

Living Up to Young Employees' Expectations: Employer Brand Management in Health Care Organisations

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Health care professionals are ageing, and there is a severe, global need to attract future employees. This study examines the construction of employer brand image among young health care professionals, and related elements. The qualitative research data were collected through email and personal interviews from young nursing and physician students. The analysis results indicate that organisations can affect their employer brand image for future employees through supportive working culture and human resource practices as well as direct marketing actions. The marketing and human resource practices targeted towards young health care professionals are underused. The results can help health care organisations in planning recruitment and marketing processes according to young health care professionals' expectations. This study integrates human resource management research and marketing research relating to employer branding and recruitment.

Key Words: employer brand management, young employees, recruitment, health care, strategic human resource management

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Introduction

Traditional brand-related research has generally related to nations, individuals, products, and organisations. According to a recent study, young people have a need to know how organisations take care of their employees. Young employees hope for an interesting job, so it is not insignificant

what kind of image the organisations present (Suomalaisen työn liitto 2020). The topic of this paper, employer brand image as a part of strategic organisational branding, relates to recruitment, with a specific focus on the Finnish health care sector. Employer branding is examined from the perspective of new health care professionals applying for their first job as this is a key target group for future recruitment and for securing the pool of needed talent for health care organisations.

The biggest current professional groups in health care, nurses and physicians, are ageing. The greying of the workforce in all industrialised countries has been described as ‘a demographic time bomb’ (Vettori 2010, 14; Kunze, Boehm, and Bruch 2011). In Finland, this especially concerns the public sector, as over 80% of public sector employees work in social and health care, and over half of the Finnish public sector personnel will retire between 2008–2025 (KEVA 2016; 2019). Hence, motivated applicants with the right skills profiles and attitudes are needed to replace the retiring personnel. There is plenty of research relating to employer brand and recruitment, but only a few studies from the perspective of health care and especially that of young health care professionals. These potential future employees are very important to organisations in times of employee shortage. The importance of attracting the workforce to the health care sector has been rising globally since the Covid-19 outbreak, making the question of employer branding especially timely and crucial in this context.

In countries where the average age of health care personnel has grown, hiring skilled personnel can be difficult as the public image of the health care profession is not attractive due to the working conditions and high workload. Concurrently, there are several recruitment-related challenges (Askfors and Fornstedt 2018; Heilmann 2010) involving the lack of specialist skills, lack of experience, applicant salary requirements, and the overall lack of applicants (Beardwell and Claydon 2010). Nowadays the biggest challenge involves the lack of applicants, which has, for example, led to recruiting potential candidates from abroad. Therefore, organisations need to understand the expectations of young professionals and manage their image (Yu 2019) to improve their brand and recruitment. The research topic is thus very timely, and the context is interesting as there is a long-awaited public health care reform on the way.

The scientific discussion of employer branding relates to human resource (HR) management, organisational behaviour, and marketing research, and is understood as a common effort to promote a desirable

workplace image. People's perceptions of organisations are based on a set of corporate, organisational and institutional images. The corporate image is considered as an image of an organisation experienced by various stakeholders (Furman 2010; Luoma-aho and Vos 2010). Prospective applicants generate an opinion of the organisation, and the overall employer brand is based on their opinions and views of the organisation as an employer. Thus, the discussion on employer brand image is particularly linked to recruitment studies within human resource management (see, e.g., Heilmann 2010).

The reputation and image of a corporation, as well as the industry image, are important factors for potential job applicants, affecting their decisions on applying for work (Lee, Lee, and Wu 2011; Turban, Forret, and Hendrickson 1998). Good organisational image and reputation (Mariconda, Zamparini, and Lurati 2021) influence the applicants' intentions to seek employment opportunities, and their perceptions of a particular organisation (Helm 2013). The employer image of a company is an impression of the organisation as a place to work. Good organisational image can explain the organisational attraction of applicants (Drury 2016; Lievens and Slaughter 2016). Also, the impact of advertisement-image congruity has a high impact on its attractiveness for applicants (Baum, Schäfer, and Kabst 2016).

Although some studies focus on defining the elements of constructing an employer brand and discuss its consequences such as the positive impact on organisational attractiveness, surveys covering the employee side are lacking (Charbonnier-Voirin and Poujul 2017). One such recent example is provided by Yu and Davis (2019) who discuss how employee job search behaviour influences organisational attraction. Additionally, there is a shortage of knowledge of how employer brand is formulated when discussing recruitment and related practices (e.g. Lievens and Slaughter 2016; Yu 2019). This paper tries to cover both gaps. Furthermore, this study aims to clarify the blurry discussion on the conceptualisation of employer branding by focusing on potential employees as called for by recent authors (Theurer et al. 2018; Lane 2016). The organisational viewpoint of employer brand image in the health care context has been investigated, for example, from the viewpoint of using social media for nurse recruitment (Carpentier et al. 2017), but studies from the perspective of young health care professionals and employer branding are rare.

