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# UPPSALA UNIVERSITET

## EMPLOYER BRANDING IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

- The Importance of Recruiting and Retaining Employees

## Abstract

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**Problem:** Companies are facing problems concerning the attraction and retention of talented employees, due to the shortage of individuals with competence. Employer Branding is a relatively new concept that can function as an instrument for firms to position themselves as an employer, in order to attract and retain wanted employees.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this thesis is to examine the field of Employer Branding in the context of recruitment and retaining. The study examines the questions of *how* and *why* Employer Branding is implemented in firms and *what* role such implementation plays in Human Resource Management, in the context of recruitment and retaining processes.

**Methodology:** This study has been made with a qualitative approach, with a descriptive and exploratory purpose a case study approach. Data has primarily been collected through interviews at five different companies with knowledge within the area of Employer Branding.

**Findings:** Employer Branding can be utilized both externally to attract potential employees, and internally to increase commitment and loyalty among current employees. In the context of recruitment, Employer Branding can make the process more effective. For the Employer Brand to be trustworthy and successful the consistency between the internal values and the external image is vital.

**Key Words:** *Employer Branding, Employer brand, Human Resources, Human Resource Management, Recruiting, Retaining*

## Acknowledgement

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We have heard nightmare stories of people writing their bachelor thesis. The need of changing subject one, two or even three times. Empirical studies that turned out to be no studies at all and the need of re-writing theory a week before the final hand-in. We can happily say that we have avoided such crises and that our work has been very pleasant. This is to a great extent because of our informants, who have been very cooperative and given us quick answers and great insight of the subject.

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## 1. Introduction

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Today's business environment is changing in a high pace and so is the climate on the labour market (c.f. Buck & Dworschak 2003; Dew-Becker & Gordon 2008; Gaddam 2008). In 2001 McKinsey & Co stated in their report "War for Talent" that companies are facing a difficulty in attracting and retaining great talents and that this will continue for at least two more decades. A few years later, Buck and Dworschak (2003) published a report concerning the aging workforce in Europe and stated that the number of people in the age-band of 20-29 will fall by 20 percent and the number of people in the age of 50-64 will increase by 25 percent in a period of two decades (2003:11). Consequently, the workforce is decreasing and companies do already fight over the reduced number of talented employees. There is no question that the equation is non-sustainable; companies are facing ruff times and are in need of strategies to gain and maintain their positions as highly valued companies by potential and existing employees.

How is this done? Reports and surveys have stated that the attraction and retention of suitable employees *is* a problem, and that companies *should* engage in their employer attractiveness (McKinsey & Co, 2001; The Conference Board<sup>1</sup>; 2001). But *how* can, and how *do* companies work with the problems of attracting and retaining employees in a world where the workforce is collaterally diminishing?

### 1.1 Background and Problematization

The brand is considered one of the most important and valuable assets of a company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). To most people a brand is directly connected to the company name, the products, services and the specific logotype. However, branding can also be used as a part of Human Resource Management (HRM) in order to attract new employees and to retain already employed members of the firm (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011). When applying

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<sup>1</sup> The Conference Board is a global, independent business membership and research association that provides organizations with practical knowledge aiming to improve their performance and better serve society

branding to HRM, the concept is entitled “Employer Branding” (EB) (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and the connection between the two concepts, HRM and EB, has been established. In 2001 the Conference Board made a report addressing the concept of EB where they compared the corporate- and employer branding methods. Some key findings from the report are that EB is strongly connected to HRM in transactional aspects, that EB is on a rise and companies were concentrating branding efforts towards employees, instead of solely towards the corporate brand as before. The report defines Human Resources (HR) and Senior Management teams as key players and their decisions as highly influential on a strategic level, whereas the actual implementation relies primarily on the individual<sup>2</sup>. The HR Executives who were a part of the study identified their goals to be recruiting and retaining employees, helping employees to internalize the company’s values and to become a top of mind employer (The Conference Board 2001:10). This report was published in 2001, and guidelines concerning EB were starting to contrive, but the report showed that 56 percent of the responding HR executives did not believe they had an employer brand. This in contrast to the finding of many companies using an EB strategy, but they just did not know the name of it.

Many managers seem to a large extent be clueless of the concept of EB and this is not surprising. The field of EB is a relatively new phenomena and the concept was mentioned for the first time in 1996 in an article by Ambler and Barrow. Research has shown that companies are starting to realize the importance of attracting the right employees, which will contribute to the company’s brand, and to distinguish themselves as an attractive employer by the use of an EB strategy (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Gaddam, 2008; Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng, 2010; Barrow, 2008). Sullivan (2004:1) defines EB 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*”. EB seems to be on the rise and key HR consultants<sup>3</sup> predict a strong upward movement for EB (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Barrow, 2008; Sullivan, 2004), partly due to the shortage of qualified human capital in labour markets, which has been observed in recent years (c.f. Buck & Dworschak, 2003; Dew-Becker & Gordon, 2008;

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<sup>2</sup> More than 90 percent of the surveys participants believed this to be true.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. John Sullivan is an author and leader in HR, a professor of management at San Francisco State University and serves as advisor to Fortune 500. Simon Barrow is a consultant within HR and Employer Branding, wrote the book “*The Employer Brand - bringing the best of brand management to people at work*” together with colleague Richard Mosley.

Gaddam, 2008; McKinsey & Company, 2001). Scholars like Lievens and Highhouse (2003) have noticed a lack of employees with excellence and describe the competition between organizations for these individuals as intense. The shortage has led to a new focus on uniqueness and to radiate a leading edge as an attractive employer in order to attract the best talents and the best possible employees (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; The Conference Board, 2001).

As stated, EB in the context of human HRM is a relatively new phenomenon, and the amount of empirical research can definitely be seen as insufficient. Most of the research concerns the fact that EB *is* important, and *should* be implemented in HRM (Barrow, 2008; Gaddam, 2008; Maxwell & Knox, 2009). But little empirical research has been done to show *how* EB is actually applied in organizations, and to completely understand the phenomenon of EB empirical contributions are necessary. The proposition is enhanced by recommendations made by Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng (2010) who claim that further empirical studies, especially qualitative case studies, must be made in order to explore the activities of HR, EB and the link between the two.

