic growth and global competition (Chambers et al., 1998).

Based on the American context, in which the McKinsey study was conducted, the authors have summarised four factors as contributing to the war for talent: 1) increased economic growth, but a declining supply of executive talent, 2) increased complexity in the economy that requires employees with a set of multiple skills, 3) increased recruitment competition from small and medium-sized firms, and 4) increased job mobility and turnover rates (Chambers et al., 1998). Although these factors should be applied with caution to the Swedish labour market, which is the outlook for this study, the war for talent is claimed to be of global magnitude and affecting companies worldwide (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Christiaans, 2013).

In order to determine the need of employer branding in a Swedish context, we begin by examining the factors stated above more closely. First of all, a shortage of skilled workers has been reported domestically in Swedish media (e.g. Nandorf, 2016), which can be seen as an indicator of the growing interest and need of a proper strategy for employer branding. More specifically, this study concerns people who are formally trained engineers, for which SCB (2013) has reported a shortage of about 51,000 workers in 2030. Other scholars (e.g. Wilden et al., 2010) have also confirmed the shortage as an increasing and consisting problem in most developed economies.

Secondly, the employees are viewed by many scholars as a firm’s most valuable asset and a basis for competitive advantage (e.g. Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Berthon et al., 2005; Moroko and Uncles, 2008). This is particularly evident to knowledge-driven organisations, e.g. consulting firms and investment banks, as they depend more on high skills and development among the employees (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). Since this is an industry-specific factor, rather than a geographic one, it is also applicable and relevant to a Swedish context. Furthermore, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) report that firms are beginning to allocate more resources to specific employer branding activities, which may be seen as an indicator of the usefulness of employer branding when attracting the right kind of competence.

Lastly, while very little has been reported about the competition for qualified employees from small and medium-sized firms in Sweden, it has been reported that 41% of the Swedish, formally trained engineers want to seek new employment, despite the fact that a majority (about 90%) are satisfied with their current jobs (Danielsson, 2005). Among younger age groups, this rate was even higher, indicating that increased job mobility and voluntary turnover rates are also palpable in Sweden. Since a clear employer branding model not only can be used to attract prospective employees, but also to leverage employee retention (Cascio, 2014), developing a strategy for such activities is likely to become critical for companies in Sweden.
2.1.3 What makes a successful employer brand?

Based on qualitative interviews with industry experts, Moroko and Uncles (2008) identified two dimensions of successful employer branding: attractiveness and accuracy. The attractiveness dimension is argued to be consistent with consumer/corporate branding. Important characteristics that need to be fulfilled in order for the employer brand to be viewed as attractive are that it should be known and noticeable, and seen as relevant and resonant, as well as differentiated from its competitors. Meanwhile, the accuracy dimension consists of additional characteristics, such as the fulfilling of a psychological contract (the individual’s belief in given and returned obligations between employee and employer) and alignment of consumer and employee-based promises. How well a firm performs given these dimensions can be measured by metrics such as the number of applicants per role, and average turnover rate, to mention a few examples from the Moroko and Uncles study.

In a similar study, Berthon et al. (2005) identified the dimensions and developed a scale for measuring the closely related concept of employer attractiveness. Defined as ‘the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation’ (p. 156), it is almost identical with the employer brand definition, with the small difference of being targeted solely at the attraction part of employer branding, rather than the retention part. However, the authors argue that high employer attractiveness form a basis for a strong employer brand equity. Based on focus groups with Western Australian graduate and undergraduate students, their suggested employer attractiveness (EmpAt) scale consists of five dimensions: 1) interest value, 2) social value, 3) economic value, 4) development value, and 5) application value. In other words, the attractiveness of an employer should be determined in terms of how interesting the individual finds the workplace as well as how the work environment, economic compensation and benefits, and development and application opportunities are perceived.

In a much more contemporary study, however, Sivertzen et al. (2013) argue that non-economic values are more important to emphasise than the economic value on the EmpAt scale, based on a questionnaire with 366 Norwegian higher education students. For example, innovation, personal growth, and self-confidence should be promoted more frequently, according to the authors. Nonetheless, the findings of both papers should be applied with caution as Berthon et al. recognise the potential implications of cultural differences.

Other studies have found additional factors that influence the effectiveness of the employer brand. Wilden et al. (2010) suggest that the consistency, clarity, and credibility of the employer brand as well as the individual’s past work experience, company size, and industry image may influence the perceived employer brand. Moreover, industry image was further explored in a study by Ferhatovic and Simon (2016) of a Swedish commercial bank, which indicated that it may affect both the general perception of the work environment and the perceived target group for recruitment. This becomes particularly apparent if the applicant in question has limited knowledge of the company (Burmann et al., 2008). Findings by Devendorf and Highhouse (2008) further suggest that an employer is regarded as more attractive if the applicant finds its current employees to be similar to oneself, especially in industries where the employees are more visible (e.g. in retail).

Furthermore, once recruited, Biswas and Suar (2016) argue that realistic job previews, fulfil-
ment of the psychological contract, support, and prestige among many factors may strengthen the employer brand and help retaining the employees. Additionally, it has been stated that the top management plays an important part in determining the success of employer branding. Importantly, leaders can be seen as creating ‘organisational images’ that ‘affect external stakeholders’ perceptions of the company’ (Biswas and Suar, 2016, p. 69).

2.1.4 The impact of individual factors on perception

So far, the literature has suggested that the success of an employer brand can be determined and measured by different dimensions and attributes. However, several studies have also researched the possibility that the importance of different attributes of employer attractiveness are perceived and ranked differently among potential employees based on individual and cultural impact (e.g. Lievens et al., 2001; Alniaçık and Alniaçık, 2012; Christiaans, 2013). That is, employer branding practitioners need to take into consideration that people of different demographics may perceive and value a company’s employer brand differently.

The following paragraphs of this section aim to give an overview of different individual factors that have been identified in literature as having varying levels of impact on the employer attractiveness (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Individual factors affecting perceived employer attractiveness](image)

**National culture** To begin with, cultural differences as a potential implication on perceived employer attractiveness was briefly introduced in section 2.1.3 as a probable limitation of the studies by Berthon et al. (2005) and Sivertzen et al. (2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the Swedish context of the present study may affect the results and the interpretation of students’ perceptions. However, as very few Swedish employer branding studies have been conducted, this section will review research in other cultural settings.

Explicitly investigated in a quantitative study by Alniaçık et al. (2014), results supported the belief of cultural impact, indicating that people of different cultural backgrounds prioritise aspects of employer branding differently. For example, set in a Turkish and Latvian context, it was found that the Turkish respondents valued humanitarian and knowledge-sharing aspects as more important than the Latvian respondents. However, similar levels of importance were found for aspects related to promotion opportunities and salary. Christiaans (2013), who conducted a cross-country multilevel analysis (including Sweden), also found country-level variables to
have a significant impact on perceptions. Notably, a country’s levels of uncertainty avoidance, future orientation, performance orientation, and humane orientation were shown to have impact on the individual’s perceived importance of job security, professional development and friendly work environment. In summary, a plausible conclusion that can be drawn from these two studies is that the requirement for an attractive salary can be considered as equally important independent of the cultural context, whilst the additional attributes vary between individuals of different countries.

**Age** On the other hand, individual-level variables, such as age and gender, have been investigated more thoroughly in previous research. Although based on a convenience sample, Alniaçık and Alniaçık (2012) found no significant difference in perceived importance of employer attractiveness attributes regarding ages of the respondents. Only a weak, but positive, correlation between age and market value was determined, indicating that the quality of a company’s customer offerings grows in importance as the employee turns older.

Nonetheless, the more general opinion among scholars today seems to be that age is of huge importance. For instance, age has been shown to have a positive correlation with values related to security, life balance, and social identity and status (Sengupta et al., 2015). Values related to development, however, seem to be of equal importance no matter the age. This is in accordance with Reis and Braga (2016), who found the importance of the development value to be the common denominator among three different generations; Baby Boomers (1946-1960), Generation X (1961-1981), and Generation Y (1982-2000). Still, these findings should be considered with caution relating to the subject of age as generations ‘comprise individuals who have experienced the same facts or relevant historical events during their socialisation process’ (Manheim, 1993, cited in Reis and Braga, 2016, p. 104). In other words, these findings are based on when individuals were born, rather than how old they are, and cannot predict how people of different ages perceive employer attractiveness in general. However, what can be noted from the Reis and Braga study is that individuals of Generation Y, to which all current engineering students belong, consider the development value, economic value, and social value to be the most important on the previously discussed EmpAt scale (Berthon et al., 2005).

Despite these facts, in the case of students as the target group of employer branding, Christiaans (2013) argue that the absolute age is of less relevance as a differentiating factor since students’ mean age vary between different countries. Instead, students’ study progress should be taken into account as their attitudes towards potential employers are more influenced by how far they have come in their educational program. Therefore, it might be more appropriate to adapt the employer branding strategy according to students’ study progress rather than their age.

**Gender** Most studies that have aimed to investigate the impact of gender seem to have found moderate differences between the views of males and females. In a Turkish study by Alniaçık and Alniaçık (2012), the findings indicated that both men and women rank the economic value and work environment similarly. In other words, they found that both men and women consider high salary and pleasant work environment to be important attributes. However, the authors found that females also tend to place a significantly higher value on social, market, application, and cooperation attributes in comparison to males. Similarly, the results obtained by Christiaans (2013) indicated that females value professional development, friendly colleagues, and job
security higher than males, although they both have the same preferences for starting salary. Instead, men seemed to value promotion opportunities higher than women, but only with a slight differences in mean values (Christiaans, 2013). Additionally, the results by Sengupta et al. (2015) demonstrated that female mid-level managers’ have higher preferences for values related to job security and work-life balance.

Interestingly, the conclusions that can be drawn from these studies, although conducted in other cultural settings than the present study, is that women seem to have a broader perspective on employer branding than males. Besides valuing the typically ‘hard’ factors, such as salary and promotion opportunities, they also seem to pay more attention to social values. This might imply that females demand a more holistic employer branding offering than males do.

**Educational background and academic achievement** Interesting for this study is how students of different disciplines and with varying academic records value employer attractiveness attributes. Instinctively, engineering students who are high achievers would be regarded as the most interesting group for recruitment in technology and knowledge-driven companies. However, Christiaans (2013) appears to have been among few to investigate the difference between business and engineering students as well as the difference between high and average achievers. Findings indicate that while business students are more attracted by promotion opportunities, professional development, and training, engineering students value job safety. Moreover, as with previously discussed demographic factors, no significant difference was found for valued importance of salary. Continuing with academic achievement, Christiaans also found that students who considered themselves to be high achievers place more importance on promotion and development opportunities, than on having friendly colleagues. Although not confirmed in a Swedish context, these findings indicate that there are apparent differences between different courses of study as well as between high and average achievers, which need to be taken into account when targeting students.

**Personality** Demographics aside, Lievens et al. (2001) further explored the possibility of individuals’ personality traits having a moderating effect on perceived employer attractiveness when assessing four objective organisation characteristics: organisation size, level of internationalisation, pay mix, and level of centralisation. Overall, results indicate that medium and large-sized organisations with a high level of internationalisation and decentralisation are viewed as more attractive. Furthermore, certain personality traits among individuals were shown to have impact on the effects of particular characteristics. Individuals with high levels of openness and intellect appear to be more drawn to multinational organisations in comparison to those with lower levels of these personality traits. Additionally, individuals showing higher levels of conscientiousness appear to be more attracted to large organisations than do the less conscientious (Lievens et al., 2001). However, in similarity to parts of the Christiaans (2013) study, these results have neither been confirmed nor rejected by more contemporary studies, which is believed to be an implication of the relatively unexplored field of employer branding and should be applied with caution.

### 2.1.5 Adapting employer branding to different stakeholders

From Section 2.1.4, it is possible to conclude that several demographic factors influence on the individual’s perception of employer attractiveness and, ultimately, the employer brand. Conse-
quently, it is suggested that companies should acknowledge these differences, investigate what attributes are valued as the most important by their target group, and decide upon an employer branding strategy thereafter (Alniacık et al., 2014). In most cases, however, a company may have several target groups, consisting of both potential and current employees and varying in demographics. Hence it is proposed that traditional market segmentation should be applied to employer branding (Moroko and Uncles, 2009). Furthermore, segmentation can be based on both macro and micro-level aspects Christiaans (2013). For example, one segment could be high-achieving engineering students (micro-level) in the Nordic region (macro-level).

Besides making employer branding efforts more attractive for the specific receivers, Moroko and Uncles (2009) state that companies can make more cost efficient resource allocations by using different segments for employer branding strategies. As an example, offering on-site childcare is probably a costly and inefficient resource allocation when targeting students, but more appropriate when targeting middle-aged employees. Other benefits of using segmentation in employer branding include lower communication costs and a stronger brand identification among the employees, according to Christiaans (2013).

As have been debated in the literature, it is critical for the companies to adapt their employer brands for the sake of appealing to the right employees. Chambers et al. (1998) even maintain that it requires ‘paying what it takes to attract and retain strong performers’ – also referred to as the ‘price’. Yet, this raises the question whether or not this is practically applicable in an organisation. Moreover, how should employer branding strategies be adapted to managers’ standpoint, who often are the ones who ultimately have to incorporate such initiatives in their practises? Surprisingly, how to adapt the employer brand with regards to the practical limitations of an organisation has merely been investigated in previous research, which almost solely has concentrated on the perspectives of potential and current employees. Almost somewhat contradictory, several studies imply that the employer brand must be aligned with the values and identity of the particular company, while at the same time take its target groups’ preferences into consideration (e.g. Christiaans, 2013). Similarly, Ambler and Barrow (1996) declare that the personality of the employer brand must be consistent with the consumer brand in order for it to be trusted. However, research so far has not been able to offer any advice on this evident compromise and how to fit the pieces together. In fact, Lieveens et al. (2001) admit to this problem, stating that some companies may find it difficult to attract certain target groups due to the lack of desired organisation characteristics.