The research problem of this paper is to examine how employer brand is constructed among young Finnish health care professionals. The prob-

lem is approached through investigating the elements of the employer brand image; the important factors that encourage or discourage potential young employees to apply for a job; and actions and tools used in improving employer branding in a health care organisation. The current research approaches these themes from the perspectives of the individual physician and nursing students who are about to complete their studies.

As an important finding, this study stresses the change of the employment culture in the eyes of young health care professionals who dare to demand certain terms of employment even from their first employer. Young professionals also ask for collegial support, good working conditions and leadership practices in their first workplace. In response to this, health care organisations should be more visible in educational institutions and use different marketing tools in their recruitment.

The findings of this study are useful to both academics and practitioners in passing information from young professionals to health care organisations on what they expect of future work. This paper encourages practitioners to invest more in employment marketing and proper recruitment processes. Employer brand image and recruitment processes that target young professionals have not been well covered by health care management research, but an ageing health care profession and changing job market environment necessitate preparing for the future.

This paper is organised as follows: first, the literature relating to employer brand image and recruitment is reviewed. Second, the qualitative research material and methods are presented. Third, the analysis results are reported, followed by discussion and conclusions.

Previous Research

EMPLOYER BRAND IMAGE

The term *brand* originates from marketing management literature and can be defined as ‘a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them, meant to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from competitors’ goods or services’ (Kotler and Keller 2009). It relates to organisational competitiveness (Keller and Lehmann 2006; Sullivan 2004). A brand is a product or service whose dimensions differentiate it from other products or services designed to fulfil the same need. These differences can be rational, functional, or tangible, associated with a brand’s product performance. If these differences are related to what the brand represents, they can be symbolic, emotional,

or intangible (Kotler and Keller 2009). The employer brand is 'a package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment' (Ambler and Barrow 1996) and identified with the employing company. The primary role of the employer brand involves providing a coherent framework for the management to simplify and focus on priorities, increase productivity, and improve recruitment, retention, and commitment. Recent studies have focused mostly on the 'best employer' surveys (Love and Singh 2011), and on how a person thinks about working for a specific company (Nolan et al. 2013). Employer branding covers both the current and potential employees as the branding targets, whereas product branding considers how a product is represented to customers (Edwards 2010). The employer brand can be said to have a personality that could be positioned as a product brand. Therefore, traditional marketing techniques, especially research, could be usable (Ambler and Barrow 1996).

According to Aggerholm, Andersen, and Thomsen (2011), employer branding covers the 'communicative, relationship building, and cross-disciplinary processes, which create, negotiate and enact sustainable employee-employer relationships, i.e., long-term relationships between an organisation and its potential, and the existing employees, initiated by corporate branding processes that integrate the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) through sustainable HRM.' Employer branding aims to communicate to both prospective and existing employees that the organisation is a desirable place to work (Backhaus 2016; Foster, Punjaisri, and Cheng 2010). It also forms beliefs on how well the employees and prospective employees will 'fit' with the employment opportunities (Nolan et al. 2013; Kristof-Brown and Guay 2011).

This paper focuses on potential new employees only. New employees are usually young, and as a study conducted among college students highlighted, employee-centred HR is important in forming a strong employer brand to support recruiting (Wayne and Casper 2012). Employment branding reflects the image of the organisation in the eyes of employees concerning working for the company.

The term *employer branding* has been mainly used for developing a distinctive external reputation; some authors also include internal attempts to achieve positive employee engagement or culture change. Recently, a more integrated approach has evolved. External recruitment promises have been aligned with the internal employee experience and employer brand development integrated with the corporate and customer