## **1.2 Research purpose**

Considering the present need of EB (c.f. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Barrow, 2008; Gaddam, 2008; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Maxwell & Knox, 2009) and the observed lack of empirical research (c.f. Foster et al., 2010), the purpose of this thesis is to examine the field of EB in the context of HRM in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Due to the definition made by Kunerth & Mosley (2011), who state that EB is the utilization of branding in the field of HRM to recruit and retain employees, in this thesis the term “HRM” is limited to including solely recruitment and retaining. The thesis aims to examine the questions of *how* and *why* EB is implemented in firms and *what* role such implementation plays in HRM, and specifically in the recruitment and retaining processes, of the firm. The study is based on research made in the field of EB in a context of HRM. The importance of the mentioned concept in the recruitment and retaining processes and the fact that theoretical research and hypotheses by scholars have increased, implicate a great opportunity for this study to contribute to the field of EB. Furthermore the thesis and its empirical studies will contribute to an increased understanding of *how* and *why* EB is used by practitioners. Hence this thesis aims to contribute to theoretical research made by scholars, such as Mosely (2007) and is additionally recommended by Foster et al. (2010), as well as to practitioners, by

proving a starting point for a framework of how companies can use their employer brand in HRM.

### **1.3 Thesis Disposition**

The proceeding thesis disposition will be as follows; in the second chapter the conceptual framework, that is the foundation for the analysis, is presented. Focus is on definitions of the concept and the framework on how the employer brand can be used as an instrument in HRM. It also addresses the components of employer branding and a theoretical description of successful employer brand characteristics. The third chapter regards the methodology used in this thesis. The methodological approach and design, as well as data collection and analysis is presented and motivated. The qualitative approach of the study is accounted for due to its descriptive and exploratory purpose and the significance of the chosen approach is also explained in the methodology chapter. In the fourth chapter the empirical findings are displayed by a presentation of the data received from interviews at five different companies. In the fifth chapter the empirical findings are analyzed in relation to the conceptual framework. The analysis provides insights in how the employer brand is created, used and communicated in the recruitment process, as well as evidence for why it is important. The sixth chapter contains a summary of the conclusions as well as managerial implications and suggestions for further research.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

*This chapter contains a literature review and aims to give insights into the existing field of EB. The conceptual framework also includes research regarding branding, since it is the foundation for EB research and since the field of EB is relatively new. Further, in order to focus on how the employer brand can be used as an instrument in HRM the chapter establishes EB in an HR context and important EB components are identified.*

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### 2.1 The Employer Brand as an Instrument

Research has shown that human capital is becoming an increasingly important asset that creates competitive advantages for companies (Barney, 1991; Mosely, 2007). Lievens and Highhouse (2003) imply that shortages in labour markets increase the importance for companies to attract, recruit and retain suitable employees. An employer brand can be used as an instrument to position the company as an employer. The EB strategy functions as a means to communicate characteristics of the workplace and how the firm differentiates as an employer from other organizations and therefore becomes a competitive advantage. The employer brand is used both to attract potential employees and to ensure that current employees are committed to the organization (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The purpose of the employer brand is to present the organization's philosophy regarding human capital. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) EB produces brand associations and brand loyalty. When conceptualizing EB they created a model (Figure 1) which shows that a firm's brand image is built upon brand associations and the image will have impact on the attractiveness of the firm. Firms need to develop employer brand associations in order to create the brand image and the image presented by the employer has impact on the applicant attraction in the recruitment process (Belt & Paolillo, 1982; Greening & Turban, 2000). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) an individual who identifies herself with the image of the company, is more prone to apply to a position. Therefore it is important for firms to communicate their employer brand in order to attract applicants that are considered suitable for the company and the specific position (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Figure 1 also shows that through the EB strategy, the organization can establish the organizational identity and the organizational culture, which affect the loyalty of the employees. It is suggested by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) that a high degree of loyalty, leads to productivity within the company.

Employees that are committed to the organization tend to stay longer, since they feel attached to and identify with the organization and its culture.

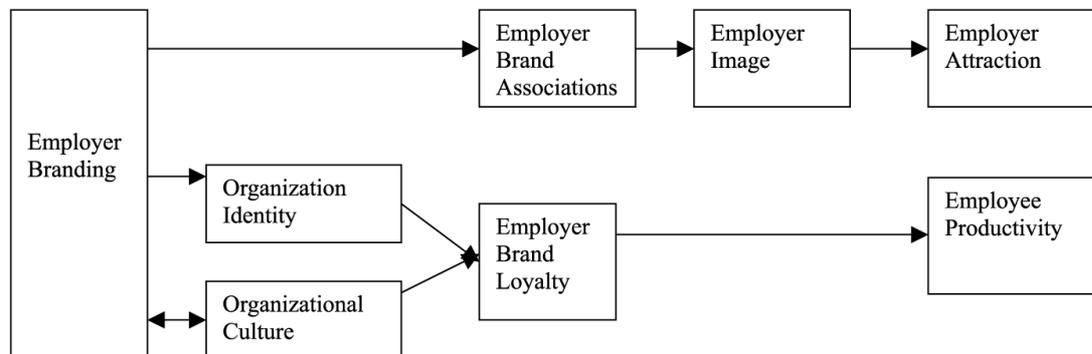


Figure 1: Employer branding framework. Source: Backhaus and Tikoo (2004)

## 2.2 Definitions of Branding and Employer Branding

To investigate the phenomena of EB and in what way and why it is used in HRM, it needs to be defined. EB has its foundation in branding (Morocco & Uncles, 2008), why an initial definition of a brand is also necessary. Kotler (1991) defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of seller and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler, 1991:442). The definition has primarily been used to describe product brands and the consumer’s relationship to the focal product brand (Mosley, 2007). But according to recent marketing literature a brand has great impact on the company as an employer and how external stakeholders identify the organization, the corporate brand and the firm as a future workplace (Davies, 2008; Foster et al., 2010; Gaddam, 2008). There is a clear emotional relationship between the employer and the employees based on brand image (Davies, 2008; Gaddam, 2008).

According to Morocco and Uncles (2008) branding and EB are closely related. What characterizes a strong brand is mostly consistent with successful employer brands. The first article regarding the subject of EB, “The Employer Brand”, was published in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow, where they define the concept as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996:186). The research by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) contributed to a further conceptualizing of the phenomena by creating a theoretical framework and they define EB as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity” and the

employer brand as “*a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors*” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004:502). According to Sullivan (2004:1) employer branding is 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*”. Martin et al. (2011:3618) further developed the concept and define it as “*a generalized recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing a high-quality employment experience, and a distinctive organizational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others*”. Common features of the definitions are the unique identity and values of the firm that are utilized to communicate how the firm differentiates as an employer. Based on the research presented EB is here defined as “*a strategy of internal and external communication of the unique attributes that establishes the identity of the firm as an employer and what differentiates it from others, with the aim of attracting and retaining potential and current employees*”.

