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MANAGING EMPLOYER BRAND FOR ATTRACTING POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES

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Abstract			
<p>Attracting and retaining current talent have become important for today's organizations. Employer branding, which includes marketing the employer brand for potential and current employees tackles these issues by promoting an organization as an employer and by differentiating the organization from its competitors. It has many advantages such as increased employee satisfaction and reduced recruitment costs. Employer branding also helps to gain competitive advantage.</p> <p>The purpose of this study is to find out how private employers in the early childhood education field in Finland can attract potential employees. This study aims at finding out what potential employees value in their employer and what makes an employer attractive for them. Also, regional differences in private employer attractiveness are studied.</p> <p>This research is a qualitative study. Both semi structured theme interviews and observation were used and altogether five interviews were conducted. All interviewees were either studying towards a degree in early childhood education or were working in the field for a public employer.</p> <p>The results show that private employers in the early childhood education field have difficulties in attracting potential employees and public employer is seen more attractive especially in Southern Finland. Potential employees have also very little knowledge about private employers which affects their perceptions about private employers and private employer attractiveness in general.</p> <p>Potential employees value humane values and for example child-orientation, and freedom and flexibility from work content and culture. From employers, early childhood education professionals value for example occupational development. Also, the attractiveness of an employer was studied using five factors from which the most important ones could not be identified since they all seem to matter to at least to some extent.</p> <p>By emphasizing values and attributes that potential employees value, private employers can enhance their employer brands. It is also important that organizations create appealing employer value propositions that are close to the attributes that potential employees desire. In addition, reputation needs to be built to change the unfavorable attitudes towards private employers.</p>			
Keywords Employer attractiveness, employer branding, external branding, private early childhood education			
Additional information			

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1 INTRODUCTION

According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), the pioneers of employer branding, there are two factors that annual reports praise as companies most important resources; people and brands. In their article, the authors bring two concepts relating to these assets, human resources and marketing, under a single conceptual framework – employer branding.

The attraction of potential employees and retention of current talent have become a top priority in many organizations and a critical tool for management. In today's business, talented and loyal employees are hard to find. In addition, employees' loyalty has reduced due to the easiness of changing jobs (Chhabra & Mishra 2008). Talented employees are also seen to be the key to growth (Mandhanya & Shah 2010) and to create competitive advantage which pushes companies to pay more interest in their personnel. The necessity of employer branding is thus evident and the employer brand can be seen as an intangible asset for organizations. Employer branding is a process where organization builds a unique and identifiable employer identity. Through employer branding organization differentiates itself from its competitors who require employees with similar skills and attributes, try to attract potential talent as well as retain their current employees. Employer branding creates an image about the company as a great place to work in the minds of potential employees. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Berthon et al. 2005, Biswas & Suar 2016, Vatsa 2016, Verma & Ahmad 2016.)

Employer branding is a concept that brings many different constructs under one concept. Constructs of employer branding such as employer brand equity, employee engagement, and attraction and retention of talents are all highly interrelated. Employer branding can be seen as an umbrella under which different activities for attracting potential employees and retention of talents are channeled into a well-coordinated human resource strategy. By channeling different activities under one umbrella, organizations can have much greater effect from them than implementing each of them on their own. According to Biswas and Suar (2016) companies that have a proactive strategy towards employer branding show that they are interested in

retaining their workforce as well as attracting potential talents to gain competitive advantage. Companies that earn their place for example in Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For list also yield higher returns for shareholders (Chhabra & Mishra 2008). (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Biswas & Suar 2016.)

According to Biswas and Suar (2016) companies that are more involved with employer branding are generally well managed and they have more motivated employees who are continually willing to learn more and develop themselves. Also, the stronger the employer brand is, the more attractive talented, potential employees see the company to work for. Employer branding improves organizations' non-financial as well as financial performance like return on assets and recruitment costs. It influences and increases organizations' profitability for example through increased employee satisfaction, performance and commitment. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Biswas & Suar 2016.)

Delivering brand promises is important and the employees of the company are the first to know if the company is not delivering them (Biswas & Suar 2016). This is why it is important that the employer brand is build and communicated so that it reflects reality and that the employer brand and promises made to the employees are managed thorough the employee life cycle. All in all, an organization's employer brand strategy should align with the vision and mission of the company and harmony between the company brand and the employer brand should exist. (Chhabra & Mishra 2008.)

This research will tap on the issues of employer branding and attracting potential employees in the private kindergarten services in Finland. The issue will be discussed generally from the private service provider perspective as well as from the perspective of the biggest private service provider in Finland, Touhula Varhaiskasvatus Oy.

1.1 Significance of the topic

Employer branding is a relatively new concept but it has already received attention and interest both in academic research as well as in practice. The importance of employer branding has been noted especially in fields where talented employees are in short supply. This is especially true in knowledge-based economies and in early

childhood education in Finland. The effect of different factors and dimensions on employer attractiveness have been studied by researchers such as Berthon (2005) and Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010). These studies are placed, however, in countries such as Turkey (Almaçık & Almaçık 2012) and India (Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010)). There have not been any studies about employer attractiveness, to my knowledge, that have concentrated on people working or studying in early childhood education in Finland. Also, there is a lack of research on the values that early childhood education professionals are looking for from their employers.