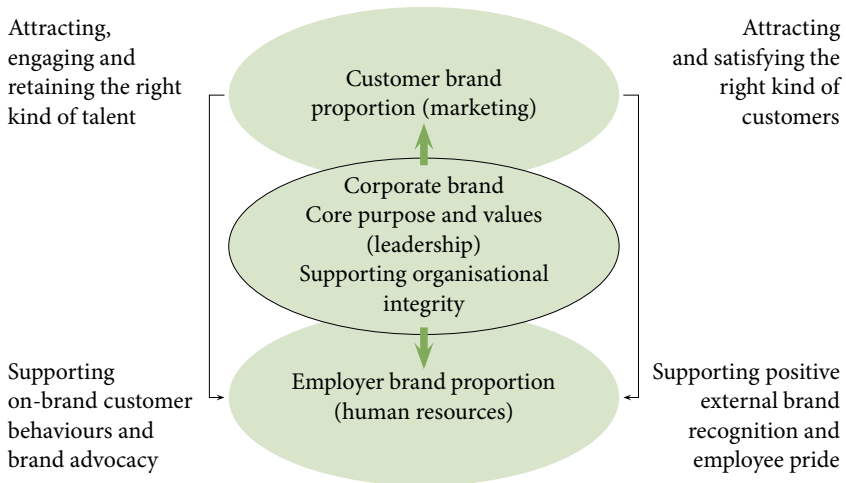


FIGURE 1 Integrated Service Brand Model (adapted from Mosley 2007)

brand in many organisations. This approach (figure 1) defines the HR-led role of employer brand management as a reinforcing counterpart to the marketing-led role of customer brand management. The role of leadership is to maintain the integrity of the corporate brand through applicable communication and behaviours (Mosley 2007).

The progression towards a more integrated perspective of the brand has promoted acknowledging that employer brands must have a dual purpose. The employer brand proposition clarifies what potential and current employees can expect from the organisation regarding rational and emotional benefits. Additionally, it must clarify what is expected from the employees in return. Most integrated employer brand propositions involve 'give' and 'get' sides that align the promise of the employer brand with the corporate performance agenda and the customer brand (Mosley 2007).

Current conceptualisations of employer branding are characterised by:

- A static inside-out notion of the employer brand: the employer brand propositions are defined by brand strategists based on brand identity, and conceptualised as stable and enduring core characteristics, or the brand DNA (Urde 2013).
- The exposure and transmission of employer brand propositions or attributes, internally (Punjaisri and Wilson 2011) or externally (Kucherov and Zavyalova 2012; Edwards 2010).

- A linear employer branding practice entailing static sender (employer) and receiver (employees) positions (Backhaus 2016).
- A channel to enhance customer experiences (Mosley 2007) and organisational performance (Ambler and Barrow 1996).
- A brand value pyramid model that measures the strength of the employer brand on three hierarchically ordered dimensions: knowledge of the employer, consideration of the employer and choice of the employer (Franca and Pahor 2012).

EMPLOYER BRAND MANAGEMENT

To deliver a consistent brand service experience, the organisation must manage all significant operational and interpersonal touchpoints with the customer, not only the communication channels. The employee experience is much more complex than a service experience, therefore organisations would benefit from adopting a similar approach and even appointing an employer brand manager responsible for specific tasks related to creating and nurturing the employer brand for potential and current employees (Edlinger 2015). Employee touchpoints can be described as a wide range of ritualised processes and HR 'products' that are involved in people management. They could equally be used on recruitment, orientation, communication, shared services, performance management, employee development, measurement, reward, and recognition. Similarly, the core values and competencies govern the everyday employee experience through their immediate line managers' and corporate leaders' communication and behaviour. The employer brand experience framework is shown in figure 2.

In the employer brand context, there exist a wide range of functional (good salary, career opportunities) and emotional benefits (belonging, caring, personal growth) that people derive from their work. Barrow and Mosley (2011) have defined the employer brand mix that helps to assess organisations' current employer brand realities and plan on how to deliver the desired employer brand proposition. The employer brand mix has 12 key dimensions that can be divided into two broad groups. The first group includes organisational and policy aspects (external reputation, internal communication, senior leadership, values and corporate social responsibility, internal measurement systems and service support) and the second group includes local and practice-related aspects (recruitment and induction, team management, performance appraisal, learning and development, reward and recognition and working environment).