2.1.6 Employer branding activities to attract students

In addition to knowing what kinds of attributes that should be emphasised when promoting an employer brand towards potential employees, in this case engineering students, it is also important to understand what communication channels and activities that have the largest impact on their application intentions. Furthermore, it has been argued that general advertisement is more effective in promoting the corporate image rather than job attributes (Collins and Stevens, 2002), for which direct interaction with potential applicants is recommended as a complementary action (Lemmink et al., 2003).

**Word-of-mouth endorsements** In their study of 1,955 engineering students, Collins and Stevens (2002) found that students who had been exposed to early recruitment-related activities were...
more likely to apply for the particular employer. Importantly, word-of-mouth endorsements from e.g. alumni were found to have a large impact on applicants’ decision-making, which is also supported by the findings of Wilden et al. (2010, p. 66), who recognised it as the most credible source of information as current employees were found to be ‘credible ambassadors for the firm to the recruitment market’. Furthermore, job seekers tend to rely on their personal networks in order to gain more insight to the employer brand before making the decision to apply. Subsequently, both studies recommend development of word-of-mouth endorsements, such as referral programs, as a useful and relatively cost efficient method of appealing to potential employees in general.

On the other hand, companies need to be aware of the difference between the internally and externally perceived employer brand when using current staff in employer branding activities, such as word-of-mouth endorsements. Knox and Freeman (2006), studying final-year undergraduates and employees working as part-time recruiters, found a significant difference in all but one of the perceived employer brand attributes between the two groups. Not to mention, the part-time recruiters were also found to have a positively exaggerated view of how the company is perceived by its potential employees. Furthermore, since the external perception of a brand is influenced by employee behaviour (Foster et al., 2010), it is recommended that companies develop employer brand images that are consistent both internally and externally in order to avoid split communication (Knox and Freeman, 2006).

**Publicity and advertisement** Similarly to word-of-mouth endorsement, publicity in other sources than the company’s is found to be successful in creating a positive feeling towards the company among students. Collins and Stevens (2002) maintain that students that have been exposed to the company in other sources (e.g. newspaper articles) are likely to be more influenced by other recruitment-related activities. That is, publicity seems to have an enhancing effect on the overall employer branding, making students more receptive of other employer brand signals. However, as the company must rely on other sources for publicity, there is no straightforward way of increasing this kind of activity.

On the contrary, advertisement is more easily controlled by the company and has been found to also have a significant effect on students’ perception (Collins and Stevens, 2002). In general, there seems to be a common opinion among students that companies provide scarce information, especially regarding employment, resulting in stress and a more time-consuming search for the student (Wilden et al., 2010). Therefore, it is suggested that companies put more effort into making information available on their Web sites and in other channels (Collins and Stevens, 2002). In addition, companies should make use of social media, as it has been discovered to be useful in employer branding campaigns and strengthening the corporate reputation (Sivertzen et al., 2013).

**Work opportunities and development programs** Altogether, investing resources in a broad variety of employer branding activities, e.g. participating in career fairs and offering internships, improves the impression of a caring company (Wilden et al., 2010). Clegg (2004) even suggests sponsorship of societies, brand ambassadorship, and other sorts of part-time work as potential opportunities to connect with students. While sponsorships were not proven successful in the Collins and Stevens (2002) study, career development programs within the organisation were

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proved to be valuable by Ahmad and Daud (2016) due to the opportunity for the individual to gain a competitive edge in comparison to other peers. This is especially evident as possessing only a higher education degree is hardly enough to receive the top jobs in today’s labour market (Ahmad and Daud, 2016). By studying best employer branding practices in the Russian IT labour market, Kucherov and Zamulin (2016) also concluded that companies successful in attracting young IT talents are those which offer training programs, support, and opportunities to grow.

2.2 Organisational culture

In the absence of employer branding literature that concerns managers’ attitudes and demands, the remaining part of this literature review will aim to examine management from an organisational culture perspective. Closely related to employer branding, the importance of organisational culture has been stated in various papers. For example, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) mention that a central task for managers is to cultivate the organisational culture, for which employer branding can be used to either reinforce or change it. For that reason, theory on organisational culture may help interpret the results from the present study.

In contrast to the field of employer branding, organisational culture has been widely studied for a longer period of time, originating in the late seventies (Wallace et al., 1999). However, due to the time constraints of this master thesis project, this literature review will focus on more contemporary and well-cited studies from the early eighties and forward with the extensive work of Schein (2004) as a foundation for theory. Firstly, it aims to give a summary of the meaning of organisational culture and how it is defined. Secondly, it discusses how culture is created and whether or not it can be managed and/or changed. Thirdly, it investigates how subcultures arise and their impact on the overall organisational culture. And, finally, recruitment and selection in relation to culture is briefly touched upon.

2.2.1 What is culture?

As diffuse as the term ‘culture’ may be, as many competing definitions are there that have aimed to explain what culture means in an organisational perspective. In fact, most scholars seem to agree upon that there is very little consensus regarding this matter, for why it is important to outline the different definitions. Starting with Schwartz and Davis (1981, p. 33), their definition of culture can be captured in the following quote:

> Culture, on the other hand, is a pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by the organization’s members. These beliefs and expectations produce norms that powerfully shape the behavior of individuals and groups in the organization.

This view on culture as a set of not only beliefs, but also values, is shared by a series of authors, including Deal and Kennedy (1982), Jones (1983), and Schein (1992) (cited in Rashid et al., 2003). While the beliefs specify what is important, the values present what the organisation stands for (Deal and Kennedy, 1999). Additionally, Schein (2004, p. 17) stresses the historical importance as culture constitutes basic assumptions that ‘was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaption and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid [...]’. In its essence, culture is developed over time and is to be taught to newcomers as the ‘correct way to perceive, think, and feel [...]’ in order to continue solving
the problems as done previously (Schein, 2004, p. 17). Furthermore, Scholz (1987, p. 80) maintain that culture is the ‘implicit, invisible, intrinsic, and informal consciousness’ of those in an organisation, suggesting that culture is something intangible.

In contrast to the early works of American management scholars, in which shared values were considered the backbone, the notable study of Hofstede et al. (1990) proposes that shared perceptions of practices instead form the core of organisational culture. By studying 20 different units from 10 different companies in Denmark and the Netherlands, it was found that practices (also called habits, traditions, conventions, etc.) varied more between different organisations, while employee values tended to vary based on demographics, such as age and nationality. Hofstede et al. argue that the values of an individual are already set from childhood and that entering a particular organisation will not affect them, but instead the individual will be taught the shared practices through ‘socialisation’ processes. The authors suggest that previous literature has focused on the values of ‘corporate heroes’ (founders and leaders) as a means of describing the culture, while ignoring the rest of the organisation’s members, which has led to this divided opinion. However, as the values of leaders still are recognised as having influence on the culture (Hofstede et al., 1990), the concept of organisational culture, as used henceforward, can be summarised as:

1) A set of values and beliefs shared by the members
2) A set of shared practices that is taught to new members
3) Something that is unspoken or intangible

2.2.2 How is culture created?

Although the focus of the present study is not on culture creation, I maintain that in order to understand the cultural effects on an organisation, it is important to understand how cultures arise. According to Schein (2004, p. 225), culture emerges from three different sources. The first, and arguably the most important source, is the founder’s own set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that initially shapes the organisation. For example, it is the founder who sets the basic mission and environmental context, as well as chooses the first group members. Furthermore, the founder affects how initial problems of external adaption and internal integration are solved (Schein, 2004), which could be seen as setting the standard practices for the organisation. Schein also mentions that organisations are deliberately formed with a clear purpose, e.g. to supply a good or service in the case of firms.

The second source of culture is the learning experience of the organisation’s members as it progresses. As previously mentioned, founders’ own ideas of how to solve problems influence how the organisation operates in the beginning. If successful, the behaviour will be preserved and act as a basis of culture.

The third and last source of culture is the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that new members and leaders bring to the organisation. People of different demographics, who are hired, come with their own certain values and perceptions of reality (Hofstede et al., 1990). In the event of a failed leadership of founders, Schein (p. 243) advocates that ‘other leaders will be empowered by the group’. Thus, newcomers’ beliefs, values, and assumptions may become critical in the creation of the organisational culture.
2.2.3 Can culture be changed?

Much of the previous research within organisational culture has focused on examining the relationship between culture and corporate performance. Originating from the 1970’s America, which at the time was under economic pressure from Japanese manufacturing competition, scholars began to advocate Japanese management styles as inspirational examples. Above all, having ‘shared values’ within the organisation – a *culture* – was seen as the key to success (Grey, 2013). Although proven to be a much more difficult task than first anticipated by early pioneers, scholars have investigated the possibility of culture improving organisational commitment (Lok and Crawford, 2004), competitive advantage (Barney, 1986), and financial performance (Rashid et al., 2003).

Naturally, in the search of making better business, the question whether or not organisational culture can be changed in order to achieve such success has been widely debated in research. Altogether, the common opinion among those debaters seems to be that culture is hard to change, but not impossibly so. In the early phase of an organisation, leaders may change the culture and the behaviours of its members rather easily by paying attention to and remarking on certain things that are seen as important (Schein, 2004). However, as time passes, the culture becomes more and more difficult to change. Particularly, there is a *learning anxiety*, which is related to the member having to learn new competencies, taking on a new role, etc., causing him or her to resist change (Schein, 2004). In the case of implementing a new strategy within the organisation, Schwartz and Davis (1981, p. 43) argue:

> Although extremely difficult to accomplish, culture can, and in some instances must, be changed. However, this is a lengthy process requiring considerable resources, and should not be entered into lightly.

Continuing, Schwartz and Davis (pp. 43-44) claim that strong leadership is needed in a gradual process of changing the culture, which should aim to reduce ‘perceived differences between current norms and the new behaviour’. However, managers must also be aware of how to act in accordance with the new culture in order to manage the change properly.

On the contrary, there are those who suggest that the strategy should be changed and not the culture. Scholz (1987) argues that changing the culture is too hard and expensive, wherefore strategy should be formulated to fit the culture of the organisation, besides the obvious requirements of considering corporate capabilities and market situation. Deal and Kennedy (1999, p. 61) agree to this, maintaining that a ‘strategy that asks people to do something unnatural or totally foreign is doomed to a slow death’.

In some cases, nonetheless, Scholz claims that changing the culture is necessary. Firstly, organisational culture must be changed if it is extremely weak, or if it will be in the future market. Secondly, the culture should be changed if the corporate is forced to go in an entirely new direction. However, Barney (1986) is sceptical towards the possibility of changing the culture in order to gain competitive advantages as such activity implies either imitating other successful competitors or consciously managing the culture. Either way, if one corporate can do it, that means everyone can do it, resulting in no competitive advantage at all. Even more scepticism is brought forward by Grey (2013), who argues that advocates for culture management are assuming that culture can be managed. However, referring to the work of Linda Smircich (1983), he
states that cultures are ‘spontaneous, unmanaged, just the way things are’ (p. 68). Furthermore, he speaks of culture in two versions: the ‘real’ and the ‘managed’, implying that managers, in the best of worlds, can change the managed one, but never the real one.

So, what to conclude from this brief overview of cultural change? The opinion among early scholars has been that culture can, but should only be changed if absolutely necessary, as it is considered an extremely difficult task. The more contemporary opinion, however, is that culture should be thought of as something that ’is what it is’, and needs to be taken into consideration when estimating how implementing new strategies will be met by the organisation.

2.2.4 Subcultures

Despite the fact that there is no formal size limit to which the concept of organisational culture no longer can be applied, Schein (2004) admits that at a certain point, cultural variations between different parts of the organisation begin to emerge. When these differences become strong enough, they give rise to so called subcultures, which are formed by their unique experiences, expertise areas, and geographical placements. According to Schein, cultural differentiation may be caused by:

- Functional/occupational differentiation
- Geographical differentiation
- Product, market, or technology differentiation
- Divisionalisation
- Hierarchical level differentiation

In the present study of knowledge and technology-driven companies, which mainly employ people with engineering background and can be considered fairly homogeneous, all but the functional/occupational differentiation are considered relevant.

To begin with, differentiation into geographical units may occur as the organisation needs to come closer to the customers in emerging geographical markets, as well as benefit from cost advantages by reducing distance to market (Schein, 2004). The main consequence of having geographical subcultures, however, is that they unavoidably will be affected by the local cultures in their different geographic areas. According to Schein, a common language and way of communicating is needed in order to prevent conflicts in communication between the different units.

Secondly, differentiation by product, market, or technology occurs as it in time becomes more efficient to separate the organisation in accordance with the different customer groups it serves (Schein, 2004). One of the drivers is that different technology areas attract and employ people with different specialisations and backgrounds. The second driver is that different customers, who are also affected by their own cultural contexts, require different mindsets.

Thirdly, in mature organisations, where business has already been differentiated under the above stated conditions, divisionalisation may occur as a way of integrating different functions according to technology, market, etc. Often, leaders of divisions require autonomy, which does not pose a threat until the parent organisation is to implement common practises in all divisions.
As divisional subcultures develop by their own learning experiences, changing into common practices may be met by resistance.

Lastly, large organisations often develop a number of hierarchical levels to cope with the responsibility given to each manager, which creates subcultures based on rank (Schein, 2004). Schein means that all leaders ‘develop assumptions about human nature and how to manage employees’, but that they are also influenced by the industry and the organisation itself. Importantly, the culture of any hierarchical level is construed by the tasks these managers must face, of which they develop their own assumptions. Thus, a first-line manager with recruitment responsibility may have strong assumptions about how employees should behave, while a manager on higher level might care more about overall strategy and financial results.