### **2.3 Positioning in the Area of Human Resources**

In the internal perspective the employer brand is directed at current employees, while the external focus is on other stakeholders, and primarily potential employees. The retention of current employees as well as the attraction and recruitment of new employees are core processes related to the HR department (Morocco & Uncles, 2008). The business environment that organizations act in is dynamic and continuously changing, which is why the acquisition of competent employees with technical skills is vital, and since the competition among organizations for qualified human resources is intense, companies need to distinguish themselves from others (Gaddam, 2008). One of the activities of the HR department is to manage the recruitment process and the employer brand can be used as a tool to attract applicants to the company. The role of developing and communicating the employer brand is therefore often assigned the department of HR (Barrow, 2008). In the area of HRM the development and communication of the employer brand is expanding and according to Barrow (2008) they are the most suitable since they have an overview of the organization and the managerial insights needed. Morocco and Uncles (2008) consider the department of HR responsible for attracting and retaining suitable employees and suggest that the employment experience should be considered a product, which indicate that the HR department is assigned the role as developer and manager. The mission of the HR department, in the context of EB, should therefore be to establish the foundation of the employer brand and communicate it to

potential and current employees to maintain growth within the firm (Morocco & Uncles, 2008).

#### **2.4 Characteristics of Successful Employer Brands**

EB can be used by HR as an instrument in the recruitment process to attract and recruit suitable people to the organization (Barrow, 2008). However, for the employer brand to be a competitive advantage, it needs to fulfil some criteria. Morocco and Uncles (2008) claim there are similarities between EB and other types of branding, such as product branding and corporate branding and they characterize successful brands by attractiveness and accuracy, which they claim is also applicable on successful employer brands. This implicate that a strong employer brand is characterized by being known and noticeable, relevant and resonant, and differentiated from its competitors (Morocco and Uncles, 2008). Between the employer and the employee there is a psychological contract, and the expectations regarding obligations for both parties are settled during the recruitment process (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The employer is supposed to offer and provide the employee training and development, in exchange for the employee's performance. If the psychological contract is fulfilled a high degree of loyalty and engagement of the employee towards the firm is more likely (Morocco & Uncles, 2008) and according to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) loyalty and commitment to the firm increase productivity. Maxwell and Knox (2009) discuss that the attributes employees consider important for their employers vary between different companies. However, there are categories of attributes that affect the attractiveness of the firm. Employment is one category that strongly affects the perceived attractiveness by current employees, which includes work environment, relations, management style, rewards, type of work and attributes of workforce (Maxwell & Knox, 2009).

#### **2.5 Functional and Symbolic Benefits**

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) divide the employer brand image into functional and symbolic benefits. Functional benefits describe components that are objectively desirable, such as the salary and economical benefits whereas the symbolic benefits are related to the subjective perceptions of the company and are identified as associations, ideas and feelings. To communicate these benefits, emphasizing on the symbolic ones, EB can be used as an instrument to communicate benefits of a brand to potential employees (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). By conveying the specific attributes connected to the brand, for example innovativeness and flexibility, organizations can develop a favourable and strong employer

brand that will attract individuals suitable for them. The expression of the symbolic benefits is crucial in industries where the functional differences between organizations are insignificant. EB can then be used to differentiate the company, as an employer, from others. In the context of recruitment the potential employees will find the organization more appealing if it possesses the attributes that the applicant finds important (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

### **2.6 Realistic Promises**

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) further suggest that the values presented by the organization need to be adequate and honest. The information provided both potential and existing employees has to be realistic and realized. If the message delivered through the employer brand is exclusively positive and the promises made can not be realized, there is a risk employees will be dissatisfied, which will increase the employee turnover, and thus the employer brand will be negatively affected. The information concerning for example organizational culture, need to be accurate in order to enable high employee retention. This is confirmed by Morocko and Uncles (2008), who explain that the values inherited in the brand have to be accurate and delivered continuously. It is also consistent with Mosley (2007) who argues that the properties and values of the employer brand need to be implemented into the leadership and management processes in order to be sustainable and accurately functioning. Hence employer brand management functions as a means of translating and communicating the values into the everyday work of the employees. Morocko and Uncles (2008) stress the fact that the employees create their perception of the employer brand during the recruitment process, based on explicit information from the firm, but also on informal information, which is why the recruitment process is vital in the communication and implementation of the EB strategy.

### 3. Methodology

*This section provides information and insights on the methodological approach used in this study. The research design, data collection and data analysis processes are described and the chapter finishes with a discussion regarding the research limitations and quality of the study.*

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#### 3.1 Research Approach

The empirical contributions concerning the role of EB in HRM, has hitherto been few, which is why a descriptive and exploratory approach has been used. This thesis describes a specific phenomenon, its characteristics and outcome, and to permit this the data collection and analysis have been made with a qualitative approach. The purpose is to gain practitioners' point of view and their perceptions of the existing theory in order to collect data in a close to reality setting, and a qualitative approach is to prefer when acquiring such data (c.f. Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Roper & Davies, 2007; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), and also appropriate when the study is descriptive and there is a need for a deeper understanding of a phenomena (Holme & Solvang, 1997). Furthermore, Yin (2011) recommends qualitative research when investigating a real-world setting, and since the aim of this study is to examine in what way and why companies use EB in HRM, and therefore takes place in a highly real-world setting, the empirical framework is based upon a qualitative study. Merriam (1994) describes the purpose of a qualitative approach as understanding the signification of a certain phenomena and has its focus on processes instead of results. The importance of focusing on the process as well as the product (Spiggle, 1994) has lead to a better understanding and the possibility to make interpretations and understanding the meaning and experience of the informants.

#### 3.2 Research Design

##### 3.2.1 Case Study

Due to the descriptive and exploratory purpose of this thesis and the need for a deeper understanding of the concept of EB, a case study is considered appropriate (c.f. Blumberg, B., Cooper, D. R., & Schindler, P. S. 2008; Saunders, 2008). Case studies are according to Bryman and Bell (2007) a research design that is commonly used in business and management research and it implicates an intensive and detailed examination of a single case. The case of EB is a relatively new phenomena that has mainly been researched in theory and

to get a deeper understanding of the subject Blumberg et al. (2008) suggest that a phenomena needs to be studied within its context, and that multiple sources should be utilized to demonstrate different perspectives in order to allow comparisons and promote theoretical reflections on the results. This is consistent with Merriam (1994) who suggests that case studies are applicable when the subject needs to be studied in its context and in depth. Multiple sources of evidence increase the possibility to render an analytical generalization (c.f. Blumberg et al., 2008; Yin, 2007). The phenomena of EB in an HRM context has thus been studied in more than one context in this thesis, to permit a general discussion regarding the practical application of the concept, since it until now mainly has been researched on a theoretical level. In other words, the case, which is the phenomena of EB, has been studied at the strategic and operational levels at five different companies, which are the contexts relevant for this study.