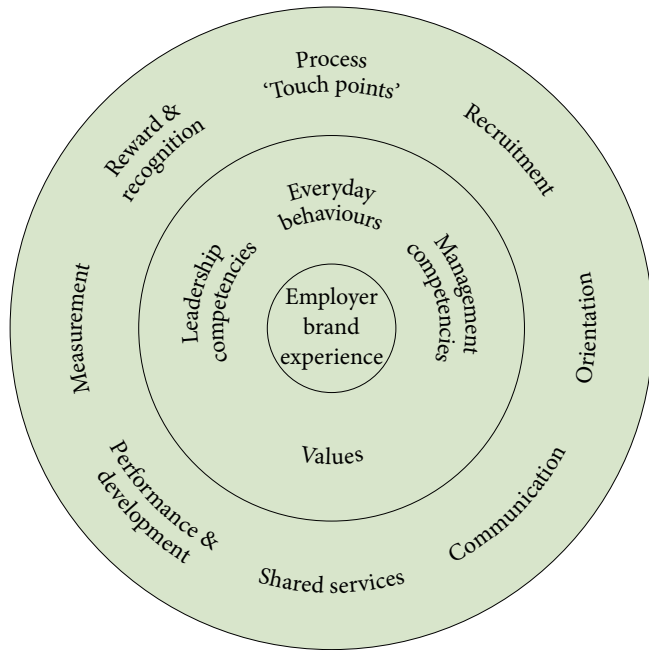


FIGURE 2
Employer Brand
Experience
Framework
(adapted from
Mosley 2007)

This model can support organisations in differentiating themselves from their competition.

Additionally, differentiating from competition involves organisations ensuring that their employer brand attracts the right kind of people. Thus, the employer brand management reinforces the right kind of culture, which includes everything from the customer-facing frontline to the deepest recesses of every support function (Mosley 2007).

Nowadays, the Internet and social media play an important role in creating employer brand image (Carpentier et al. 2017; Mehta and Sharma 2016). Organisations have used their websites to attract and inform prospective applicants by adding features and content that highlight career aspects. A survey of websites of the top fifty US accounting firms has revealed that most could improve in providing information relevant to job seekers, and in presenting the information in ways that emphasise originality and flair. The career pages could be made more appealing and useful by keeping the content fresh, opening avenues for one-to-one online communication, and giving more specifics about the benefits aside from any other career information. Websites and social media should give young people an idea of what it is like to work at the organ-

isation, preferably through videos and other multimedia presentations that highlight young people who already work there. The use of modern media creates an impression of being dynamic. Organisations can embrace new technologies in tailoring content to individual interests such as videos, podcasting, RSS feeds (Really Simple Syndication) and blogs. Young people already share their impressions of corporate cultures – whether favourable or not – via Facebook and other online communities (McCabe 2017). However, the role of the Internet in employer brand building and recruitment has not been properly used in many health care organisations. Wilden, Gudergan, and Lings (2010) have discovered that the effectiveness of a brand signal to potential employees is dependent on the consistency, clarity, credibility, and associated investments in the employer brand.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is the most important function of human resource management (Boxall and Purcell 2011). Recruiting is based on an organisation's vision, strategy, human resource management and human resource planning activities (Chung, Brewster, and Bozkurt 2020). The key stages of a systematic approach to the recruitment and the selection process can be summarised as *defining the vacancy, attracting applicants, assessing candidates, and making the final decision* (Boxall and Purcell 2011; Beardwell and Claydon 2010; Tanwar and Prasad 2016).

Recruitment is a broad term used to communicate the notion of acquainting someone with the organisation, which covers everything from advertising to induction. Themes that affect recruitment and selection are changes in organisation, job, persons, society, legislation, technology, and markets (Wood and Payne 1998). The recruitment and selection process is concerned with identifying, attracting, and choosing suitable people to meet an organisation's human resource requirements. When planning employment requirements, there is usually a need to forecast 1) personnel needs, 2) the supply of inside candidates, and 3) the supply of outside candidates (Dessler 2002).

Intensification of recruitment methods, recruiting health professionals from abroad and increasing the number of health care students (Aluttis, Bishaw, and Frank 2014) have been proposed as solutions to tackle the employee shortage in health care. Other identified current trends in human resource management related to recruitment in the health care sector include employer branding, online recruitment, and HR outsource-

ing (Bejtkovsky 2017). Recruitment strategies include actions that aim at making the organisation an attractive workplace, and at reaching better applicants, for example, profiling the ideal candidate, choosing the recruitment channels and deciding on the incentives offered to candidates (Boxall and Purcell 2011). For reaching potential candidates, choosing the right media is essential, and, for example, efficient advertising provides a better range of applicants. Also, the selection method used should be tailored according to the job. The more valuable the task, the more time and resources should be invested (Nieto 2006). Recruitment branding relates to the advertisement of positions that are vacant in a company and explains the process for application (Mandhanya and Shah 2010).