2.2.5 Recruitment and selection in a cultural perspective

As previously discussed, culture might be difficult or even impossible to change. However, managers do have the chance to include or exclude members of the organisation through recruitment and selection of individuals (Schein, 2004; Grey, 2013). In his book, Schein (2004, p. 261) states the following:

One of the most subtle yet most potent ways in which leader assumptions get embedded and perpetuated is the process of selecting new members.

Through determination of the core values, managers should be able to choose individuals who can fit into the organisational culture (Rashid et al., 2003). In accordance with Rashid et al., O’Reilly et al. (1991) previously stated that the individual not only needs to fulfil the basic competence requirements, but also have a set of values that are similar to those of the organisational culture. If not met, O’Reilly et al. meant that it would increase the likelihood of the person leaving the organisation. Conversely, a failed fit between the individual and the organisation’s values may also cause the organisation to terminate the individual’s employment, which was infamously done in the 1980’s and 1990’s as a way of managing culture (Grey, 2013). Similarly, who is selected to be promoted or not is also a means of reinforcing the organisational culture (Schein, 2004).

According to Schein (2004), leaders tend to choose individuals who resemble to the current members in terms of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs. These are thought of as the ‘best people to hire’ and help maintain the cultural values. Also leaders themselves are chosen on the basis of the culture, with Schwartz and Davis (1981, p. 35) stating that groups choose leaders who ‘embody the norms of the group’.

2.3 Theoretical framework

Following the literature review, a theoretical framework (see Figure 2) has been developed to illustrate how the different concepts and theories interrelate. As this study attempts to study both sides of employer branding, the theoretical framework has been divided into two subbranches: students’ perspective and managers’ perspective.

Using the definitions of Ambler and Barrow (1996) and Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), the term employer brand can be viewed as the benefits provided by the employer to the employee, while also serving as a means of differentiating the particular company from its competitors. Thus,
employer branding (‘EB’ in Figure 2) becomes the action of building such an identity as an employer. Mainly based on the works by Christiaans (2013), Lievens et al. (2001), and Alniaçık et al. (2014), there are independent variables (demographic factors) that affect how attractive one considers a certain employer brand to be, as well as how effective different employer branding activities are. As Swedish engineering students can be viewed as a subgroup in society, sharing similar demographics and values, they can be considered a subculture according to the definition of Schein (2004). Similarly, managers of a company and a specific division are affected in their decision making and behaviours by the organisational culture and the subculture (Schwartz and Davis, 1981). Importantly, the organisational culture determines their ability or resistance to change, as well as which individuals they find attractive in recruitment and selection (Schein, 2004).

Ultimately, the different needs and demands among students and managers will inevitably cause problems, but also create opportunities, when a company decides to implement a new employer branding strategy. While some scholars (e.g. Chambers et al., 1998) strongly advocate the need to adapt the employer branding strategy at all cost in order to attract talent, other scholars (e.g. Scholz, 1987; Deal and Kennedy, 1999) argue that it is difficult to implement strategies that do not correlate with the organisational culture. How these opposing views should be resolved in order to seize the opportunities remains undiscovered.

2.4 Positioning of present study and research questions

To conclude, a degree of uncertainty and disagreement exists within both fields of employer branding and organisational culture. On one hand, employer branding has been intensively researched in order to develop strategies of how to attract and recruit the right kind of employees in a tightening labour market, but less of what the problems might be when implementing such strategies. On the other hand, the concept of organisational culture and, even more so, the question whether it is manageable or not, has been heavily debated among advocates and critics.
However, its impact on managers from an employer branding point of view, and specifically in their interaction with students, has merely been examined. Therefore, the present study attempts to address the gap in literature of the clash between students’ and managers’ perspectives when an employer branding strategy is to be implemented. In order to do so, it specifically aims to answer the following main research questions that have been formulated with regards to the findings in the literature review:

- **RQ1**: What problems can occur when combining the different perspectives of students and managers in an employer branding strategy?
- **RQ2**: How can these problems be encountered to make the implementation more successful?

Furthermore, to understand the first question, i.e. the different perspectives, the following two sub-research questions need to be answered in the process:

- **Sub-RQ1**: What do students value in potential employers and their employer branding?
- **Sub-RQ2**: What are the values, beliefs, and behaviours of managers that may conflict with the employer branding?
3 Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology for the study is presented. First, the classification of the research and choice of methodology are discussed. Using a mixed methods approach to research, the methods for data collection and analysis are presented. Finally, ethical issues and limitations are discussed.

3.1 Classification and research design

The aim of the present study is to investigate what the problems are of combining engineering students’ and managers’ needs and demands when implementing a student network. Further, it aims to investigate how these problems and opportunities could be encountered in order to make such an implementation more successful in the context of a large, knowledge-driven company. Given the purpose of this study, it can be classified as descriptive research in accordance with Collis and Hussey (2014), who define it as the description of the characteristics related to a particular issue. It is particularly useful when describing phenomena of which knowledge is limited (Blomkvist and Hallin, 2014).

Based on the nature of this study, interpretivism has been identified as the paradigm under which beliefs of reality the research has been conducted. According to Collis and Hussey (2014, p. 45), interpretivism is built upon the belief that ‘social reality is not objective but highly subjective’ and depends on the individual’s perception of reality. Hence, this give rise to multiple realities. Furthermore, it focuses on interpreting the complexity of social phenomena, rather than only measuring them as in the opposing positivist paradigm (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Since the results of this study will be founded upon the different values and perceptions of individuals (i.e. students and managers), as well as the author’s own interpretation of the empirical findings, this research is acknowledged as subjective in accordance with the interpretivism definition.

Moreover, common for studies under the interpretivist paradigm is the use of an inductive approach as the logic of the research (Collis and Hussey, 2014). In their book, Blomkvist and Hallin (2014) describe this approach as using theory in order to understand the empirical results, which may lead to a newly developed theory. Considering that previous research on employer branding from managers’ perspective is rather limited and the aim is to derive an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, the inductive approach is suitable for this study.

The choice of methodology, however, is not as straightforward. On the one hand, this study strives to develop a deep understanding of managers’ needs and demands in a particular company, for which interpretivist methods are appropriate. On the other hand, the study strives to explore the needs and demands of Swedish engineering students in general for which a survey methodology would be more suitable, which is often associated with positivism (Collis and Hussey, 2014). The use of methods from different paradigms should be denoted as ‘mixed methods’, according to Collis and Hussey (2014), who report that the use of this methodology in research is increasing despite much debate. Besides using this approach, it is also worth noting that this study attempts to analyse the empirical findings, both qualitative and quantitative data, with interpretivist methods.
3.2 Data collection

This section describes how data was collected for the literature review and the empirical study. For the empirical study, an archival study and interviews were performed, collecting both secondary and primary data respectively. The following subsections aim to describe the methods used in more detail.

3.2.1 Literature review

In accordance with Collis and Hussey (2014), a thorough literature review was conducted in the beginning of the study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the existing knowledge within the research fields considered relevant for this study. It also exposed the areas of deficient knowledge in the literature, from which the purpose and research questions were designed in order to address these gaps. Furthermore, the findings from the literature review served as a source of inspiration when choosing appropriate methods for the data collection (Collis and Hussey, 2014). As the study progressed, the literature review continued as an iterative process whenever new discoveries were made or extended knowledge was required.

The search procedure followed a systematic approach, as suggested by Collis and Hussey (2014, p. 77). Literature, in the form of articles from peer-reviewed journals and books, was mainly found on Google Scholar, KTHB Primo (the school library database), and in libraries. Examples of keywords and phrases used in the search include 'employer branding’, 'employer branding and corporate culture’, and ‘organisational culture’. The references made by other authors also provided with some guidelines of where to find useful information. Following the recommendations of Blomqvist and Hallin (2014), a list of read authors and their publications, as well as own notes and reflections, were kept in a working document for literature. Moreover, the literature was critically reviewed, meaning that the works of the authors were approached with a questioning and reflective mindset (Blomkvist and Hallin, 2014).

3.2.2 Archival study

An archival study was performed, in which secondary data was collected from a survey on Swedish students’ preferences for employers and employer branding activities. Particularly, surveys are appropriate when the aim is to find general answers (Blomqvist and Hallin, 2014), as was the goal of this study. However, the choice to collect secondary data from an existing survey rather than collecting primary data can be questioned. According to Kiecolt and Nathan (1985), the custom in social sciences has been to promote the collection of primary data. Nonetheless, the authors continue arguing that the use of secondary survey data has many advantages, especially regarding time and cost savings. Another advantage is the possibility to obtain large data samples from different countries, time periods, etc. that are representative for the population, which otherwise would have been difficult to perform by the individual researcher. As an inspirational example, Christiaans (2013) used secondary data from The European Graduate Barometer survey in order to conduct her multilevel and cross-country analysis of students’ preferences.

About the survey  The yearly survey called FöretagsBarometern was issued by the commercial research organisation Universum, which provides with reports and insights on career preferences to help companies build their employer brands. For the 2016 edition of the survey, which
was used in this study, data was gathered from October 2015 until January 2016. The survey, both developed and analysed by Universum, was online-based and distributed via the organisation’s university contacts, alumni networks, communities, and global and local partners. In total, 24,474 students from 30 universities participated in the survey, of which 5,143 respondents were enrolled in a MSc engineering program. However, only data from MSc engineering students was collected for this study.

Procedure Data, in the form of tables and diagrams illustrating the results from the survey, was collected from Universum’s website, which was accessed through a user account provided by the commissioning company. Furthermore, the results on the website were filtered, using the options to only display the results of female or male respondents in order to extract this data as well.

3.2.3 Interviews

Four interviews with managers were conducted in order to gain an understanding of their organisational culture and reality, along with what their needs and demands are regarding employer branding towards students. All four managers were from the commissioning company, but of different divisions and/or business areas in addition to their different placements (see Table 1). Blomkvist and Hallin (2014, p. 70) maintain that interviews are appropriate when the aim is to ‘develop a deep understanding of a phenomenon, or discover new dimensions’, which is necessary in this study since the manager perspective in employer branding is relatively unexplored.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Section Manager</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Luleå</td>
<td>2017-03-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Region Manager</td>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Malmö</td>
<td>2017-03-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Market Area Manager</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Gothenburg</td>
<td>2017-03-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Group Manager</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>2017-04-03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Overview of manager interviews

Population and sample Due to the fact that the population of interest in this study include all managers of knowledge-driven companies in Sweden, a sample had to be selected in order to make the study manageable (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Convenience sampling was made with the help from a contact person at the commissioning company, who provided with the names of suitable respondents. Additionally, purposive sampling was made as the respondents were selected based on their previous experience of the investigated phenomenon (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Two of the respondents had reportedly been in contact with the company’s student network, while the two others had not. This sample raised the possibility of gaining both positive and negative views of the employer branding. Although not necessarily representative for the total population, Collis and Hussey (2014) argue that non-random samples are acceptable in interpretivist studies as the goal is not to make statistical generalisations. Furthermore, it is argued that non-random sampling methods are easier to conduct (Blomkvist and Hallin, 2014), especially considering the time constraints of this study.

Procedure The interviews were semi-structured, in which the respondents were asked questions revolving a number of predetermined themes (see Appendix A). All questions asked were
open-ended, allowing for the respondents to elaborate their answers regarding their experiences and opinions (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Due to geographical constraints, all interviews were conducted over telephone. The benefits of using this method is that it enables a broader geographical sample and reduces travel costs and time (Collis and Hussey, 2014), while at the same time decreasing the quality of the dialogue. For example, it was difficult to hear what the respondents said from time to time, as well as to fully interpret their emotions due to the lack of face-to-face contact. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour, during which audio recordings and notes were made.

3.3 Data analysis

The data collected from the interviews was analysed following a general analytical procedure, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994; cited in Collis and Hussey, 2014). First, all interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings. These transcriptions were subsequently analysed through coding of different keywords and phrases stated by the respondents. The codes were developed from iterating through the material and finding several pieces of interest. Once all transcriptions were coded, the material was yet again analysed with the aim of grouping similar codes into patterns that were found.

A similar approach was given to the secondary data from Universum’s survey, although the data consisted of tables and diagrams. By analysing the statistical results, patterns regarding the students’ perspective could be extracted from the material. Afterwards, these patterns were mapped against the findings and codes from the interviews. Finally, a number of themes emerged from the subgroups of codes and patterns, together with added notes of reflections throughout the analysis process.

3.4 Research ethics

Research ethics concern the moral values that direct the manner in which research is conducted (Collis and Hussey, 2014). In order to conduct the interviews in a correct, ethical manner, this study followed the four ethical principles regarding information, consent, confidentiality, and utility as stated by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). As to the conduct of the survey, however, the following of these principles cannot be guaranteed.

First, the information requirement was fulfilled as all respondents were provided with information about the purpose of the study prior to the interviews. Subsequently, the second requirement of consent was fulfilled as the respondents, after hearing about the purpose, were asked for approval in order to begin with the questions. Additionally, they were informed about their right to cancel their participation at any time of the interview.

The third requirement of confidentiality was completed through considerate handling of personal data. For example, audio recordings and documents (including file names) were cleared from the respondents’ names by giving them pseudonyms, such as ‘Respondent A’. Also, the respondents were assured anonymity in the study. Besides achieving confidentiality, this provided with the benefit of the respondents giving more truthful answers, especially since they were asked sensitive questions about the negative aspects of the company. Finally, the utility requirement was fulfilled as the collected data has been used for this study only.