### 3.2.2 Research Sample

To enable the study of the phenomena, the use of it and its importance, it needs to be analyzed within its context. To permit comparisons and analytical generalizations regarding the phenomena of EB the research sample includes five companies that are knowledgeable and prominent within the subject. Since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate in what way and why companies use EB in HRM, the criteria for the sample selection were that the companies needed an expressed EB strategy and employer proposition. Furthermore, the criteria was a successful EB strategy, with respect to/and the selection was based on the List of Employers of the Year 2012 made by Universum (2012). Universum is a global leader in EB that offers products and services to help clients attract, recruit and retain talent. The survey is conducted annually to identify and rank the best employers according to the perceptions of current employees. The result is based on three criteria; identity, satisfaction and loyalty (Universum, 2012). By studying companies that have managed to implement and communicate their employer brand strategy successfully, the aim is to gain knowledgeable practitioners' views of in what way and why the concept can be used. Based on these criteria five companies were chosen; two specialist companies that are experts in the area of EB and three companies that have been acknowledged for their strong employer brands. The informants at each company were selected with respect to their positions at each company respectively, as well as their competence and knowledge regarding the subject of EB. The size of the firms or industries that the companies are active within has not been taken in consideration, which contributes to

a wider scope of information, and enhances the qualification of making more generalized acknowledgements.

During the pre-research phase, an unwillingness to address potential failure concerning EB, or to admit that the company did not have an EB strategy, was observed. To increase the amount of data and to improve quality and validity of the information, the companies and the identities of the individual informants were anonymized. The responses from the informants should not be seen as representative for the specific companies, but as representative for the concept as such. Therefore, the selected companies are not specified by name or brand, but are instead re-named by the authors in order to keep track of them. The two EB specialist bureaus are named *Castor Consulting* and *Pollux Consulting*, and the chosen companies are named *Athos*, *Aramis* and *Porthos*.

Castor Consulting and Pollux Consulting are consultancy firms that are specialized within the area of EB. They provide their clients with services regarding analysis and implementation of an EB strategy. The consultancy companies were selected as informants to provide the researchers with the professional view and specialist knowledge regarding how and why the employer brand is used in HRM. The pre-research was conducted through interviews and open conversations with two employees at Pollux Consulting; a partner and Head of Marketing Communication who also has served as HR Executive, as well as one Account Manager. The information received from the pre-research was also included in the result. The final interviews with informants at the consultancy firms were made with the aim of receiving initial knowledge and an overview of the subject. The selection of interviewees at Castor Consulting and Pollux Consulting were based on their positions at the companies and their knowledge regarding EB strategies directed at client companies. Table 1 below explains the informants' positions and area of expertise, and also includes a brief company description.

The three firms Athos, Aramis and Porthos were selected based on their high ranking on Universum's list of Sweden's Best Employers of 2012 (Universum, 2012). Athos, Aramis and Porthos have all been acknowledged for their employer brands and the purpose of selecting these companies as informants was to get insights and knowledge regarding how and why companies with strong employer brands use and communicate them. One individual from Athos, Aramis and Porthos respectively were interviewed and the selection was based on the

individual informants' knowledge regarding the EB strategy at the specific firm as well as their insights in and responsibility within the HRM processes (see Tabel 1).

*Tabel 1: Respondents*

Company	Area of expertise	Position	Company description
Castor Consulting	Employer branding	Employer branding specialist	Employer branding agency (18 employees)
Pollux Consulting	Corporate and employer branding	Partner and Head of Marketing	Communication and marketing agency (130 employees)
Pollux Consulting	Corporate and employer branding	Account manager 1	(see description above)
Pollux Consulting	Corporate and employer branding	Account manager 2	(see description above)
Athos	Human resources, recruiting and retaining	HR Executive	International IT consultancy (20 000 employees worldwide)
Aramis	Human resources, recruiting and retaining	HR Executive	Real estate agency (1100 employees)
Porthos	Employer branding towards young professionals and new recruitments	Head of Student & Young professionals relations	Consultant agency, auditing, tax, advisory (145 000 employees worldwide)

### 3.3 Data Collection

#### 3.3.1 Primary Data

The primary data has been collected through personal interviews and telephone interviews. Interviews are one of the most important sources of information when conducting a case study (Yin, 2007). The interviews were conducted in person or via telephone and each interview lasted for approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were of a semi-structured nature with open-ended questions in order to allow an open discussion with the respondents regarding the different themes of the subject (c.f. Yin, 2007). According to Saunders (2009) semi-structured interviews are applicable when the purpose of the study is descriptive. When the aim is

exploratory Saunders (2009) also recommends keeping the interviews unstructured. This study is characterized by both a descriptive and exploratory purpose, which is why an interview guide (see Appendix A) covering the fundamental issues was created in preparation for the interviews and used as a starting point for the discussion. To permit a comparison between the cases, the fundamentals of each interview were similarly designed. The themes were concerned with the definition of the concept of EB, the role of EB in the recruitment process as well as the HR department's utilizing and communication of the employer brand to the potential employees. The consultancy firms, Castor Consulting and Pollux Consulting, were asked to explain the implementation process of the employer brand strategy at their client companies. Athos, Aramis and Porthos were asked to describe the work with the employer brand at strategic and operational levels. The informants at Athos, Aramis and Porthos also discussed with the researchers which departments, within each company respectively, are involved in the EB management. Finally, the informants were asked how they measure how well they succeed in communicating and implementing the employer brand strategy. If the researchers needed further information or clarifications from the informants, contact was taken via e-mail.

### **3.3.2 Secondary Data**

Secondary data was collected from each company's website and other electronic sources and was used to complement the interviews and for contrasting the primary data. Recruitment advertising, descriptions of the firms as employers and other background information, for example from annual reports, were gathered to give full background information and to clarify the perceived employer brand of each company. Each firm respectively has a description on their website aiming to depict the values of the firm and what they offer their employees. One of the firms, Aramis, has a video on their website aiming to present the firm as an employer and what the potential employee can expect if being recruited.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

All the interviews were transcribed, translated and coded in order to facilitate the data analysis and to enable a comparison, both between the theoretical framework and the empirical findings as well as between the sources. The coding laid the foundation for the presentation of the empirical data received from interviews and other sources. Common themes were identified and assigned categories, which also enabled the analysis of the material (c.f. Spiggle, 1994). The empirical presentation is built on statements both from

primary and secondary sources, and is outlined according to common themes, including both similarities and differences. Coding is considered the starting point in qualitative research and an instrument used for analyzing data and is according to Bryman and Bell (2007) the process where data is divided into constituents and categorized according to the researchers' interpretations. Transcribing the material reduce the risk of personal interpretations by the researchers and also allow them to go back and verify information received during the interviews. Collection and analysis were parallel processes, which means that analysis of the data occurred in connection to the data collection (c.f. Yin (2007)). The analysis is based on the research questions of why and in what way EB is used in recruitment and retaining purposes, where the first two parts focus on why, while the following three contains discussions of in what way.