There are many possible methods and channels for recruitment, such as the following:

- informal personal contacts (word of mouth, speculative applications),
- formal personal contacts (employee referral schemes, career fairs and open days),
- (electronic) notice boards, accessible by current staff and/or the public,
- advertising (local and national press, specialist publications, radio, and TV),
- external assistance (job centres, career service, employment agencies and ‘head-hunters’) (Beardwell and Claydon 2010); potentially saves costs, but may cause negative mediating effects on job acceptance intention (Wehner, Glardini, and Kabst 2015),
- social media platforms and tools (LinkedIn, Facebook), which are the most common among recruiters and jobseekers (Carpentier et al. 2017) or Twitter and YouTube.

A study conducted in 2018 among professional recruiters and managers shows that the importance of online tools and especially social media (LinkedIn, Facebook) as recruiting channels is growing, and in addition, the current personnel’s networks are utilised in identifying potential candidates (Kansallinen rekrytointitutkimus 2018). Companies usually use many of these contemporaneously. Overall, digital channels, for example, websites (Kim, Wang, and Boon 2021), have a more significant impact on applicant attraction than printed channels (Baum and Kabst 2014). The professional recruiters also identify building employer brand image as an important trend in recruitment, along with the increasing use

of artificial intelligence in the process (Kansallinen rekrytointitutkimus 2018).

Recruitment is an expert function in an organisation. Recruitment mistakes can lead to an inconvenient experience for the displaced worker and the organisation. The costs of advertising, interviewing, induction, training, and production loss during new employees' settlement are considered as the overall cost of replacement (Nieto 2006).

Based on the theoretical background presented above, employer brand management and recruitment actions are closely connected (Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen 2013; Edwards 2010; Backhaus 2016).

Material and Methods

Qualitative research is a way of learning about social reality. There are several methods for qualitative data collection; however, the selection of the methods should be based on the research topic and on how the research questions are framed (Leavy 2014). In this study, a qualitative research approach is used with asynchronous email interviews and inductive oriented analysis. The central motifs of qualitative research are the ways in which people interpret and understand their social reality: how they interpret the experiences, how they construct the world, and what meaning people dedicate to their experiences (Merriam 2009, 5). One of the most used methods to reach a person's social reality is an interview, which is considered as a process within which a participant and a researcher are focused based on questions (Leavy, 2014). When collecting qualitative research information, an individual interview is a widely used technique. The main quality of an interview is the ability to offer pure concentration on the interviewee, and therefore the interview is used in this research to provide the possibility of investigating a person's perspectives for detailed examination of their viewpoints, to reach an in-depth understanding of a person's context and catching the research phenomena, and to attain an in-depth coverage of the subject. The clarification and understanding can be provided by a suitable interview tool (Ritchie 2003; Silverman 2006).

An interview can be carried out by the means of computer-assisted interviewing (Singleton and Straits 2012), as an email interview in which the communication between the interviewer and interviewee is done in a computer-mediated fashion consisting of several emails. This type of interviewing is also referred to as an asynchronous email interview (James 2015; Ratislavová and Ratislav 2014). An email interview has several ben-

efits over face-to-face interviews: cost, range of participants, time for reflection, saying things that would not be said face-to-face, working with a set of interviews simultaneously, creating rapport and overcoming interviewer effects. Disadvantages of email interviews include problems with the sample, the interview taking too long and losing its focus, ethical issues, working with a set of interviews simultaneously, missing nonverbal cues, and impersonality (Cleary and Walter 2011). The type of interview in this study was guided and semi-structured (Adeoy-Olatunde and Olenik 2021; McGrath, Palmgren, and Liljedahl 2019; Kallio et al. 2016; Galletta 2012; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008); an outline of topics, issues, or themes existed but the wording and the order of questions varied in the email correspondence. The computer-aided research method was chosen based on resources: geographical reasons, cost-saving and flexibility. In other words, there was no need to travel, and participants could choose when to respond (Cleary and Walter 2011; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008).

The respondents were originally difficult to reach but finally, they were found with the help of educational organisations, universities, and universities of applied sciences. Qualitative samples are usually relatively small. The research data of the current study is based on textual material that was gathered through emails directed to a total of eight Finnish physician students and six nursing students at the end of their studies. The data was complemented with interviews with a senior nurse, after which the size of the total sample was 15 informants. The informants were asked to answer questions such as ‘On what basis did you chose your first job?’, ‘Which issues are important when choosing a job?’, ‘What is an attractive employer like?’, ‘What kind of recruitment channels are used?’ and ‘What is the role of management in choosing a job?’