3.5 Limitations

There are several limitations to the methodology used in this study. First of all, the small sample size for the interviews, and the fact that only one case company was studied, are considered limiting to the generalisability of the findings. Despite that the research was conducted under the interpretivist paradigm, for which a large sample size often is considered less important compared to a positivist study (Collis and Hussey, 2014), it is yet questionable whether or not these findings can be applied to other large, knowledge-driven companies. Due to the small sample size, it was difficult to find any definite patterns of how the organisational culture affect the managers’ attitudes towards employer branding. However, given that other settings share similar characteristics to the company used in this study, the findings could likely be used as indicators.

Second of all, the use of Universum’s survey in the archival study brought additional limitations for two, primary reasons. First, the organisation’s database could only be accessed by membership, which was paid for by the commissioning company. This is evident as Universum, being a commercial research organisation, sell their insights to companies. Consequently, this limits the exact replication, and ultimately the reliability, of the present study, which is worth noting although of less importance in an interpretivist study, according to Collis and Hussey (2014).

Moreover, the content of the survey limited the scope of the analysis. Once the database was accessed, it was made clear that the available data only covered parts of the student perspective, for why the research questions and analysis had to be altered. For example, there were no exact results of what employer branding activities the students prefer, but rather what communication channels are the most effective. As a result, this implicates the validity of the study, as certain relationships could not be measured accurately.

Third of all, at the time of the analysis, it became apparent that more rigorous data describing the managers’ perspective could have been collected from the interviews. For instance, more follow-up questions, that could have facilitated the interpretations, should have been asked when the respondents were diffuse. Furthermore, a pilot test of the interview questions could have been performed in order to improve the reliability.

Lastly, the study was likely limited by the difficulties to access some literary works, specifically within organisational culture. This might be due to the fact that many of the pioneering studies made during the eighties have limited availability in electronic form. Therefore, it may be problematic to understand the interpretations made of some of the cultural phenomena under investigation, which have not been confirmed by previous research.
4 Empirical findings

In this chapter, the empirical findings are presented in thematic fashion. First, the findings covering the students’ perspective from the archival study are presented. Second, the findings from the interviews with managers regarding their perspective are presented.

4.1 Students’ perspective

The following results are based on Universum’s 2016 survey *FöretagsBarometeren*. The results cover MSc engineering students’ attitudes towards career goals, perceived importance of different employer branding attributes, and most effective communication channels for the different stages of the recruitment funnel.

Out of the 5,143 respondents, the gender distribution was 56% males and 44% females. Although all Swedish technology universities were represented in the survey, a large majority of the respondents came from the larger universities: KTH Royal Institute of Technology (27.43%), Chalmers University of Technology (17.02%), and LTH Faculty of Engineering (16.67%). Furthermore, the top three represented disciplines in the survey were Industrial Engineering and Management (22%), Mechanical Engineering (16%), and Design and Product Development (8%). In Appendix B, further details regarding the university and discipline distributions can be found.

4.1.1 Aspiring to achieve balance, security, and intellectual development

In Table 2, results from the survey regarding the MSc engineering students’ perceived importance of different career goals are displayed. From this list of nine predefined career goals, the respondents were allowed to choose a maximum of three options. The percentage represents how many of the respondents in total that chose the particular career goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Career goal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To have work/life balance</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To be secure or stable in my job</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To be competitively or intellectually challenged</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To be dedicated to a cause/To feel that I am serving a greater good</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>To be entrepreneurial or creative/innovative</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>To be a leader or manager of people</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To have an international career</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>To be a technical or functional expert</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>To be autonomous or independent</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Universum, 2016

As can be viewed, the primary goal among engineering students was to have balance between work and personal life, which by Universum has been defined as ‘achieving personal satisfaction from all aspects of life’. Chosen as one of the most important career goals by 52% of the respondents, it was superior to the runner-up: having a secure or stable job situation, chosen by 40% of the respondents. This includes having both employment and financial security, according to
the definition by Universum. Thirdly, to be competitively or intellectually challenged in work was considered important by 33% of the respondents, which indicates that they enjoy working with or solving difficult tasks that few others can. Furthermore, being dedicated to a good cause (30%), being entrepreneurial or creative/innovative (30%), and being a leader/manager (25%) were also considered relatively important.

On the contrary, less of the respondents thought that having an international career is important, with only 25% choosing this option. Of even less importance was to be a technical or functional expert, meaning to develop high-level technical or functional skills, which was chosen by 21% of the respondents. The least important career goal was to be autonomous or independent, only chosen by 19% of the respondents. This indicates that it is less important to have complete freedom, including the option to decide one’s own work structure, conduct, and scheduling.

Table 3: Gender and ranking of career goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career goal</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To have work/life balance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be secure or stable in my job</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be competitively or intellectually challenged</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be dedicated to a cause/To feel that I am serving a greater good</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be entrepreneurial or creative/innovative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be a leader or manager of people</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have an international career</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be a technical or functional expert</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be autonomous or independent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Universum, 2016
** F = Females, M = Males

In Table 3, the differences between male and female respondents’ ranking of the career goals are shown. Interestingly, even though both groups ranked work/life balance the highest, as much as 62% of the female respondents had chosen this career goal in contrast to 46% of the males. Moreover, significant differences can be found for the career goal of being dedicated to a cause, which ranked as number three for the females in contrast to number six for the male respondents. Meanwhile, the males ranked the goal of being a technical or functional expert much higher than the females, with rank five and nine respectively. Otherwise, both groups show similar tendencies regarding the ranking of career goals.

4.1.2 Employment as a step towards a better future

In Table 4, the ten most important employer branding attributes among MSc engineering students can be viewed. From a list of 40 attributes in total, the respondents were asked to rank the importance of each attribute on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, representing 'not important at all' and 'very important' respectively. All attributes were categorised into four different drivers: Reputation & Image, People & Culture, Job characteristics, and Remuneration & Advancement opportunities. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to choose which three of the attributes that they considered most important.
Table 4: The ten most important employer branding attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Driver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Good reference for future career</td>
<td>Remuneration &amp; Advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A creative and dynamic work environment</td>
<td>People &amp; Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>High future earnings</td>
<td>Remuneration &amp; Advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Attractive/exciting products and services</td>
<td>Reputation &amp; Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Leaders who support my development</td>
<td>People &amp; Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Professional training and development</td>
<td>Job characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Variety of assignments</td>
<td>Job characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Challenging work</td>
<td>Job characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Inspiring purpose</td>
<td>Reputation &amp; Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Secure employment</td>
<td>Job characteristics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Universum, 2016

Overall, extrinsic attributes, such as a good reference for future career, high future earnings, and attractive/exciting products or services, were perceived as highly important by the respondents. However, intrinsic attributes associated with culture, such as being in a creative/dynamic work environment and having supportive leaders, were also highly ranked. Moreover, a vast majority of the attributes were associated with job characteristics. According to the survey results, professional training and development opportunities, varying and challenging work, and secure employment were viewed as attractive. Lastly, and similarly to the important career goal of working for a good cause, an inspiring purpose was also among the ten most important attributes.

Table 5: Gender and perceived importance of employer branding attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Good reference for future career</td>
<td>A creative &amp; dynamic work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leaders who support my development</td>
<td>High future earnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A creative &amp; dynamic work environment</td>
<td>Good reference for future career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Secure employment</td>
<td>Attractive/exciting products &amp; services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Variety of assignments</td>
<td>Professional training &amp; development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Attractive/exciting products &amp; services</td>
<td>Challenging work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Professional training &amp; development</td>
<td>Leaders who support my development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>High future earnings</td>
<td>Variety of assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Inspiring purpose</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Challenging work</td>
<td>Leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Universum, 2016

Also for the perceived importance of employer branding attributes, Table 5 displays how male and female respondents ranked them differently. While the males ranked high future earnings as second most important, females ranked this as number eight. Conversely, females ranked supportive leaders as number two, which only received rank seven for the male respondents. Furthermore, secure employment ranked as the fourth most important attribute for females, while this attribute was not even among the top ten for males. Another attribute that ranked
on their top ten but not on the males’ was inspiring purpose. Meantime, males alone ranked innovation and leadership opportunities among their top ten.

4.1.3 The importance of in-person channels increases

According to Universum, the impact of different communication channels on students vary depending on which stage they are at in the recruitment funnel. Based on which channels the respondents reportedly have used to find information about employers, Table 6 shows the three most effective communication channels per stage.

Table 6: The most effective communication channels in the recruitment funnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Channels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Awareness</td>
<td>• Career magazines/guides/books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• University press &amp; student organisation publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Career fairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Consideration</td>
<td>• University press &amp; student organisation publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Brochures presenting career possibilities at a company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Desire</td>
<td>• Conferences arranged and hosted by employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Employer office/site visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Employer presentations on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Application</td>
<td>• Informational interviews with employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Skills training sessions organised by employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Employer office/site visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Universum, 2016

At the awareness stage, the task is to make students aware of the company. Here, printed materials alongside career fairs, which are denoted as an in-person channel, are considered effective. While printed materials, and also social media, are continuously effective throughout the following consideration stage, in-person channels are crucial at the two last stages of desire and application. In order to make students want to work at and eventually apply for a certain company, different in-person activities that are arranged by the employer were considered the most effective. In particular, informational interviews, training sessions, and office visits are highly effective in order to increase the students’ application intentions.

4.2 Managers’ perspective

Four interviews were conducted with managers at the commissioning company (referred to as 'The Company’) – a large, Swedish engineering and consulting company that recruits employees from a wide range of engineering disciplines, both for entry and senior positions. Like many other companies within knowledge and technology-driven industries, the company is concerned with the problem of attracting the right talent in order to assure supply of competence and future growth. Thus, the company has developed different strategies and initiatives to communicate with students as a means of strengthening its employer brand.
One such strategy is a student network, which currently has about 2,000 students registered across Sweden. The purpose of the student network is for the company to early establish a presence among and build long-term relations with engineering students by recruiting and offering them as student consultants to their clients. For the students, the network provides an opportunity to gain relevant work experience within the engineering profession, which the company hopes will also lead them to continue their employment after graduation. Simultaneously, the company is able to make a small profit on the student consultants and learn to know them as prospective employees.

However, the human resource management of the company, which carries the central responsibility for the employer branding, is experiencing problems with the student network, which they describe as ‘idle’ and not actively marketed towards students. Therefore, the aim of the interviews was to investigate the underlying problems from the managers’ perspective, both regarding the specific student network and the company’s employer branding as a whole. The following subsections aim to summarise the findings from the interviews. For full case descriptions, see Appendix C.

4.2.1 Comprehensive responsibilities and tasks

Coming from engineering backgrounds, all four respondents had various length of experience in other manufacturing or consulting firms prior to entering The Company. Their different business areas range from a broad spectrum of technologies, including project management within infrastructure projects to software and system development within embedded IT systems. Common for all business areas, however, is that all assignments are project-based, with consultants working both in-house and at the client’s office. Although varying in ranks within The Company, they all recounted their roles as having comprehensive responsibility for their respective units’ overall performance and employees.

My role is that I have staff liability, responsibility for results and that I have to find new assignments. I have to make sure we have utilisation and something to do.
(Respondent A)

Respondent B and C, besides having the above stated responsibilities, are also responsible for their entire geographical and technological areas respectively, as they rank higher than the other two respondents. As for staff liability, which all respondents have, extensive tasks are included:

Seeing it as a staff manager, you are responsible for recruitment, growth, and to take in more competence, but you also need to take responsibility for the group itself and that the individuals have the right competence development. (Respondent C)

4.2.2 The large and successful company with big-size problems

The respondents seem to have corresponding views of The Company, which overall was described as a large engineering company with a long and successful history and that is still pushing forward, much thanks to its driven employees. Some respondents reckoned that the company is characterised by a strong sense of professionalism, seriousness, and long-term thinking, which is also reflected by their clientele, which is comprised of other large, long-lived technology companies. Also, most of the respondents highlighted the company’s width and broad offering as particularly outstanding:
When I meet with clients, I talk about our incredible scope and that we practically can offer consultants to solve any types of questions for any types of clients. (Respondent D)

Moreover, the large size is seen as bringing stability and structure to the company, which mostly is viewed in a positive way as it means that delivery towards clients can be assured:

I believe there is a good structure, even though the company is so large. There are many templates, we know everything, and you can always find something. There are many experts within a lot of different areas. I feel secure when meeting with clients – like The Company has my back. (Respondent A)

However, the large company size is not problem-free. All respondents agreed to the negative effects, which mostly include heavy administration. There seems to be a general opinion that the administrative tasks, such as time reporting and invoicing, are much too time-consuming.

There is a system for things. There are structures and processes and when they do not work... Well, you have to live with it. Administration, processes, and reporting on that level is probably not something most of us are passionate about. It is the downside, that it is more of that. But I do not consider it to be a specific problem for us, but rather related to the size. (Respondent C)

Furthermore, the size is believed to increase isolation and complicate the communication between the separate divisions:

The Company is very large. Because it is a consulting company and all sections run their own businesses with respective responsibilities, the communication is a bit exhausting. (Respondent D)

Nonetheless, the company is seen as having a well known and strong brand that is very beneficial, not least when bringing in new clients and recruiting employees. Respondent C considered this to be one of the company’s greatest assets as he thought it is important for individuals to 'belong to a team that is perceived as successful’. Respondent A also agreed to this view as she recounted that The Company’s brand and marketing is what drew her attention away from its competitors.

I have always had my sights on The Company when I was studying. I felt that they were good at exposing themselves. I think that it was sometime during my studies when they started this brand journey. It was The Company that I knew about of all the consulting firms. (Respondent A)

4.2.3 Leadership reinforcing 'freedom with responsibility'

The leadership of The Company is unanimously described as decentralised, giving great responsibility to the individual manager, who is free to make own decisions:

All managers within The Company are responsible for their own businesses and are rather detached from the next managing level. It is more coaching and guidance between managers. You are allowed to make your own decisions and your own businesses and recruitments. So, there is an entrepreneurial spirit. (Respondent D)
However, the leadership is also described as business-driven with focus on financial performance. Several respondents denoted it as ‘freedom with responsibility’, meaning that managers are free to rule on their own, as long as they deliver desired results:

You can do as you please, as long as you do it well. There are pros and cons to that. It can put pressure on the individual if one does not have the experience to put together the numbers. But, that is more of a foundation. Given that, one has great freedom to accomplish things, which is true for all managing levels really.