### **3.5 Research Limitations and Quality of the Study**

A limitation with case studies is that the result can not be generalized to an entire population (c.f. Yin, 2011). To at least increase the possibility of rendering an analytical generalization and to increase the validity of the study, multiple sources were used and the research sample contained companies ranging from small to large size from various industries. By choosing informants with different positions, such as HR Executives and EB Specialists, the scope of information is extensive and the description of the phenomena becomes more balanced since it includes several perspectives (c.f. Blumberg et al., 2008; Yin, 2011).

By anonymizing the companies and individual informants the possibility of acquiring and verifying information stated in this thesis is limited. However, there is no reason to misrepresent the information received from them, which is otherwise mentioned by for example Yin (2011) as a risk when using a qualitative approach and collecting data through interviews. Since the researchers were aware of this risk, the interviews were transcribed which made it possible to go back and verify the information. By undertaking a qualitative approach and collecting data through interviews the information received is more detailed and elaborated, compared to the use of a quantitative approach, which is why a qualitative approach is considered appropriate when studying a relatively new and unexplored phenomena that needs to be studied in detailed, in order to get a deeper understanding (c.f. Holme & Solvang, 1997; Yin, 2011).

## 4. Empirical Findings

*This section consists of a presentation of the empirical data received from the case study. The section starts with a brief description of the companies and a presentation of the common characteristics of their definitions of EB. It proceeds with a description of their use of EB in practise and its importance in HRM processes. The received data show that the employer brand can be a competitive advantage and the use of it can contribute to making the recruitment process more effective.*

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### 4.1 Definition of Employer Branding

All the informants, both EB Specialists at Castor Consulting, Pollux Consulting and Porthos, as well as HR Executives at Athos and Aramis, consider EB to be a rather new phenomena. When defining the time period of EB being a know strategy in HRM and brand management, Athos and Aramis associate the starting point of their EB strategy in 2003 and 2004 respectively. The EB Specialist at Castor Consulting confirms the starting point to somewhere year 2000 to 2005 and states; *“We jumped on the train just in the right time and now we see a boom of employer branding bureaus”*. Porthos started working with EB about ten years ago, even though the company did not label it EB until a few years ago. Castor Consulting and Porthos describe the work with the employer brand as a long term strategy. Porthos establishes the plan concerning EB on a strategic level three years ahead, in order to ensure that it permeates the daily operations. The definition of EB was very similar between the companies. Keywords such as *“attract”, “retain”, “communication”* and *“internal and external consistency”* were mentioned by all of the interviewees. When asked to explain EB in a more detailed context words like *“work environment”, “competitions”* and *“follow up”* were mentioned. However, there was a general agreement that the core of EB is defined as the strategy to recruit and retain suitable employees and to communicate a consistent image, both internally and externally.

### 4.2 Importance of Employer Branding in the Recruitment Process

The recruitment process plays an important role in building the employer brand. The two HR Executives at Athos and Aramis specifically express the importance of a well executed recruitment process, due to the cost of a failed employment. The cost of a bad recruitment is estimated to a minimum of 200 000 SEK plus the cost of an annual salary, according to the

Project Manager at Castor Consulting. HR Executives at both Athos and Aramis stress the large consequences when new employees do not match the expectations of the company, or vice versa, when the company does not match the expectations of the employee. This will ultimately lead to an untenable situation for the company as well as for the employee. According to EB Specialists at Pollux Consulting, this can be rectified by EB. Hence the quote by the HR Executive at Aramis; *“If we don’t use it [EB], we are screwed”*. The informant continues by explaining that the firm’s reputation depends to a large extent on their employer brand and that they will immediately fall behind their competitors if an EB strategy is not . The informant at Porthos stresses that the EB strategy is a continuous process that includes all units of the firm. The employees are the most important ambassadors, and therefore it is vital to have the best employees. According to the EB Specialist at Porthos another reason for the enhanced importance of EB in the context of HRM, is the demand from potential employees, especially students, of receiving a proper image of the company and the work place environment, in advance of employment. This is confirmed by the EB Specialist at Pollux Consulting, who further sees advantages in the increased demands, since it implies that the firm needs to clearly express its values and internalize them.

The EB Specialist at Castor Consulting instantiate the process when using EB in the context of recruitment and describe that it begins with the inherited values and how they can use these to their advantage in order to create a strong employer brand. There is a focus on quality and attracting the optimal employees; *“It is better to find one right employee than one hundred that are not suitable for the company”*. This is in line with recommendations from the HR Executives at Athos and Aramis, as well as the EB Specialists at Pollux Consulting and Porthos, who recall the importance of attracting the right people to a position. At Athos, the use of EB in the recruitment process started on an internal level where HR Executives in cooperation with the company as a whole evaluated what they could offer. The HR Executive at Athos, the EB Specialist at Porthos as well as the EB Specialist at Castor Consulting emphasize the importance of beginning with an internal evaluation and establishing what the firm stands for and what it can offer in order to secure the company from bad recruitment. *“If we manage to express our employer brand before the actual recruitment process has begun, we will sift out unsuitable candidates that do not match our brand, even before they hand in their job application. It saves us time and money and we keep the company brand intact”* says the HR Executive at Athos. The HR Executive at Aramis comments *“By communicating what*

*the company represents as an employer, the HR department can demand more from the applicants in the recruitment process.*” Both HR Executives at Athos and Aramis emphasize the use of EB in the recruitment process both for attracting suitable candidates and for sifting out the ones that are not appropriate for the firm.