Inductively oriented analysis was applied in this study to find similarities and differences within the qualitative research data by organising it into themes, categories and activities, and finding patterns as well as extracting from the natural variation (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). The data were analysed qualitatively by specifically classifying text into different themes and types and by using mind maps. The email interviews were analysed under four themes: (1) health care employer brand image, (2) recruitment process, (3) motivation relating to applying for a job, and (4) strategic human resource management in health care. The findings presented in the results section cover mainly themes 1 and 2, following the research problem formulation. After the specific examination, more com-

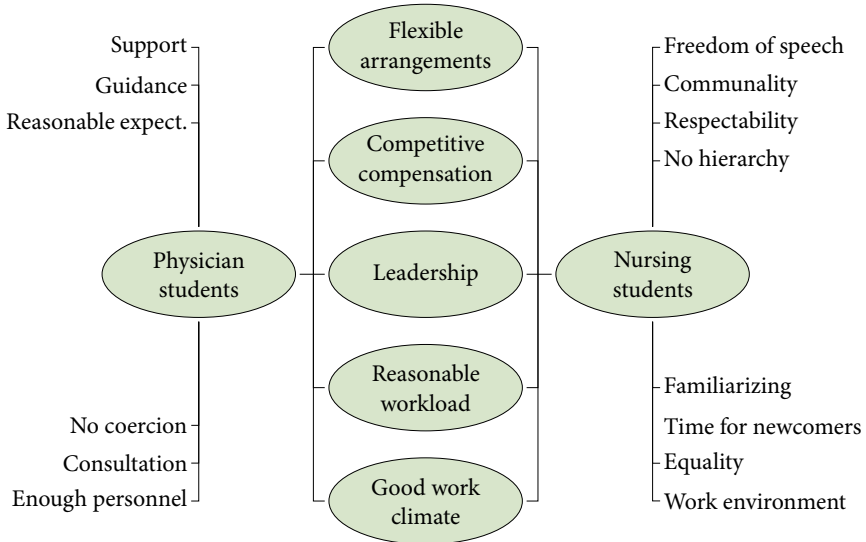


FIGURE 3 An Example of the Mind-Map Used for Inductive Analysis on ‘Attractive Employer Brand Image’

pact findings were extracted, and the overall picture of employer brand image in health care was drawn.

Results

The main focus of the study relates to the experiences concerning the employer brand image of health care organisations among those studying to become physicians and nurses. The interview results emphasise the importance of employer brand image and the need for improving the recruitment processes in health care. The analysis of the interviews utilised mind-maps as a graphical tool in classifying the text material and finding similarities and differences in the research data. An example of the material classification in the analysis phase is presented in figure 3. The issues mentioned by both informant groups are placed in the middle.

ELEMENTS OF ATTRACTIVE EMPLOYER BRAND IMAGE

Work community spirit and professional support were seen as important among both physician and nursing students. Physician students emphasised the importance of adequate support and guidance in their work, good opportunities for collegial consultation, competitive compensation, a good work climate, and enough personnel to carry out the needed tasks.

Leadership and collegial spirit were seen as important for new nurses. Nursing students emphasised the importance of the supervisor's leadership skills. In addition, a functional work environment, good work climate and communality, flexible work arrangements, non-hierarchical actions, and good processes familiarising employees were essential for young professionals. The role of professional support, consultation, and guidance were seen as important. Supervisors should give enough time to newcomers; also, the good leadership skills of a supervisor were appreciated.

As a comparison, according to a study among young technology or IT professionals, the most valued issues when choosing a future employee were interesting and challenging work, positive atmosphere and colleagues, and reimbursement (pay and other benefits) for the work. 11% of technology professionals and 16% of IT professionals chose employer brand image among the three most important factors. (Virtanen 2018). Noteworthy is that the young health care professionals stated demands of their first employer. Previously the employment situation has been more of a 'give or take' nature, and organisations have given open positions and made the recruitment rules. The employees' role has only been to accept the rules given by the employer, but now, due to the shortage of potential applicants, the negotiation power of the employees has increased. Now, new professionals dare to set terms of their own. The economy has changed, the average age of professionals has grown, and many nurses and physicians are soon retiring. The current Covid-19 pandemic has also caused exhaustion among health care professionals, encouraging them to consider career changes. At the same time, there are many health care professionals outside the workforce. The current situation has resulted in the lack of a competent workforce and opened new markets for professionals. The professionals are in more of a situation in which they can choose what they want to do and where they want to work. Recruitment has changed more towards a commercial situation. Both employer and employee can set terms; the employee can, for example, refuse to sign an employment contract if the terms of employment are not negotiable and suitable for them.