(Respondent C)

Respondent C also suggested that the leadership style might differ between the different parts of the organisation. Respondent B agreed to this view, adding that conflicts and ‘territorial thinking’ sometimes arise as an implication of the differences between sections and managers. Furthermore, as a consequence of the decentralisation, Respondent B thought that there is a disconnection between the targets on the organisation level versus the section level:

There are certain targets within the company, saying where we are heading and why. Then, there are targets on a local level and how to act on the local market, but there should be more clear targets on a level in between. (Respondent B)

As for their own leadership styles, all respondents emphasised on coaching and communication, stating the importance of having an open and continuous dialogue with their employees in order to help them and the business to develop.

4.2.4 The performance-driven and open engineering culture

When asked to describe the corporate culture, all respondents became unsure of what to say, giving different views of it. However, it was mostly depicted as nurturing an open and tolerating climate, in which much focus is on coaching and knowledge exchange.

When someone has an idea, it is not like people reject it or say ‘we have never done that’ or ‘that will never work’. (Respondent B)

Furthermore, the respondents believed that the culture is performance-driven, in which people are motivated to reach the targets and become the best, though in a prestigeless and cautious sense:

It is a rather non-selfish culture, at least in my opinion. It is not OK to move forward by treading on others’ toes. And then, I believe that the culture, if you think of the whole firm, is reflected by an engineering orientation. There is a view that things should be right, correct, logical, and understandable. (Respondent C)

The engineering culture, according to Respondent D, also seems to affect the way of handling clients. They value professionalism, honesty, and trust.

If we say we are going to deliver something to the client, we will also do so, and not just empty promises. The engineering spirit is something that is present. We are all engineers who want to solve the client’s problem, not some sleazy salespersons who are out meeting the clients. We are engineers who have been in the same position and understand the client. (Respondent D)
Several of the respondents also noted on the possible cultural differences between the different geographical units, divisions, and sections. Although team work and team spirit is encouraged within the entire organisation, Respondent C acknowledged the difficulties of bringing the whole company together:

It is difficult to make time for being ‘one company’ and to cooperate across the boarders. It is not so much about dislike, but rather that there is no time and space to manage that. (Respondent C)

4.2.5 High expectations on an attractive employer

All respondents seemed to agree that others, not least students, perceive The Company as large, ambitious, and successful and that it is involved in exciting projects. Also, Respondent D claimed that The Company is viewed as innovative, especially regarding its technical solutions and business conduct.

I think that you value the width – that there are opportunities to meet with different clients and to have an interesting career. I think you value that we are big and have many possibilities to change clients and work tasks. That we are innovative is fun, I think. We come up with new solutions. (Respondent D)

Despite being well known amongst students, however, the respondents were concerned that they might have a narrow image and limited knowledge of what The Company does:

Many [students] have a connection to the company or know about it in one way or another. There are very few people who do not know what The Company is. But then, you might not know what we do. Many are impressed by all the things we do that they might not know about or have seen in other contexts. (Respondent B)

Furthermore, the respondents believed that the company is perceived as an attractive employer with plenty of development opportunities and a fun and pleasant work environment. Respondent B added to this, arguing that having The Company on the resume is a merit. Overall, they thought that the students’ image corresponded well to their own perceptions of the company. Nevertheless, all four respondents were worried that the positive company image might induce too high expectations among the students, which are difficult to fulfil once they are on ‘the inside’.

The brand itself is what attracts [them]. However, sometimes I feel that it is hard to live up to the students’ expectations because we advertise ourselves as the ones with the most exciting assignments. But a great deal of our everyday life is to do easier assignments – it is the clients’ needs that control what we do. (Respondent A)

Additionally, Respondent C argued that there is a mismatch in the perception of the life as a consultant. For example, the respondent thought that students are unaware of that most projects take place at the client’s office, during which the consultant has very little connection to the home office.

Once you are a part of The Company as a newly graduate or new recruit, you will be assigned to a project at the client’s office that will last for years, perhaps. You will not see what The Company does. You will not do as much in The Company’s
accommodation, but rather as an individual at the client’s. (Respondent C)

4.2.6 Socially skilled and experienced candidates

When searching for newly graduates for recruitment, the respondents presented a wide range of criteria that candidates are assessed by. First of all, having a proper engineering education within a relevant field and an interest in technology were considered basic requirements. In addition, previous work experience within a relevant industry was desired, although to a varying extent. Respondent A insisted that the candidates should have ‘seen the reality’ in some way, while Respondent D wished to see candidates who have been working in technology companies for the past summers, doing relevant projects. Respondent C also said that he regards extracurricular activities as meriting.

As for personal abilities and characteristics, the respondents claimed the importance of being socially competent as the candidates should be able to ‘handle the client’. For example, the candidates should be confident, self-aware, open, and curious. Most importantly, they should also have an inner drive:

In the consultant role that we have, you must have the drive to do your own work. No one is going to come here and tell you what to do, but rather you are in charge of your own work. (Respondent B)

However, Respondent D requested a balance between drive and humbleness:

You should not be too much of a ‘high flyer’. You should have the will to move forward, but you should not believe that you will become CEO within the next three years. (Respondent D)

On the question whether it is easy or difficult to find and recruit graduates, all but Respondent C claimed that it is relatively easy to find the right people and competence, although varying depending on the complexity of the assignment. In contrast, Respondent C maintained that the tough and competitive labour market in Gothenburg and other parts of Sweden made the recruitment more difficult.

It is a great challenge, finding enough people. Viewing it as a funnel, the biggest challenge is to fill it up properly. (Respondent C)

4.2.7 Lack of knowledge, resources, and incentives

When asked to assess their own units’ involvement in the employer branding activities of the company, most of the respondents considered themselves as relatively active. For instance, most respondents replied that they are participating in career fairs at the universities, as well as in different events. However, the participation amongst the employees seemed to vary according to the length of experience:

Younger employees are more interested in sharing on social media, for example what we do, what we think, and how we collaborate, while the older ones are less interested in that sort of commitment. For them, the projects are more important. It is the younger employees who have been at the get-togethers at LTH [Faculty of Engineering at Lund University]. (Respondent B)
Two of the respondents argued that the employer branding strategy is too centralised, which often results in lack of involvement from the sections and their respective first-level managers.

I feel that the employer branding work is quite centralised, which is not always a good thing. It is good that there is a presence, that we are professional. But I as a manager for the business think it is very good to come out and meet with students in order to talk about The Company from my perspective and find interesting individuals on site. (Respondent D)

About The Company’s current student network, all respondents were positive to its existence. Despite this fact, there seemed to be a lack of knowledge and devotion to work with it. Respondent A admitted that she usually promotes the network at career fairs, but that she is not fully aware of how it works or what students get out from being members:

I think it is great to have something [the student network]. It felt really great at LARV [the career week at Luleå University of Technology]. I could say to the students to ‘log in here’ and so on. But I feel that I know too little and had wished for a template or something to show to the students – so you know where to look. (Respondent A)

Additionally, the respondents had noticed the low level of activity in the network:

When you go to visit the website, you see that it can be up to one or two years since they last were online, so there is not much activity in it. It is not like you are online and updating your profile, and so on. And you do not do that, because there is no point to it. (Respondent B)

The respondents insisted that more assignments need to be offered in order to make the student network more attractive and useful. However, they were disagreeing whether or not this could be accomplished. On one hand, Respondent D thought that it is just a matter of promotion and managers having the right knowledge and mindset to sell this kind of service to clients, since he had experienced an increased demand from the clients. On the other hand, Respondent B argued that the demand on student consultants from the client side might not be large enough to stimulate the whole network. Furthermore, Respondent A brought up the matter of cost:

I do not feel like there is a need… We are not bad, we attract and I feel like I have a good selection when recruiting graduates and so on. So I do not believe that we have to spend so much money on it. (Respondent A)

Furthermore, she thought of it as a matter of prioritising:

You focus on finding assignments for the employees you already have. You are more reactive and must solve the current needs. (Respondent A)

Respondent B, although the only one commenting the following, brought up yet another problematic aspect:

In reality, there are no obstacles, but rather a matter of organisation and new ways of thinking, to see the opportunities in testing younger employees and not be afraid of… Well, they do not have that much experience when coming here, but they
can always contribute with something and see how it flies. I think it is up to us managers and employees to rethink how we work. (Respondent B)

As suggested improvements, the respondents replied that the network should offer additional activities and events and that the value of being a part of it should be concretised. Since the respondents also thought that employer branding activities are time-consuming, it was suggested that some explicit unit should work with the network and that managers should be provided with information and materials to use when promoting it to students.
5 Analysis and discussion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the different perspectives of engineering students and managers of a knowledge-driven company in order to identify and encounter problems that might occur when implementing an employer branding strategy. More specifically, it will attempt to formulate an understanding of what students value in potential employers and their employer branding, as well as the needs of the managers. In the following sections, the findings will be thematically analysed and discussed in order to answer the main research questions:

- What problems can occur when combining the different perspectives of students and managers in an employer branding strategy?
- How can these problems be encountered to make the implementation more successful?

However, in order to answer the first research question, the following two sub-queries need to be answered as well:

- What do students value in potential employers and their employer branding?
- What are the values, beliefs, and behaviours of managers that may conflict with the employer branding?

5.1 Identified problems of combining the perspectives

Based on the empirical study, three problems have been identified that might serve as obstacles to a successful implementation of an employer branding strategy. First, the different views of the employer among students and managers increase the risk of mismatch. Second, the strong divisions and arising subcultures complicate the communication of the strategy. Third, and last, the strong culture and conception of leadership decrease the managers’ adaptability. In the following subsections, these three problems will be discussed in greater detail.

5.1.1 Different views of the employer increase risk of mismatch

To begin with, the findings indicate that students and managers have altered views of what the employer should and can offer to its employees. This interpretation opens up to a discussion of the clashing views that might cause problems of mismatch.

Students in search for something more  The findings present an overall view of Swedish engineering students as wanting more out of work, and even life itself. In the survey, having work and life balance as well as being dedicated to a cause ranked as number one and four respectively on the list of career goals, indicating the students’ desire to achieve more than professional success and to do good in the world. Furthermore, it appears as if they strive to take on challenges and accomplish extraordinary things, besides having a stable and secure work situation. Surprisingly, however, was that the students appeared to be more attracted to extrinsic employer branding attributes, such as receiving a good reference for future career and high future earnings, in combination with working for an employer who provides with attractive products or services. Also, a creative and dynamic work environment, categorised as an intrinsic and ’soft’ factor, ranked highly as number two. In contrast, challenging work, inspiring purpose, and
secure employment, all connected to the most important career goals, received lower rankings whilst still being among the top ten.

Regarding age as an individual factor affecting the importance of different employer branding attributes, these findings are mostly in line with Reis and Braga (2016). However, Sengupta et al. (2015) found that values related to life balance and security were positively correlated with age, much in contradiction to the findings of the present study. A possible explanation is that the two studies have been conducted in different cultural contexts, influenced by Indian and Swedish values respectively. According to the findings of Christiaans (2013), Sweden can be assessed as a economically prosperous country that relatively highly rewards individuals for their performance and care for other people and moderately engages in future-oriented behaviours (e.g. planning), while relying less on social norms and rules, in comparison to the other European countries in her study. As such, Christiaans suggest that people in countries with these characteristics tend to value job security and professional development more than promotion opportunities, no matter what the age, partially explaining the contradicting results.

From the aspect of educational background, the findings can only partly be supported by previous studies. As earlier mentioned in Section 5.1.2, Christiaans (2013) found that engineering students tend to place a higher value on job security than do business students. In contrast, Christiaans further suggests that business students value promotion opportunities, professional development, and employer success in the market more than engineering students. However, findings from the present study indicate that engineering students also are attracted to professional development and working for an employer that has a good reputation, besides valuing job security.

Ineffective promotion Knox and Freeman (2006) suggest that students and part-time recruiters have different perceptions of the importance of employer branding attributes. Furthermore, their findings indicate that part-time recruiters have positively exaggerated views of how their employer brands are perceived by students. That is, part-time recruiters may believe that certain attributes, although not seen as attractive by students, are worth promoting and possibly made worse by their belief that students are more allured than they are.

As for The Company, the managers can clearly be regarded as part-time recruiters. Whilst this is not their only responsibility, it constitutes an important part of their work, according to the respondents. Correspondingly to the suggestions of Knox and Freeman, the respondents also appear to have a slightly altered view of what students value in an employer, possibly infused by their confidence in The Company’s ‘strong brand’ and reputation as an ‘attractive employer’. From the interviews, it appears as if the respondents believe that The Company’s market success, development opportunities, innovation ability, and pleasant work environment attract the students. Although market success and development opportunities seem important to the students, working for a particularly innovative employer with a friendly work environment do not appear to be of the highest priority, with these ranking as number 11 and 18 respectively on the students’ list of attributes. As for the students’ career goals, the respondents’ recounts indicate that they are not promoting values related to work/life balance and being dedicated to a good cause. Despite that the degree to which employees of The Company have a good balance between work and private life could not be entailed by the interview findings, the fact
that The Company provides with technical solutions, improving society, could be determined. For this reason, the managers are believed to ineffectively promote certain attributes that are less necessary, instead of focusing on other, inherent attributes of the company that fulfil students’ career goals.