### **4.3 Implementation of the Employer Branding Strategy**

All interviewees highlighted the significance of a consistent and well thought through EB strategy. According to the respondent at Castor Consulting many firms make the mistake of starting with an external communication without having any advocacy from the organization as a whole. The HR Executive at Aramis answered the question on what one would have done differently if recommencing the company’s EB strategy today with *“the opposite of what we [at Aramis] did”*. The HR Executive goes on by explaining the first assignment of increasing the workforce and that the first step taken was to turn to media and the outside world in order to increase knowledge of what was expected of a good employer. Today they would do the opposite and make the process more effective and the implementation faster by turning to the existing employees and ask them what they expect and demand from Aramis as an employer. The story corresponds with the approach Athos had when it entered the Swedish market and established a new business. The strategy was not to immediately recruit new employees, but instead to localize their strengths and uphold and nurture their existing organization and maintain their client base. In contrast to Aramis and Porthos, Aramis analyzed what its employer brand could, and should, represent with the help of an outside EB bureau. It was important not to beautify reality and not to promote an employer that did not match the actual firm. When the desired employer brand was mapped out, the firm started to recruit new employees. *“Our fundamental analysis prevented us from the need of re-inventing the wheel but instead just developing the employer branding strategy”*.

The informants at Castor Consulting and Aramis explain that the HR department, in consensus with Senior Management, is responsible for creating the employer brand in terms of designing and implementing the strategy, while Senior Management communicates it externally. This is in line with statements from the HR Executive at Athos, who in addition consider that the marketing department should be included in the communication of the employer brand externally. The HR Executive at Athos also stresses that the internal communication is crucial for implementing the employer brand with current employees, so that the message delivered to potential employees is actually internalized; *“By communicating*

*the EB strategy, it becomes implemented*". The Account Managers and EB Specialist at Pollux Consulting, on the other hand, claim that the responsibility of the EB strategy is connected to Senior Management and especially to the Vice President. The informants explain that company executives design the strategy and that it is every individual employee's task to communicate a sincere image to potential employees. The EB Specialist at Porthos agrees with the fact that all employees at the firm are responsible for communicating the employer brand and that they should all act as ambassadors for the brand, but do consider HR Executives having an important role in EB processes.

#### **4.4 Employer Proposition and Communication**

The EB Specialist at Castor Consulting suggests the creation of the employer brand, and thus the employer proposition, starts by identification of the attributes of the specific company and analysis of what it can offer its employees. Both EB Specialists at Castor Consulting and Pollux Consulting stress the fact that the strategy needs to have its starting point within the firm and that connection to internal activities is necessary. The EB strategy should not be determined based on ideals, but the goal setting should instead focus on the possibilities of the specific company, since the consistency between the internal implementation and the external message is vital for the realizing of the employer proposition. The EB Specialist at Castor Consulting means that if the firm communicates an exclusively positive and unrealistic image, potential employees that the firm consider being suitable might apply, but if the perceived image does not correspond with the actual values, there is a risk of dissatisfaction and thus employee retention will be negatively affected.

The employer brand in the context of recruiting is primarily communicated through the employment advertisement, where the companies describe themselves as employers, the work environment and also what they search for in the individual employee. The values presented by the company all together compose the employer proposition. Athos presents its benefits in economical terms, such as salaries, bonuses, insurances and pension agreements, but also in terms of characteristics of the work environment, for example openness, honesty, respect and confidence. The fundamental values of Athos are built upon entrepreneurship, cooperation and quality of operations. Aramis expresses its company values as innovativeness, cooperation and possibilities for personal development and professional training. Porthos stands for open communication, cooperation and possibilities for internal development, and demonstrate its flexibility and societal engagement as factors motivating potential employees

to apply. Pollux Consulting argue that the employer proposition currently is focused on the values of the specific company, in comparison to earlier, when companies would rather express strictly economical benefits, such as bonuses and other privileges. Additional channels to employment advertisement for communicating the employer brand is by participating in competitions or sending representatives to universities, with the purpose of attracting talent. The companies use competitions, such as Universum's Best Employer of the Year, both as channels of communication, but also as instruments for measuring how well they manage to be an attractive employer and having an attractive work environment. Additionally, Aramis exhibits on its website a video aiming to describe the employment environment and values of the firm. The video communicates advantages connected to working at the particular firm, in terms of opportunities of development, flexibility and bonuses, but also negative aspects, such as long work hours. The EB Specialist at Porthos also brings up the importance of not only communicating the positive aspects of employment, but being honest about what the potential employees can expect from working at that particular firm and providing them with a realistic picture, in order to avoid an inappropriate recruitment.

## 5. Analysis

*In this section the empirical findings are analyzed in relation to the conceptual framework. The definition of EB made by practitioners seems to be consistent with the one suggested by scholars and the employer brand is primarily used to recruit and retain suitable employees. What is not yet clarified is what business unit should have the responsibility of the creation, communication and implementation of the EB strategy.*

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### 5.1 Definition of the Concept

The definitions made by scholars are mainly consistent with the perceptions of the practitioners' views on EB as a concept. The informants emphasize the attraction and retention of potential and current employees, which is in line with the description by Martin and colleagues (2011) who also accentuate the key stakeholders' perceptions regarding the company as a high quality employer. Sullivan (2004) emphasizes that employer branding is a long-term strategy, which is confirmed by informants at Castor Consulting and Porthos. The informant at Castor Consulting discusses the creation of an employer brand strategy as an extensive process containing analysis of the current situation and possibilities, as well as implementation and communication. The informant at Porthos confirms the statement by the commentary that the EB strategy is extended over a long time period. This indicates that to build a strong and trustworthy employer brand, the strategy needs to be properly thought through and elaborated with a long term perspective. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) as well as Martin and his fellow scholars (2011) argue that differentiation from competitors is a fundamental factor in having a successful employer brand. Castor Consulting promotes the first important step in building a strong employer brand as identifying the unique attributes of the specific company, and to avoid ideals provided by media and others. The differentiation from others seems to be an important component of the EB strategy since it motivates talented employees to apply to the firm, instead of applying to its competitors. The competition for these employees with competence is according to Lievens and Highhouse (2003) described as intense, and therefore the acquiring of those is vital for the firm's creation of competitive advantages and their profitability. To distinguish the company from other employers can therefore be seen as a vital part of the EB strategy, since a key in attracting and recruiting talented employees is to offer something that the competitors can not.