FACTORS STRENGTHENING OR WEAKENING EMPLOYER BRAND IMAGE AMONG YOUNG EMPLOYEES

Employer brand image encourages or discourages potential job applicants. The study results indicate that flexible work arrangements, super-

TABLE 1 Summary of Factors Strengthening or Weakening Employer Brand Image by Informant Group

<i>Physician students/strengthening factors</i>	<i>Nursing students/strengthening factors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible work arrangements • Leadership skills of a supervisor • Adequate support • Competitive compensation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership skills of a supervisor • Competitive compensation • Good work climate • equality among personnel
<i>Physician students/weakening factors</i>	<i>Nursing students/weakening factors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflexibility • Lack of support or consult. possibilities • Unreasonable expectations • Poor compensation • Coercion and excessive workload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rumours relating to lack of respect • Bad work climate • Huge workload • Poor compensation • Lack of voice in organization

visor leadership skills, adequate support and competitive compensation improve the employer brand image among physician students. Inflexibility, lack of support or consultation possibilities, unreasonable expectations, poor compensation, coercion, and excessive workload were the key preventive factors. According to the nursing students, the most important improving factors of employer brand image were leadership skills of a supervisor, competitive compensation, good work climate, and equality among personnel. On the other hand, rumours relating to the lack of respect in an organisation, bad work climate, enormous workload, poor compensation, and lack of voice in the organisation prevented young professionals from applying for a job in such an organisation. A graphical summary of the analysis results is presented in table 1.

SUGGESTED EMPLOYER BRANDING ACTIONS

Physician students suggested that potential employers should be more visible among the students and that they should use more direct marketing actions towards the students in educational institutions. For example, organisations can arrange coffee, lunch, or dinner events with students to inform them about their organisations and open positions. In addition, organisations should be present at professional and recruitment fairs. Physician students encouraged health care organisations to send them direct emails. Nursing students trusted the grapevine, traditional and online bulletin boards, and their own experience from compulsory practical training periods. In both examined professional groups, it was seen as important how the trainees are treated during their trainee periods in health care organisations. Both positive and negative experiences

TABLE 2 Summary of Suggested Employer Branding Actions by Informant Group

<i>Physician students</i>	<i>Nursing students</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More visibility among students • More direct marketing actions • Coffee, lunch or dinner events • Being present at professional and recruitment fairs • Direct emails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grapevine • Bulletin boards • Own experience from practice periods

were seen to spread in the professional networks. Positive information can form an impression of a magnetic employer. A graphical summary of the analysis results is presented in table 2.

Discussion and Conclusions

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

The findings of this study contribute to the discussion on employer brand image and recruitment. It seems that the employer brand image has not been managed properly in Finnish health care organisations and there is a need for ‘face-lifting’ of the employer brand image. This kind of improvement of employer brand image can be achieved as suggested by several earlier authors with better employment marketing and actions relating to a proper applicant-employer-interaction process taking into account the high impact of advertisement-image congruity when attracting applicants (Baum, Schäfer, and Kabst 2016; Mandhanya and Shah 2010; Mosley 2007).

Health care organisations need to market more vigorously and communicate more effectively the organisational culture, different HR practices and job opportunities to students (Kooij et al. 2010; Mosley 2007). The present lack of competent personnel has forced employers to think about the role of a good organisational image and their current related actions. The actions aiming at better employer brand image are twofold. First, building employer brand image relates to marketing and communication by using different tools. Different marketing actions can be used in communication, for organisational ‘face-lifting.’ Young professionals can be approached by using different channels, for example, the internet and social media, magazines, newspapers, professional and recruitment fairs, and through direct communication. The internet should be used diversely; it can be more than only a job-board for informing about open vacancies. Interviews with physicians and nurses, videos, webcasts and podcasts that demonstrate the organisation culture and work envi-

ronment can be attached to the organisation's webpages (Kauhanen 2012; Beardwell and Claydon 2010). A customer-oriented, applicant perspective is important in communicating the employer brand image. Second, the employer brand image is built in people's minds during interaction with health care organisations, including the themes such as what kind of impression a person achieves from inside or outside the organisation, and what is their experience when they have been working in the organisation. Additionally, what stories are told about different employers among the students, or what kind of observations a health care professional makes when using health care services themselves, may interest applicants.

Employer brand image seems to be constructed from different aspects. According to the results, it can be argued that employer brand image is constructed in the dynamic and continuous interaction between a health care organisation and a health care professional. It is a question of the organisational image that is built in the mind of a potential employee. Employer brand building should be taken seriously in health care organisations. Good or bad messages are spread widely. In times of personnel shortage, employers cannot afford a bad reputation.