High expectations that are difficult to live up to Yet another problem, investigated by Jablin (2001), is that applicants often have unrealistic expectations on the employer. According to Jablin, this is mostly caused by traditional recruiting, in which only positive sides are enhanced and communicated to the applicants. Even though it seems like the best means of attracting applicants, the problem of expectations still become apparent once they are recruited.

During the interviews, it was evident that all respondents were concerned that students have too high expectations of what working there will be like. Respondent A thought that The Company exposing itself as 'having the most exciting assignments’ leads to a not completely accurate view of the actual day-to-day work. Respondent C agreed, stating that students might have an incomplete view of the consulting role, implying that some students do not expect working at the client’s office for a long period of time. Furthermore, for those who hope to make a rapid, professional development, two of the respondents argued that there are opportunities, but that it often takes considerable amounts of time and work. Thus, the students expectations might not be aligned with the organisational reality.

Different rankings require adapted employer branding Additionally to investigating the aggregated results of the Universum survey, this study also presented the rankings of career goals and employer branding attributes according to gender. Of these results, it can be concluded that males and females have somewhat different career goals, where males to a larger extent hope to become technical experts, whereas females strive to work for the greater good. Although difficult to find a definite pattern in their different rankings of employer branding attributes, females were found to value secure employment and supportive leaders significantly higher than males, besides also showing preferences for high future earnings. These findings are in line with Alniaçık and Alniaçık (2012), Christiaans (2013), and Sengupta et al. (2015), who imply that females consider a broader selection of attributes when evaluating a potential employer.

Consequently, there is an increased difficulty for managers to adapt their communication of the employer brand to different subgroups. However, this is recommended by previous studies, indicating that resources can be used more effectively if the employer branding is segmented (Moroko and Uncles, 2009; Alniaçık et al., 2014).

5.1.2 Strong culture and conception of leadership decrease adaptability

The findings from the empirical study indicate that the strong culture and conception of leadership among managers seem to decrease their ability to adapt their work procedures in order to fit the current employer branding strategy. In this case, the employer branding strategy was to increase awareness and build long-term relations with engineering students by offering them part-time work through a student network. Importantly, the goal was to make the students continue working for the company once graduated.

Students in need of direct interaction From the findings of the archival study, it can be said that in-person communication channels are the most effective in the last steps of the recruitment
funnel, in which the students are made to desire the company as an employer and to ultimately consider to apply. Examples of in-person channels, or activities more properly, included informational interviews as well as training sessions with the employer. Hence, it is possible to make the interpretation that students place a higher value on having direct interaction with the employer as they progress through their education and come closer to the application stage.

These findings can be confirmed by Collins and Stevens (2002), who found that students, who are exposed to early recruitment-related activities of a particular company, are more likely to apply in the future. Especially, word-of-mouth endorsements were found to have the greatest impact on their application intentions. Although publicity, advertisement, and other printed materials were found to raise more awareness, Collins and Stevens, and also Wilden et al. (2010), argue that word-of-mouth endorsements from current employees are seen as the most credible source of information. In order for students to fully comprehend what working for a particular employer will be like, direct interaction is necessary (Lemmink et al., 2003). Therefore, offering the students work opportunities, during which they both can interact with other employees and practise the work tasks, seems like a viable strategy from the students’ perspective.

A clash between strategy and culture? From the managers’ perspective, on the other hand, implementing this kind of strategy would naturally require the development of new work procedures, behaviours, and competencies. For example, Respondent D argued that the managers must know how to sell the student consultants to their clients. In addition, Respondent B thought that the managers had to come up with new assignments that the students, with their limited experience, still can contribute to.

However, Deal and Kennedy (1999) suggest that asking people to act beyond the cultural constraints results in failure, wherefore the strategy rather than the culture should be changed. Many scholars (e.g. Schwartz and Davis, 1981) recount for the impact that culture has on the thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours of the individuals in an organisation. From the interviews, respondents describe the corporate culture as performance-driven with a desire to ‘become the best’. Moreover, being a long-lived company that mainly has employed engineers throughout the years, an engineering culture has been cultivated over time, in which importance is placed on solving the client’s problems. Additionally, since leaders ‘embody the norms of the group’ (Schwartz and Davis, 1981, p. 35), the culture is also reflected by their leadership. Unanimously described as reinforcing ‘freedom with responsibility’, leaders are free in their own decision-making, as long as they manage to deliver the required financial results. As a result from these descriptions and the theoretical framework, the interpretation that has been made is that the strong corporate culture and conception of leadership decrease the managers’ adaptability to the employer branding strategy in question. To support this argument, there are several examples entailed by the recounts of the respondents.

Limited time and focus on results force priorities First of all, time seems to be a scarce resource at The Company, which causes problems when managers need to make time to offer students work opportunities. According to all respondents, the large size of The Company seems to bring stability and security at the expense of time-consuming structures and procedures, as well as heavy administration. Even more important, however, is that the performance-driven culture and leadership seem to force the managers to prioritise their tasks in order to achieve the
results as required. For instance, Respondent A claimed it was necessary to prioritise the finding of assignments to her full-time employees, as one of her foremost tasks was to keep a high utilisation rate. Thus, she felt that she had rather limited time to find and plan for assignments to part-time student consultants.

The priorities are also noticeable on the employees’ different levels of involvement in The Company’s employer branding. For example, Respondent B had noticed that the younger employees were more committed to attending student events and sharing their experiences on social media. Meanwhile, the senior employees tended to prioritise the projects. Hence, it is reasonable to believe that as the responsibilities grow, the more time is devoted to focusing on the results, according to the cultural beliefs in The Company. Changing this behaviour is therefore likely to cause what Schein (2004) has denoted as learning anxiety, which occurs when the individual has to learn new procedures, take on new roles, or develop other competencies in accordance with a cultural change. As an implication, Schein argues that learning anxiety can cause individuals to resist the change. For this reason, changing the culture is not considered optimal (Scholz, 1987).

*Engineering values decrease risk propensity* Second of all, the cultural beliefs and the conception of leadership are also interpreted as limiting the managers’ risk propensity as they do not wish to jeopardise their financial performance. Respondent C believed that The Company had been labelled as ‘cautious’ from an external view, which he admitted to being relatively true and that The Company could be more daring. This cautious mindset, however, is believed to be associated with The Company’s apparent engineering culture. For example, Christiaans (2013) found that engineering students tend to value job safety much higher than, for example, business students. Similarly, safety and stability were also valued as some of The Company’s most positive attributes by the respondents.

Despite the fact that engineering culture in itself is an unexplored research field, Schein (2004) argues that occupations can be considered to have cultures if they involve a thorough education, in which attitudes, norms, and values are taught to the apprentice. Therefore, the recounts of the respondents indicate that The Company’s strong engineering culture have cultivated a higher risk aversion than other occupational cultures. As such, taking unnecessary risks in work might not come naturally to the managers of The Company. Respondent A confirmed to this, stating that she found it unnecessary to take the cost, and ultimately the financial risk as she is held accountable, of hiring student consultants. Especially, this becomes apparent as she did not consider The Company to have urgent problems with attracting students.

*High demands on recruits make managers hesitate* Last of all, the managers might hesitate to hire students as their cultural beliefs and values place high demands on certain personal qualities and experience. According to Schein (2004, p. 261), the selection of new members to an organisation is ‘one of the most subtle yet potent ways in which leader assumptions are embedded and perpetuated’. In other words, recruitment can be viewed as a means of preserving the culture, in which leaders choose newcomers who resemble its current members (Schein, 2004). Otherwise, failing to find a person-organisation fit often results in termination of employment (O’Reilly et al., 1991; Grey, 2013).
As mentioned earlier, the engineering culture within The Company is believed to place importance on problem solving. On the face of it, the respondents almost seemed proud to be engineers, who truly understand the clients and have the capacity to deliver as promised. Furthermore, professionalism was regarded by many of the respondents as one of the cornerstones. Thus, it came as no surprise that the respondents also had high demands on the ones they recruit to the organisation. Conducting business within advanced technology areas, the respondents said that they required a technical interest, a formal engineering education, and previous work experience within a relevant company or industry. Additionally, they all seemed to search for open individuals who are comfortable in the consultant role, which they defined as requiring high social skills and an inner drive. Since recruits often are chosen on the basis of the culture (O’Reilly et al., 1991; Schein, 2004; Grey, 2013), it is possible to interpret that the managers find it troublesome to hire students because of their relative inexperience. That is, they might be concerned that the students do not fit their value of being professional and able to solve all problems. For example, Respondent B claimed that the managers’ hesitation to hire students depended on their insecurity of what the students could contribute with.

5.1.3 Subcultures create communication problems

As described in the previous theme, The Company seems to be characterised by a strong organisational culture, which affects not least the managers in their behaviours and decisions. However, there is also reason to believe that the large and long-lived company, with its specific divisions, have strong subcultures that complicate the communication of the common employer branding strategy.

The emergence of subcultures within The Company To begin with, Respondent B described The Company’s journey from its foundation in the late 19th century, when it was an engineering firm specialised towards technical industry solutions only. Since then, The Company has extended its offering, developing competencies within several technological areas, such as infrastructure and IT. Furthermore, it has extended its presence to cover several geographical areas, both domestically and internationally. As a result, The Company, nowadays, is parted into large, technological divisions, which are further divided into smaller sections focusing on specific business areas within the technology. Additionally, the sections are spread out across different geographical placements.

In accordance with Schein (2004), this geographical and divisional differentiation in a mature organisation, such as The Company, can be viewed as giving rise to subcultures within the different parts of the firm. Characterised by their learning experiences, areas of expertise, and local cultures, in which they act, these subcultures will have their own sets of beliefs, values, and assumptions (Schein, 2004). For example, it is plausible that those working with infrastructure within The Company apply a slightly different mindset to their businesses in comparison to those working with IT, who have other types of competencies and backgrounds. All the respondents admitted to this, reckoning that cultural and leadership differences may exist between the different parts of the organisation. In addition to the overall organisational culture, the managers can therefore be interpreted as influenced by the particular subculture they belong to.

Lack of common goal Schein (2004) argues that divisional differentiation often results in high level of autonomy, as leaders of such divisions often seek independence in their decision-
making. However, Schein reckons that this might cause complications when the parent organisation tries to communicate a common practice or strategy for all divisions, wherefore it can be difficult to unite under the same goal.

From the empirical findings, this seems to be the case for The Company as well. Respondent B believed that the decentralised leadership not only lead to ‘territorial thinking’ among managers, but also create a lack of concrete target picture. More specifically, she reasoned that the targets on organisation level were not concretised on local level. That is, she thought it was difficult for managers to interpret what they need to do in order to achieve the organisational targets. Consequently, it appears as if the managers are on their own, instead of working towards a common strategy. This was also confirmed by Respondent C and D, who argued that the employer branding, which unlike the leadership is more centralised, fails to become concrete on a local level. While managers do not know what is expected of them, they are also asking ‘what is in it for me?’. Ultimately, this has resulted in varying levels of commitment to the employer branding work, depending on the individual managers’ perceived need of exposure to students. For instance, Respondent D recounted that he finds and makes contact with students on his own, while Respondent A thought it is enough to appear at career fairs only.

**Lack of knowledge** Another evident consequence of the communication problems within the organisation and its divisions is that it appears to be a lack of knowledge among the managers of how the current student network works. This finding can be seen as consistent with Schein’s (2004) theory of subcultures, in which he proclaims that the lack of common language and communication can result in conflicting views between different units. All the respondents were more or less unsure of what it means for a student to be a member of the network, what the offered value is, and how the managers themselves can benefit from using it. For example, Respondent A knew that such a network existed, and used to advertise it to students, but did not know what the students could do more than to sign up.

**Lack of collaboration** Finally, the communication problems also seem to hinder the collaboration between different parts of The Company. From a financial perspective, Respondent A argued that a collaboration between several sections could mean that the cost of hiring a student consultant could be split by multiple profit centres, decreasing the cost for the individual manager.

However, on the face of the findings, this seems to be a rather difficult task to accomplish in reality. Although most of the respondents emphasised the importance of team work and an open communication in the organisational culture, this seemed to be true only within the divisions. Respondent D thought that because of the large company size, the communication between the different units is ‘exhausting’. Respondent C further added to this, saying that there simply is no time left for cross-divisional collaboration. The findings of Lok and Crawford (1999) indicate that subcultures have a greater impact on the employees’ commitment than the overall, organisational culture. That is, employees tend to identify with and be more loyal to their specific units than to the company as a whole. Hence, it is plausible that the managers are more devoted to developing their own business units and employees, rather than to collaborate with other units or on an organisational level to accomplish the common employer branding strategy.
5.2 Encountering the problems

This analysis has discussed three problem areas as identified from the empirical study of combining both students’ and managers’ perspectives on employer branding. Taking inspiration from both previous research and the findings of the present study, this section aims to provide with suggestions to how the problems could be encountered in order to make the implementation of an employer branding strategy more successful and grounded in the organisation.

5.2.1 Concretise the student offering

To start with, this study has provided with evidence of students and managers having different views of what they dream of achieving as well as what is considered attractive in an employer. As a result, this has caused different kinds of mismatch problems: ineffective promotion, high expectations that are difficult to meet, and an employer branding that needs adaption to the subgroups of male and female engineering students. Therefore, there is a need to concretise the student offering in order for the managers to know what to emphasise on when interacting with students, and also to mediate a truthful image of The Company so that students know what to expect from a potential employment.

In accordance with Alniaçık et al. (2014), The Company needs to formulate their employer branding strategy based on the knowledge of what their target groups prefer. Despite the concern that some companies might not have the necessary characteristics to attract certain target groups (Lievens et al., 2001), this does not appear to be a problem for The Company. In fact, The Company seems to have the right prerequisites to attract engineering students, if the managers are aware of what they should communicate. For example, communicating that working for The Company contributes to a better world is probably a more effective approach than opting for the opportunity to become a technical expert. Furthermore, it is important to develop employer brands that are internally and externally consistent (Knox and Freeman, 2006), in order to avoid inflated expectations. For example, The Company could benefit from mediating a more accurate image of the everyday consultant life.