## **5.2 The Purpose of Employer Branding**

The HR department plays an important role in creating and communicating the employer brand according to Barrow (2008). All informants agreed on the fact that the responsibility is connected to HR, except for Pollux Consulting who claim that the liability of delivering the employer brand and attracting suitable employees lies on the executives within the companies, especially the Vice President. Castor Consulting, Athos and Aramis all stress the fact that the cooperation between HR and Senior Management is crucial in order to create a strong and trustworthy employer brand, and further to communicate it externally. Barrow (2008) as well as Morocko and Uncles (2008) claim that since HR are involved in the recruitment processes, and thus are responsible for the attraction and retention of employees, they should be managing the creation and implementation of the EB strategy. This is consistent with the opinions of Castor Consulting, Athos and Aramis, who consider that HR should establish the foundation of the employer brand, and further communicate it to potential employees as well as implement it with current employees to internalize the core values. The EB Specialist at Porthos also declares the HR department as primarily responsible for the EB strategy, but stress the fact that executives are highly involved and that all decisions need to be confirmed by them. Further, the informant at Porthos points out the importance of current employees in delivering the employer brand. Every individual employee functions as an ambassador of the brand, and thus it is vital that the values have been internalized. There is a congruity that all employees are involved in EB processes, since they represent the employer brand. This further reinforces the importance of a proper implementation of the strategy and internalization of the values so that current employees are well informed, since their image might affect the attraction of potential employees. However, the allocation of the responsibility of managing the employer brand can be perceived as somewhat vague and ambiguous. Research regarding the phenomena of EB is relatively new and consequently there are no explicit guidelines or frameworks based on empirical facts for how companies can or should work with EB management. This could be a reason for the differences regarding the opinions of under which business unit EB should be positioned. There seems to be differences in opinions of whether the HR department are primarily responsible for EB processes, and whether other executives and the marketing department should be involved.

## **5.3 Human Resources' Role and Responsibility**

All informants agree that having a strong employer brand is a competitive advantage. Castor Consulting states that employees are the primary tool for creating competitive advantages.

According to Mosley (2007) human capital is an asset that has received increased value during recent years. What has become evident from the interviews with practitioners is that one purpose of using the employer brand in the context of HRM is to make the recruitment process more effective. Athos and Aramis both agree that by clearly presenting what they represent as an employer, they have improved the quality of the applications. Their goal is not to have as many applicants as possible, but to attract the applicants that are most suitable for their company. Aramis further demonstrates the possibility to increase their demands on the applicants during the recruitment process. By using their EB strategy as an instrument in the recruitment process, they manage to sort out individuals that are not consistent with their values, and thus are not suitable for the organization. Moreover, the employer brand can be used as an instrument to make the recruitment process more effective and to ensure that applicants that are suitable and match the firm's values apply. It is likely to believe that this will save the firm both time and money. This is consistent with Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) who discuss the importance of communicating the employer brand externally to attract applicants that possess the capabilities and competences that the company desires. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) suggest the employer brand can be used both externally and internally. A strong employer brand with distinctive attributes can in the internal perspective contribute to high employee loyalty, commitment and retention. EB can also be used externally as an instrument to position the company as an employer, by communicating the characteristics of the specific organization (c.f. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The image that the employer presents will affect the applicant attraction (c.f. Belt & Paolillo, 1982; Greening & Turban, 2000) and thus it is important to communicate a sincere image. All informants stress the importance of consistency between the internal values and the external image, which can be assumed to be a key for creating a successful EB strategy, since it was first when they based their strategies on internal values that it became implemented and successful. To define successful in the case of EB, measurement such as competitions, for example "Universum Best Employer 2012" and a bench mark of employee turnover can be used. It is assumable that such benchmarks and competitions enhances the team spirit when striving towards the same goals.

#### **5.4 Realistic Employer Propositions**

Promises delivered by the employer need to be adequate and honest (c.f. Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The employer makes a value proposition which creates expectations and communicates obligations to the potential employee during the recruitment process. Castor

Consulting stresses the fact that the employer brand strategy needs to have its starting point within the firm and to create a trustworthy employer brand, the company needs to communicate its core values and what makes them unique as an employer. They focus on the possibilities of the specific company instead of what is considered an ideal employer, which could be considered to be in line with the analysis made by Morocko and Uncles (2008) who stress that the brand, as well as the employer brand, needs to be characterized by accuracy and that the values inherited in the brand should be in focus. One commonality between four of the five companies is that they all begun with an external perspective when building their employer brands, but it should also be mentioned that they all stress the importance of starting with an internal approach. All companies claim that the internal starting point was vital for their EB strategy to be successful and that it was first when they prioritized the inherited values and the current employees that the strategy became useful and implemented. When turning to external sources and designing a strategy based on what is expected, the possibility to implement it and internalize the values seem to have been limited. What is interesting is that when using an internal approach with current employees as a starting point, the strategy became successful, which implicates there is a need and a demand for an EB framework on how it should be utilized by practitioners. If the company presents an exclusively positive and unrealistic image, it may attract talented employees, but if these values are not internalized and implemented in the HRM processes, there is a large risk that the employee will be dissatisfied, since the company does not live up to the expectations delivered during the recruitment process.

The informant at Athos claims that consistency with reality and connection between the internal and external parts are crucial. Morocko and Uncles (2008) discuss the values that are inherited in the employer brand and the importance of delivering these consistently. For the strategy to be sustainable and accurately functioning the values of the employer brand need, according to Mosley (2007), to be implemented into the leadership and management processes. What is communicated externally must also be consistent with what is actually delivered internally, which is equivalent with the opinion of the informant at Aramis, who stresses that the creation of a good work place is critical for employee retention, and in extension for the employer brand. In the video that Aramis exhibits on its website, both the advantages as well as the disadvantages are exposed. This is in line with the analysis made by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) who claim that if the image presented through the employer

brand is exclusively positive and not realistic, there is a risk of dissatisfaction, which increases employee turnover. Through its video Aramis presents an image that is supposed to attract suitable people, but it also exposes the negative aspects, with the aim of creating a realistic employer proposition that can be internalized. The fact that the negative aspects are also presented, could be due to the increased demands from potential employees of receiving a realistic picture in advance of employment. Moreover, there seems to be an agreement among the companies that recruitment is an important and expensive process, and that a bad recruitment is extremely expensive. If the company manages to deliver a realistic employer brand image externally that it can realize internally, the possibility that the recruited employee will be satisfied is larger, and the risk that the recruitment is improper can be assumed to be lower. This would probably lead to high employee retention, which is assumed to generate increased productivity within the firm. Moreover, it is also reasonable to expect that high employee retention will positively contribute to the company's employer brand.