An important finding in this paper relates to the change of employment culture. Especially in times of employee shortage, young health care professionals dare to ask for compensation, support, and opportunities to combine work and private life. An organisation can influence their employer brand by communicating the organisational politics and different HR practices to young professionals in different ways. Working practices, working climate, leadership styles, professional consultation, collegial support, good working conditions and proper recruitment processes are important when a young health care professional makes decisions relating to their first workplace. In addition, an opportunity for recovery and work-life balance is important. Previously, employees have been more at the mercy of employers, and space for negotiation concerning the terms of employment has been considerably limited.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Employer brand is built in the minds of young professionals. The challenge for organisations is to influence these impressions. Better employer brand image can be achieved through communication and influencing the impressions of potential applicants. Organisations can influence future employees by organisational behaviour, HR practices, the work cul-

ture, leadership in units, or by providing good orientation and support. Young professionals are used to using social media and their networks, where good and bad employer information is shared among students. Employers need to actively follow different forums and groups where young people are active. Also, good treatment of students during their training periods in health care organisations is important. During these training periods, employers can have discussions with trainees and gather information from students. Organisations need to listen to the quiet voice of future professionals and shape their processes and practices to respond to these expectations. Organisations should ask themselves what the new health care employees expect from their employers, what their work-life values are, and what conditions they set for their recruitment. Practically, the results of this study will help health care organisations in planning recruitment and marketing processes. Practitioners can use the information relating to young professionals' demands, to understand what they appreciate in their future work.

Based on the findings, the following actions can be suggested to organisations: it is important for health care organisations to market attractive career choices to young professionals by using different channels, for example, the internet, social media, magazines, newspapers, professional and recruitment fairs and through direct communication to young professionals. In communicating challenges and open career possibilities, it is important to clarify what kind of work and working culture young people appreciate. The recruitment process should be managed professionally and by using modern IT technology. Young people seek work-life information on the Internet, and they are used to filling in applications online. A proper Internet-based recruitment tool will help both applicants and employers in the recruitment process.

Cognisant 'face-lifting' of employer brand image should be done in the media, while simultaneously avoiding underestimating the importance of the grapevine. Leadership in units is very important during the practical training periods of students. During these fixed periods, the future professionals gain impressions of organisations as potential employers. Young people evaluate their personal treatment in their first jobs, gain an understanding of how teams work in the organisation, and what the team spirit is like, how the work processes are organised, and what type of organisational culture exists. Reasonable compensation and development opportunities are also important at the beginning of a career. Also, younger generations appreciate the possibility to combine work and pri-

vate life with the help of flexible work arrangements. Professional development can be achieved by using different methods, for example, by training, job rotation, or by working as a substitute. Based on the impressions of organisations, trainees decide whether to apply for a job in the future.

According to future health care professionals, work well-being is important. Therefore, the message of good work culture and leadership is an important recruitment-marketing factor. The positive information of an organisation filters into the young professionals' networks. A well-managed employer brand image increases the number of applications, and positively impacts organisational attractiveness. An employer brand image in the health care context includes a strong organisational profile, good services and processes, new ways of organising work, good organisational culture, collegial support, and opportunities for personal and career development.

In the future, organisations must enhance their recruitment marketing towards potential applicants. Organisations need to communicate the organisational culture, values and HR practices to potential applicants through modern communication channels and tools. Employers should be more visible and informed about the good work practices and development opportunities in the organisation. Information concerning work descriptions, open vacancies, development possibilities, and working environment can be distributed by using modern technological applications, such as the Internet, and social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and such. In addition, employers should be visible in educational institutes and recruitment events and fairs of health care professionals by being physically present, and thus highlight employee-centred HR. Employer brand image should be managed and nurtured. The impression is built in a dynamic situation between the organisation and potential applicants. It is a question of defining the image an organisation wants to convey and what combination of recruitment and communication tools are used.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This study is based on qualitative data; therefore, it is not possible to make any generalisations based on the data. The interview method is justified when the target is understanding and describing the phenomenon, and when the perspective of the interviewee is the focus. However, the results can also be useful for other professional fields facing similar challenges

with a shortage of young employees in improving their employer brand management. The study is focused on discussions of employer brand image and recruitment, and the larger context of strategic HRM including, for example, research on retaining and commitment was excluded as out of scope and will be a topic of further research. The discussion is limited on the role of social media in creating employer brand image, which is also a timely and possible topic for further research. The results of the study have implications for management practices in health care organisations, especially with young employees, which implies that studying the changes in management practices in this context could be another topic for future research. We hope this research can inspire other researchers in management and marketing fields to continue studies relating to employer brand image.

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