5.2.2 Provide with additional activities and support

This study indicates that the managers at The Company are influenced by a strong organisational culture and conception of leadership. In turn, it has decreased their ability and/or will to prioritise finding suitable student assignments, take financial risks, and recruit inexperienced employees, all necessary to implement their current employer branding strategy. However, as Scholz (1987) suggest that the culture should only be changed if it is extremely weak in performance (which is not the case), and the process itself is considered difficult and expensive, it is a more sound solution to adapt the strategy to the culture.

Therefore, a suggestion is to offer additional activities and events to students, instead of only offering part-time work opportunities, especially since the current need is not large enough to stimulate the whole network. In that way, the student network can raise its activity without being solely dependent on the work of the managers. On the recommendations of Collins and Stevens (2002) and Wilden et al. (2010), these activities should incorporate some kind of word-of-mouth endorsements, which are also in line with the students’ need of direct interaction. For example, managers and their employees could have informal meetings with interested students, during which they discuss their experiences of The Company and answer to the students’ questions.
In comparison to offering work opportunities, this suggestion is also considerably cheaper and less time-consuming for the managers.

Moreover, to further facilitate the managers’ workload, it was suggested by the respondents to have a specific unit that is dedicated to working with the network. More specifically, this unit could provide the managers with student contacts and employer branding materials, as well as organise the student events, to which managers and employees are invited to participate.

5.2.3 Raise awareness through internal communication and training

Lastly, the study revealed that The Company’s strong, divisional subcultures have contributed to internal communication problems, which are shown on the lack of a common goal, knowledge of the student network, and collaboration between different parts of the organisation. Although there are no quick fixes to the divisional differentiation that has emerged over time, with the decentralisation that comes with it, it is yet important to establish a common language cross the divisions (Schein, 2004). Subsequently, a suggestion is to increase the managers’ awareness, both of how to communicate the employer brand and how to work with the proposed strategy, by increasing the communication of what the parent company expects from the divisions with respective units, as well as provide with training to the managers. From the interviews, the respondents appear to be interested in the student network, but are in need of more information in order to understand how they can contribute. These measures can therefore be regarded as attempts to involve the whole company in the employer branding work, which is necessary to reach the common goal.
6 Conclusions

This study has aimed to investigate the problems that can occur when students’ and managers’ different perspectives are to be combined in an employer branding strategy. In particular, Swedish MSc engineering students and managers of a large, knowledge-driven company have been the focus of this study. Additionally, the study has attempted to suggest measures to encounter the identified problems.

In order for the purpose to be fulfilled, I began by investigating the perspectives of students and managers by searching to answer the following two sub-queries:

- What do students value in potential employers and their employer branding?
- What are the values, beliefs, and behaviours of managers that may conflict with the employer branding?

By performing an archival study, in which secondary data from Universum’s student survey was collected, it was found that the students appear to strive for something ‘more’ out of work and in life. Wishing to achieve work/life balance as the most important career goal, the students seek employers who can provide them with good development opportunities for the future, and stimulating work environments that allow them to be challenged and grow as individuals, while also contributing to a good cause. Although unable to confirm these findings with previous research within the Swedish context, the findings of other, contemporary studies (e.g. Christiaans (2013); Reis and Braga (2016)) show similarities. In pursuance of their attention, the findings indicate that direct interaction has the greatest impact on their desire to work and apply for the particular employer, much in accordance with previous research (e.g. Collins and Stevens, 2002; Wilden et al., 2010). For example, this can be accomplished through informational meetings, office visits, training sessions, etc.

In the meantime, managers’ values, beliefs, and behaviours appear to be strongly influenced by organisational culture (Schwartz and Davis, 1981; Scholz, 1987; Schein, 2004). By conducting interviews with four managers of a large, knowledge-driven consulting company, it was found that the managers have an altered view of what students think is attractive in an employer, while at the same time being highly confident in the company’s employer brand and reputation as an attractive employer, confirming previous findings of Knox and Freeman (2006). Furthermore, they seem to be under pressure to perform expected results in accordance with the company’s strong, performance-driven culture and view on leadership, in which managers are given free hands – as long as they deliver. Additionally, a pride in the traditional engineering values, which has built the company since its origin, has shaped the managers’ mindset. For instance, they place a great value on putting the client first, being honest and professional and the best problem solvers. Being in a mature state and large-sized, the company has developed a number of divisions, which in turn have developed their own subcultures (Schein, 2004), also affecting the managers.

- What problems can occur when combining the different perspectives of students and managers in an employer branding strategy?
By analysing the different data with the use of existing theories, three main problems emerged from the material. First, the students and managers’ different views of what is attractive in an employer increases the risk of mismatch regarding both promotion and expectations. For example, the managers’ altered view is causing a tendency to emphasise unnecessary attributes, in addition to exaggerating some features, when communicating their employer brand. Jablin (2001) suggests that the way in which traditional recruiting has been conducted, only emphasising the positive sides, has created unrealistic expectations among applicants.

Second, primarily based on the works of Deal and Kennedy (1999) and Schein (2004), the strong culture and conception of leadership are interpreted to cause problems of adaptability. That is, the managers appear to be influenced by the culture and leadership to such an extent that it becomes difficult for them to adapt their current work procedures and behaviours, referred to as 'learning anxiety' by Schein, to an employer branding strategy that requires direct interaction with students. This has been demonstrated through their difficulties to dedicate time to students, take financial risks, and also trust them with clients as they have very high demands on recruits, who are to fit in the organisational culture (Schein, 2004).

Last, the strong, divisional subcultures within the company are interpreted to cause communication problems that complicate the strategy implementation itself. Examples of this problem are shown on the lack of common goal, knowledge, and collaboration in the organisation. Schein (2004) argues that the high level of autonomy, which is often an inevitability in a divided organisation, is likely to cause problems when a common strategy is to be implemented.

- How can these problems be encountered to make the implementation more successful?

Three measures have been proposed. To begin with, the student offering should be concretised, meaning that the value of working for the employer should be defined in order to make the employer branding more attractive, in accordance with the preferences of desired target groups (Alniaçık et al., 2014), and also truthful (Knox and Freeman, 2006). Moreover, in addition to offering work-time opportunities, a dedicated support unit could arrange complementary activities and events, focusing on word-of-mouth endorsements (Collins and Stevens, 2002; Wilden et al., 2010) to raise movement, without pressuring the managers to change their behaviours. This is suggested as it is considerably easier to change the strategy than to change the inherent culture, by which managers are influenced Scholz (1987). Also, it is suggested that the company should work with internal communication and employer branding training in order to raise awareness among managers and involve them in this common goal.

6.1 Contribution to knowledge

By conducting this study, an empirical contribution has been made to the employer branding literature, specifically addressing the gap of studies that take both students and managers into concern when formulating a proper strategy. Importantly, this study has provided with initial indicators of that cultural barriers to employer branding do exist and need to be addressed in order for organisations to fully benefit from employer branding strategies. Interestingly so, managers have been found to play a much more critical part than previously believed or discussed in the literature. Hopefully, future studies of this phenomenon will further improve our understanding.
6.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this study managed to demonstrate the impact of organisational culture on the implementation of an employer branding strategy, this study had its limitations. Previously discussed in Section 3.5, one of the main weaknesses of the study lay in the small sample size of managers and companies to be studied. For future research, it is suggested that a larger sample size is used for the interview part in order to make more accurate representations and develop definite patterns. Additionally, the interviews should be more rigorously conducted with better designed questions and follow-up questions. To improve the generalisability, it would also be interesting to investigate several case companies and settings, to which these findings might apply.

Furthermore, the decision to perform the archival study of Universum’s student survey brought upon its limitations in the form of lack of data and restricted access. Although it enabled the scope to fit the time constraints, only a shallow understanding was obtained from the much smaller data set, in contrast to the manager perspective. Therefore, future studies should aim at collecting primary data from self-constructed surveys, which questions could be better fit to capture the students’ attitudes. Yet another alternative is to conduct in-depth interviews, similar to the manager interviews in this study, to obtain a deeper understanding.

Lastly, due to the time constraints of the master thesis project, the literature review could not be as thorough as wished for. Moreover, not all literature within organisational culture could be accessed, resulting in fewer theories that could have been used for interpretation of the findings. Future research could aim to make a more comprehensive literature review, construing a more solid foundation on which more accurate interpretations can be made.
References


Appendices

A  Interview questions

The respondent’s background and role within the company

- Shortly describe your background.
- Shortly describe your role within the company.
- Describe the business you manage.

Corporate image

- How would you describe the company?
- What is good about the company?
- What is less good about the company?

View on leadership

- How would you describe the leadership within the company?
- How would you describe your own leadership style?

View on corporate culture

- How would you describe the corporate culture within the company?
- What values are important to you?
- In what ways are you distinguished from other companies within the same industry?

View on other’s perception of the company

- How do you think outsiders (e.g. students) perceive the company?
- How well do you think their image corresponds to your own image of the company?
- What do you think people that apply for the company value in you?

View on recruitment and supply of competence

- What personality traits and experiences do you look for in candidates when recruiting to your business?
- How do you feel it is to find the right people or competence?

View on employer branding and building relations with students

- How active is your business in the employer branding?
- What do you think about the current student network?
- In your opinion, how could the network be improved in order to attract more students?
• What are the possibilities of attracting more students, i.e. the objective of employer branding?

• What are the limitations/challenges within the company and/or your own business of achieving this objective?

• What could facilitate your exchange with students?
B FöretagsBarometern 2016

The following tables, Table 7 and Table 8, show the distribution of universities and disciplines among the respondents of the survey FöretagsBarometern 2016, issued by Universum. Please note that the university names and disciplines are in Swedish on the author’s convenience.

Table 7: University distribution among respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KTH, Kungliga Tekniska högskolan</td>
<td>27.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalmers tekniska högskola</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTH, Lunds tekniska högskola</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linköpings universitet</td>
<td>13.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luleå tekniska universitet</td>
<td>8.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uppsala universitet</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blekinge Tekniska Högskola</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mälardalens högskola</td>
<td>2.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umeå universitet</td>
<td>2.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLU, Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet</td>
<td>1.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karlstads universitet</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mittuniversitetet</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.72%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

* Data from Universum, 2016
Table 8: Discipline distribution among respondents

<table>
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<th>Discipline</th>
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<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Industriell ekonomi</td>
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<td>Medieteknik</td>
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<td>Maskinteknik</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>Ekosystemteknik</td>
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<td>Design och produktframtagning</td>
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<td>Interaktion och design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teknisk fysik</td>
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<td>Datavetenskap</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samhällsbyggnadsteknik</td>
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<td>Materialdesign</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energi- och miljöteknik</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Informations-/Kommunikationsteknik</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Väg- och vattenteknik</td>
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<td>Lantmäleri</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energiteknik/Energisystem</td>
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<td>Rymdteknik</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkitektur</td>
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<td>Riskhantering</td>
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<td>Elektroteknik/Mikroelektronik</td>
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<td>Teknisk nanovetenskap</td>
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<td>Hållbar utveckling</td>
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<td>Teknisk biologi</td>
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<td>Datateknik/Teknisk datavetenskap</td>
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<td>Brandingenjör</td>
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<td>Farkostteknik</td>
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<td>Kemiteknik med fysik</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistik</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Teknisk fysik med materialvetenskap</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automation och mekatronik</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Kommunikation och transport</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teknisk fysik och elektronik</td>
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<td>Microelektronik</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicinsk teknik</td>
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<td>Molekylär bioteknik</td>
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<td>Elektronokdesign</td>
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<td>Landskapsingenjör</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teknisk matematik</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Träteknik</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miljö- och vattenteknik</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Sjöfart</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System i teknik och samhälle</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Teknisk - naturvetenskaplig kemi</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialteknik</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Universum, 2016
C  Case descriptions

C.1  Respondent A

A section manager in the north
Respondent A comes from an engineering background and has been working for different companies prior to joining ÅF about five years ago. After holding different positions, she is now the Section Manager of Mechanical Engineering within the Industry division in Luleå, which currently employs 20 people. The respondent describes the people as a blend of different technical backgrounds, mostly BSc engineering. As Section Manager, the respondent is responsible for staff, accountability, and finding of new assignments for the employees. Examples of assignments include reinforcing the client’s organisation in various ways (professional services) and delivering different types of products, such as equipment and machines.

A strong but heavy company
The respondent describes the company as having a strong brand, which is well known, not least among students. This is also what attracted her to apply for the company. Moreover, the respondent perceives the company as well structured in spite of its large size. The structure and the broad offering also make the respondent feel secure that they have the competence to solve any kind of problem that the client might have. However, the respondent also claims the downside of being almost ‘too large’, which makes her spend a lot of time on administrative tasks, such as time reporting and handling of invoices. Additionally, the different divisions within the company create the feeling of being separate companies, although they try to work as ‘one’ company.

Do as you please, as long as you deliver
The leadership is described as reinforcing ‘freedom with responsibility’. The respondent claims that leaders within the company are free in their leadership role, as long as they deliver results. The respondent describes her own leadership style as similar to the company’s and that she strives towards an including communication with the employees, where everyone should be seen and heard.

A positive and target-driven company with a lot of team spirit
Although insecurely, the respondent describes the corporate culture as positive and target-oriented, in which very high objectives are set. Furthermore, the respondent considers the culture as joyful and pleasant with a lot of team spirit. Customer focus, a positive attitude, and an open communication are important values to the respondent. Furthermore, the respondent believes that the company’s broad offering and competence differentiate it from its competitors. The strong cohesion and other ‘soft’ factors, in particular, make the company an attractive employer.