### **5.5 Characteristics of Strong Employer Brands**

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) discuss the company image in an external perspective and categorize the benefits associated with a specific company as functional and symbolic benefits. Athos, Aramis and Porthos all have high ranking on the list of successful employer brands, and one similarity between them is the explicit employer offer and value proposition. Athos, Aramis and Porthos express their functional benefits in terms of salaries, bonuses, insurances and pension conditions. The symbolic benefits at Athos are described in terms of entrepreneurship, cooperation and quality of operations, while Aramis offers symbolic benefits in terms of innovativeness, cooperation and possibilities for personal development and professional training. What is evident is that all three companies have both the functional and symbolic benefits that Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) the symbolic benefits become increasingly important when the functional benefits do not differ between companies. Even though Athos, Aramis and Porthos operate in different industries, the functional benefits do not distinguish significantly. By communicating the symbolic benefits connected to the firm, they motivate the potential employees to apply to them and not to their competitors. Pollux Consulting stresses the fact that the importance of the symbolic benefits, in comparison to functional benefits, have increased. Currently, employees seem to value these symbolic benefits more than those that are strictly economical as the functional benefits do not differ much between companies or industries. Benefits are communicated to the potential employees, but most importantly, the

promises have their starting point within the specific firm and are consistent with their core values. The fundamental values of Athos are built upon openness, honesty, respect and confidence and there is a consistency between the internal and the external image, which is demonstrated by the fact that the values expressed through the employer brand strategy is consistent with how the current employees describe their employer according to Universum (2012). This contributes to the building of a trustworthy and successful employer brand. Maxwell and Knox (2009) argue that the attributes of employer brands differ between companies, but there are categories of attributes that have impact on the attractiveness of the firm. The attributes expressed by Athos, Aramis and Porthos are mainly related to employment factors, such as flexibility, cooperation and innovativeness. According to the EB consultancy companies, the demand for pronounced symbolic benefits, in terms of employment factors, in advance of employment has increased, which may have contributed to the intensified importance of an explicit EB strategy. One can assume that talented employees have high demands on their employers and therefore require information regarding the work environment and the proposition of the employer in advance of employment. The distinct employer proposition from the companies included in the sample selection, that clearly have strong employer brands, could be a reason for why they are able to recruit talented employees, and further to retain them within the firm. A strong employer brand leads to a high degree of employee loyalty and commitment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), but it is also reasonable to assume that employee loyalty, and thus high employee retention, enhances the employer brand.

## 6. Conclusion

*The last chapter contains a summary of the most important results from the study. It has been shown that the employer brand can be used as an instrument in the context of recruitment to make the process more effective, and that internal and external consistency is vital for the success of the EB strategy. Moreover, the research contributions including suggestions for further research are outlined. The results of this study can be used as a starting point for a framework of how companies can use EB in the context of HRM.*

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### 6.1 Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate in what way and why companies use employer branding in HRM, and specifically in recruitment and retaining processes. What has become evident is that for the strategy to be useful it needs to be internally attached with current employees, before it can be communicated externally to potential employees. The purpose is that the perceived image, and thus the expectations of potential employees, should correspond with the actual values, in order to positively affect employee retention. The initial task for HR is to identify the unique attributes related to the specific firm and what differentiates it from its competitors. By the expression of these attributes the firm composes its employer proposition, which can be used in the recruitment process to attract suitable employees. By using their employer brand in the context of HRM, companies can make the recruitment processes more effective. The effectiveness can be exemplified as follows; if the employer brand is delivered accurately, individuals that are suitable for the organization are more prone to apply, and those who are not suitable will not apply, which indicates a streamlining in the recruitment process. However, there is some confusion regarding which business unit that should be responsible for creating and communicating the employer brand. The majority of this study's informants agree that HR should have the main responsibility. Moreover, they agree that cooperation, first and foremost with Senior Executives but also with the marketing department, is seen as vital. Furthermore, there seems to be a task assigned to current employees of acting as ambassadors for their employer, in order to communicate and represent the employer brand.

## **6.2 Research Contributions**

### **6.2.1 Managerial Implications**

The lack of empirical research made by scholars has given this study great potential to contribute to a previously unknown area within HRM, EB and how companies should work with the implementation of the mentioned concepts. Since the study is based upon and conducted in a real-life setting, it highlights the importance and use of EB and can hopefully be seen as a first step to guide firms in need of an enhanced employer brand. This study can be used as an initial framework for the utilization of EB and has shown that HR managers can use it in the recruitment process, in order to make it more effective and to attract and recruit suitable employees. With an internal approach and evaluation of the firm's values, and further communication of these values, EB is an instrument in HRM aiming to recruit and retain suitable employees, which is seen as vital since competition for individuals with competence is intense. The results and findings from this study is a starting point for how EB can be used by managers in the context of HRM and specifically to recruit and retain these employees. Moreover, this thesis stresses the importance of an internal starting point when launching an employer brand strategy, which can motivate companies in the creation of an employer brand to start off with the right approach from the beginning.

### **6.2.2 Impact on Existing Field of Research and Suggestion for Further Research**

Previous research has shown that EB is a rather new area in both the academic world as well as in the corporate world. It seems to be every employer's mission to attract new talents and recruit suitable employees to match the firm's needs and orientation. This research is a contribution to the relatively inadequate frontier of EB and its relevance when recruiting talented employees. Previous research has been conducted mainly with a theoretical approach, and this study has contributed to the existing field by providing empirical data that gives insights in successful EB strategies and functions as an initial framework for the use of EB in the context of HRM. The most successful companies within EB according to Universum (2012) are companies offering services, and one issue of interest is therefore whether there are any differences concerning the importance of EB between service companies and firms offering pure goods. To further investigate the subject, and to strengthen the empirical findings of this study, one suggestion is to conduct extensive research including a larger sample selection. What is yet to be discovered is how to retain talented employees and their competence within the firm. Little research has been made in this area, which is why we

suggest further research to focus on sustainable EB and to investigate further how companies work internally with communications and such, to follow up the results of the internal EB in retaining and its influence on external EB in recruiting. Additionally, for a deeper understanding and clarifications of the use of EB, one research suggestion is further investigation concerning which business unit should be responsible for the creation and communication of the strategy, since there currently exist some ambiguity regarding the responsibility issue.

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## APPENDIX – INTERVIEW GUIDE

### **Background**

1. What is your position at the company and your role in the company's Employer Branding process?
2. How long have you worked at the company and how long on this specific position?
3. What are your main job assignments?

### **Employer Branding at Castor Consulting and Pollux Consulting**

1. How would you describe the concept "Employer Branding"?
2. How does your company work with the implementation of Employer Branding at client companies?
3. Are there different Employer Branding Management strategies?
4. Have you seen any change in Employer Branding Management over the years?
5. What is your client's main reason to use employer branding?

### **Employer Branding at Athos, Aramis and Porthos**

1. How would you describe the concept "Employer Branding"?
2. What is the main purpose for using Employer Branding Management?
3. How do you work with Employer Branding Management on a strategic level/operational level?
4. How is the Employer Brand strategy designed?
5. How is the Employer Brand used in the recruitment process?
6. Which advantages are there with using the Employer Brand in the recruitment process?
7. How has it changed over time?
8. Which people within the firm are involved with Employer Branding Management? How?
9. How do you measure if you succeed in communicating and implementing the Employer Brand strategy?