An attractive employer among students
The respondent thinks that students find the company as an attractive employer with a strong brand that sort of speaks for itself. She does not feel that she has to work hard in order to attract them in the first place. Nonetheless, the respondent feels that students sometimes have too large expectations on the company that may be hard to live up to once they are inside. Despite this fact, she feels that their image of the company corresponds to her own image and that they are
attracted by the strong community, pleasant work environment, and exciting assignments that the company offers.

**Open individuals with some previous experience are easy to find**

When recruiting, the respondent is looking for open and curious individuals with a lot of self-awareness, who know how to handle clients. Additionally, it is meriting if they have prior experience within a relevant industry, or any kind of practical experience that shows that they have been in ‘the real world’. The respondent perceives it as easy to find candidates, even to the extent where she has to deny many applicants. However, only one graduate has been recruited during the respondent’s time as Section Manager. Furthermore, she recounts that it is fairly easy to advertise vacant positions within the company’s channels.

**Lack of knowledge, time, and other resources to fully embrace the student network**

The respondent assesses her own section as relatively active (‘3 on a scale of 1 to 5’) in the company’s employer branding efforts, which is primarily based on their involvement in the university’s career fair in Luleå. She thinks it is a good idea to have a student network, and promotes it on the career fair, but admits to having limited knowledge of what the network actually does, or what it offers to students. Therefore, she worries that she might induce too high expectations on the network when talking to students.

A possible improvement, as she sees it, is to offer more assignments that are appropriate for students, something she admits to not offering yet, or create more ‘happenings’ and other activities in the network. However, she claims that the need is not strong enough for her to spend money on this kind of activity (‘we already attract students’), and that she focuses on finding assignments to her full-time employees. Nevertheless, if several sections could split the cost of having a part-time student rotating between them, she thinks it would be a valid option but that other managers need to be convinced. As the respondent thinks that engaging in student activities takes a lot of time, she requests instructions of how to inform about the student network, as well as a ready-to-use presentation that can be shown to students.

**C.2 Respondent B**

**A combined manager role within infrastructure**

Respondent B works at the Malmö office as a combined Region and Section Manager at the Infrastructure division. With her combined role, she has the overall responsibility for the consultants within her section, as well as the responsibility to strengthen their market position in the south region of Sweden. The respondent, who has an engineering background, has been working at different consulting firms, including ÅF between 2000 and 2012, and returned to the company one year ago. Her section is specialised towards project management, serving clients within the real estate and construction industry. Mainly, her consultants are offered as project managers, but related services, such as inspections and budget calculations, are offered as well.

**The journey towards becoming a complete supplier**

Describing it as a journey that started in the founding year of 1895, the respondent depicts a company that has been seen as a traditional engineering firm with business focused on industry technology. Today, the company offers a broader range of services, including IT and infrastructure, and has become a ‘complete supplier’. According to the respondent, the company
strives to become number one in all markets where it is present, although this goal has not been reached yet. However, she states that the company brand is strong, which is helpful when talking to potential clients and recruiting in a competitive industry. Furthermore, she believes that the company stands for sound values, at least from an external view, but that these need to be worked on.

The customer security, the professional conduct of business, and the employees are noted as the best things about the company. On the downside, however, is that the company has out-dated systems and support functions, which make the work heavier. On the other hand, the respondent feels that things sometimes go too fast and that there is no time for reflection.

**Delegated leadership in a large and separated company**
Responsibility is placed far down in the organisation, which gives the individual managers great responsibility and freedom. However, the respondent suggests that conflicts sometimes arise as a consequence of ‘territorial thinking’ between different sections and managers. Also, she mentions a lack of a concrete target picture on a local level, which makes it harder to manage the organisation. As for her own leadership style, the respondent states that she likes to set objectives for her organisation and that she strives to have a dialog with and coach her employees.

**Openness, tolerance, and freedom**
The culture is perceived as allowing an open dialog and tolerating new ideas with a focus on coaching and a generous exchange of knowledge. ‘Freedom with responsibility’ means that the employees are free to rule over their own beings, which the respondent recounts as appreciated amongst those she has talked to. Meanwhile, she also believes that the culture varies between different business units, depending on the type of leader that is currently in the managing role. Most importantly, business must be conducted in a professional way, but other than that, the respondent does not consider the company to be particularly distinguished from other companies within the same industry.

**Working for the company should be a merit, but also takes hard work**
Among outsiders, such as students, the respondent believes that the company is perceived as large with a lot of exciting projects and assignments. Despite being well known, others may not fully grasp what the company does or the width of its services. Nonetheless, she believes that students consider the company to be a potential employer and that having the company on your resume is a valuable experience or ‘meriting’. From her point of view, students value the strong brand, company size, and the development opportunities that are associated with these attributes. Overall, the respondent considers that the outsider image corresponds to her own image regarding the positive things. However, she notes that there are “brown spots” that are hard to see from the outside, such as the out-dated systems and particular businesses that are less successful in comparison to the rest of the company. Students, once they are employed, might become disappointed when they realise how things are, especially that they have to put in hard work in order to gain those development opportunities.

**Socially competent individuals who can take the consulting role**
The respondent looks for applicants who feel comfortable in the consulting role, which demands high social qualities. More specifically, applicants should be confident, driven, structured, and
diplomatic team players who can manage their own work. Having an academic degree within a relevant field of study is of great importance, as is having some form of practical work experience. The respondent considers finding the right people or competence to vary depending on the complexity of the assignment. The more complex the task, the more difficult is it to find the right competence. Finding younger employees to junior positions, however, is not hard at all.

**Using the student network demands new ways of thinking**

The respondent assesses her section’s involvement in employer branding as ‘active to a certain point’, where the younger employees are engaged in social media, events, career fairs, and mingle evenings, while older employees tend to focus on the projects. She has a positive attitude towards the current student network and mentions that she has used it to get in touch with and hire students as part-time workers at her section. However, she sees a lack of dynamic and activity in the network, which she thinks depends on the ignorance among the organisation. There is a lack of understanding of what the possibilities are of using the student network, as it is not promoted or talked about internally. Also, the respondent fears that the company is unable to hire enough students, even if all managers use it, to make it attractive for students to sign up.

A possible improvement is to offer additional activities for the members of the network. Furthermore, the respondent believes that managers and employees need to start thinking in new ways instead of ‘doing what we have always done’. Managers need to plan the work so it is suitable for a less experienced student, but there might be a resistance to change.

**C.3 Respondent C**

**An experienced manager in system development**

Respondent C, with an educational background in engineering and business economics, has worked for different manufacturing and consulting firms. Having had similar leadership roles in previous companies, he is now Market Area Manager within embedded systems at the Technology division of AF. Stationed in Gothenburg, he is head over several section managers with staff responsibilities (recruitment and employee development) and accountability. This business area has clients mostly within automotive and help developing software and systems, both in the client’s own R&D department and in-house at AF. The projects require a broad technical competence, which needs to be found and matched with the right client.

**A long-lived, large, and successful engineering company**

The company is defined as engineering-oriented with a long history of long-term thinking, seriousness, and success and is still on the move. Clients who have similar backgrounds make the best match, according to the respondent. Honesty and the promise to deliver are the strengths of the company. He also thinks that the stability of the company and wish to belong to a successful group, as well as its ability to provide employees with interesting assignments, is what attracts people. On the other hand, the large size of the company brings about problems, such as more weight on administrative tasks and certain processes and structures that need to be followed. However, the respondent claims that these are not specific for the company, but related to size.

**Individuals are free but should perform to benefit the common good**

The leadership is characterised by openness and the will to drive things forward. On the one
hand, this may put pressure on the individual to reach desired financial performance. On the other hand, it gives the individual great freedom in the role he or she has been given. The respondent also states that the leadership is delegated, decentralised, and not too controlling of numbers. However, the respondent reckons that leadership differences might exist within the large organisation. To describe himself, he suggests his leadership to be characterised by a coaching attitude and that he prefers people who do not have their ‘own agenda’, but work for the common good of the entire organisation.

A performance-driven culture grounded on engineering values
Although he believes that the corporate culture differs between different offices and division, he defines the overall culture as characterised by the will to perform and ‘be the best’. However, it is not acceptable to tread on anyone’s toes in order to advance. The fact that the firm is characterised by an engineering spirit is particularly noticeable when it comes to the value of being correct, logical, and understandable. Moreover, the respondent thinks that the company has received an external label as being very ‘cautious’ and that they could work on being perceived as more daring. Teamwork is also something that is deeply embedded in the culture. However, lack of time makes it hard to establish a cross-divisional team spirit. In comparison to competitors, the company is distinguished by its long history.

The consulting reality may be different from students’ perceptions
The respondent thinks that students perceive the company as large, stable, and successful, which they want to belong to as it offers a lot of development opportunities. However, they might have a narrow image of what the company really does. Overall, their image of the company corresponds well to the reality, but the respondent explains that there might be a mismatch between their perceptions of work in contrast to the real life of a consultant. For example, most projects take place at the client’s office for a long period of time, which students may be unaware of.

High competence requirements in a competitive labour market
When it comes to graduates, the respondent looks for people with a proper education, mostly MSc engineers, with technical competence that matches his business area. This is assessed based on if the student has had summer internships or thesis projects in relevant technology-driven companies. Furthermore, it is meriting to have been involved in extracurricular activities and student sororities. Regarding personal characteristics, the student should signal a profound interest in technology, while at the same time be interesting to the company. The student should be able to ‘handle the meeting’ and not be afraid to ‘show off’. Confidence and drive are other important characteristics. The respondent considers it to be a great challenge to find enough people who are qualified, which he blames on the tough competition in Gothenburg.

A concrete offering and help to find students
The respondent regards his business unit as active in the employer branding efforts, mostly due to their need to stand out in the competition. Examples of involvement include spreading the word about the company in different forums and on recruiting events. However, he feels that the employer branding strategy is less concrete on manager-level where they ask ‘what’s in it for me?’ He thinks highly of the current student network, but admits to not offering any assignments today, although he is in contact with it. To improve it, the value of being a member
of the network must be concretised, as it would do damage to the company if high expectations are not met. The network should offer other activities, and possibly a mentor program, and be used as a way of strengthening the corporate image. The respondent thinks there are great opportunities to attract more students, but that all managers are under a lot of time pressure. Hence, they prioritise finding assignments to the full-time employees. The respondent thinks it would be helpful if students are ‘brought to them’, so that they could only work with the reception and not the searching.

C.4 Respondent D

From acting section manager to a shared responsibility
Respondent D studied engineering and business economics before starting his career as a trainee at a small firm. However, feeling that it was not the right place for him, he entered a larger firm and eventually ended up at ÅF in 2011. In 2015, he took on the position as acting section manager at the Industry division in Stockholm. Today, he shares this responsibility with the first-in-command section manager, once she returned from maternity leave, but the section is about to be split in two with him as the head. This section employs full-time consultants, partner consultants from other firms, and ‘Future consultants’, that is, students from the student network ÅF Future. The respondent has the main responsibility for the partner and Future consultants and recruits as well as meets with the clients. The section works with project management on different levels, considering that the consultants vary in years of experience. Clients come from various industries within the Stockholm area.

Great people in an extensive company
The respondent describes the company as ‘Sweden’s largest consulting firm within technology’ that has a ‘great width’ and can solve any problem of any client. The employees are driven and the whole company strives to move forward. It is also the employees that the respondent considers to be the best about the company, apart from the coaching environment. On the downside, however, the large size and dividing into different sections makes the communication ‘quite challenging’. Also, the top management increases overhead costs, which makes them more expensive in comparison to other firms.

Business-driven and unrestricted leadership with focus on financial performance
The leadership is business-driven and managers ‘keep a close eye’ on their financial numbers. They are free to make their own decisions, both when it comes to making business and recruiting, which the respondent considers as an entrepreneurial spirit. Regarding his own leadership style, he define himself as being attendant and coaching, as well as keeping a good dialog with his employees to help them develop.

Engineers who want to solve problems
The respondent is unsure of how to describe the corporate culture, but thinks that they are service-minded with a complete offering that distinguishes them from others. Trust, between the company and its clients as well as its employees, is highly valued. Furthermore, an engineering spirit characterises the company, as everyone is trained engineers and not some ‘sleazy salespersons’. Solving clients’ problems drives them.
Innovation and many possibilities attract
The respondent believes that the company is perceived as large, progressive, innovative, and a fun place to work. Although he thinks that potential recruits’ image of the company corresponds to his own, he wants to make sure that their thoughts of work are aligned with the reality. People value the company’s width and possibilities to meet with different types of clients and form an interesting career. He also thinks that they value their innovation in form of innovative solutions and ways of business conduct.

Recruits should be driven with a past record that shows interest in technology
The respondent looks for driven persons, who desire to progress, when recruiting graduates. However, they should be humble and not ‘think they will become CEO in three years’, as well as able to handle the client. Should the graduates have past experience from summer internships in several technology firms, which shows a technical interest, it is considered great. The respondent thinks it is fairly easy to find graduates, as the company is an attractive employer, while senior consultants are harder to find.

The student network should be improved in order to meet client demand
According to the respondent, his section is not very active in the employer branding besides attending career fairs. He thinks that the employer branding is ‘rather centralised’, which he reckons as good in the professional sense, but that the sections should be more involved and go out and mediate their own and partly different perspectives. He thinks that the current student network is gaining too little attention and that finding students is difficult. Instead, he currently solves this problem by connecting with students directly at career fairs. Overall, he thinks that having a network is positive and that his clients have expressed an increased demand on Future consultants. In order to improve it, the respondent suggests that it should be promoted more towards students and that managers need to know how and then sell this idea to their clients, as this ignorance is an obstacle. In addition, other events could be held for the members. To facilitate the student network, he also proposes that there should be a surrounding organisation that owns the question. Otherwise, it is too much work for the individual manager.