Private kindergarten services are a constantly growing business in Finland and as Touhula Varhaiskasvatus seeks to be the most attractive service provider in the country it is important that the company as well as other private employers are able to attract the best talent. Especially in southern Finland, potential employees seem to choose public employer over private ones. Thus, finding out what potential employees value in their employer will help private companies like Touhula Varhaiskasvatus to develop and better manage their employer brand focused especially towards potential employees.

1.2 Motivation for the research

Having worked about one and half years in the private early childhood education business, the problem of attracting and recruiting talented early childhood education professionals as a private company has become visible. I have personal experience on the subject from two companies and as the number of larger private service providers revolves around six companies, it is evident that the issue is most likely general and not company specific. This is also how the early childhood education professionals working for a private company see the problem.

My own interest in employer branding, the problem of attracting potential talents and how it is visible in my everyday work were the driving forces for this study. I also wanted the research to be something that can be applied and has use in practice. Thus, this research not only combines my personal interests but will also give private companies like Touhula Varhaiskasvatus the tools to create and manage their employer brand.

1.3 Aim of the thesis and research questions

According to Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010) organizations should understand what potential employees expect from the company, what are the attributes the company has that these individuals find appealing and what employees seek for. It is also important to know what the competitors of the organization are offering to the same potential employees the organization itself is after. After this, the organization can start building its employer value proposition that follows the overall business strategy, that is unique and what differentiates the company from its competitors. The value proposition establishes what the company is, what they have to offer and what they expect from their employees. (Srivastava & Bhatnagar 2010, Biswas & Suar 2013.)

This study aims at finding out what potential employees value in their employers, what makes an employer attractive and are the reasons for choosing a public employer over a private one. The purpose is also to find out how private companies like Touhula Varhaiskasvatus can use employer branding to attract potential talents. Currently, Touhula Varhaiskasvatus is not executing employer brand strategy in its operations and is mainly concentrating on separate functions for attracting potential talents and remaining their current employees. By finding out the answers to these issues, questions such as how to differentiate the company from its competitors, how to create an attractive employer brand and how the employer brand should be crafted and communicated can be answered. In this research, potential employees are those individuals who are currently studying towards a degree either in early childhood education in university or university of applied sciences or studying to become a childminder in vocational school in Finland as well as those individuals who are currently working for a public employer, meaning different cities or municipalities in Finland.

The research problem of this study and sub questions are:

How to attract potential employees by employer branding?

- a. What makes an employer attractive for potential employees?*
- b. What makes public employer more attractive?*
- c. Are there regional differences in private employer attractiveness?*

1.4 Research method

This research aims at providing actual and valuable information about employer branding in the private kindergarten services as well as for the case company. The research is a qualitative study and it is conducted using a semi structured theme interview and by observation. Individuals who are seen as potential employees of the company were selected for the interview. The individuals selected are either students or individuals working for public employer at the time of the study. Observation is also used to answer the research questions in the form of my own observation and the observation of professionals working in the field. Qualitative methods are used because it will offer more in-depth information about the research topic.

1.5 Structure of the paper

This paper is divided into seven chapters including the introduction of the paper. Chapters two, three and four concentrate on building the theoretical framework and chapters five and six cover the empirical part of this study.

In chapter two, employer branding is introduced and discussed generally. Concepts relating to employer branding like brand equity and psychological contract are defined together with employer branding process. The next chapter, external branding, focuses on the issue of most interest for this study. The chapter takes a closer look at employer branding directed to potential employees and what makes employer attractive as well as what employer brand associations are and how they relate to attracting potential employees. Employer branding directed towards current employees of the firm is covered in chapter four.

Chapter five covers the methodology of this research as well as how data was collected and analyzed. Introduction to Touhula Varhaiskasvatus and early childhood education in Finland are also provided in chapter five. Chapter six covers data analysis and discussion: empirical data is analyzed and discussed relating to the theoretical framework. Chapter seven summarizes the findings, and gives theoretical and managerial implications.

2 EMPLOYER BRANDING

According to Kotler and Keller (2015: 27) “marketing is about identifying and meeting human and social needs.” Marketing not only creates brands that are strong but it also helps organizations to build intangible assets that increase the value of the firm. The importance of branding products and services is generally well-known but in addition, also experiences, ideas and organizations can be branded, to name a few. (Kotler & Keller 2015: 25-28.) According to The American Marketing Association a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler & Keller 2015: 322). It acts as a promise between an organization and its customers, both existing and potential ones (Foster et al. 2010). It is a promise that differentiates an organization’s product or service from other products and services that are designed to satisfy the same need. The differences can relate to the brands performance or to its meaning. Functional, rational and tangible differences relate to performance and symbolic, emotional, and intangible differences to the meaning as well as to what the brand represents. (Kotler & Keller 2015: 322.) Like a brand, corporate brand is a promise between the organization and its key stakeholders where employees play an important role in delivering the brand promise (Foster et al. 2010). Managing the corporate brand requires understanding the corporate culture and identity as it comprises the ethos, aims and values of the organization (Foster et al. 2010).

Nowadays it has become increasingly difficult for organizations to attract new talents and retain their current ones (Mandhanya & Shah 2010). In addition to branding products and services or developing corporate brands, branding efforts can also be directed towards attracting potential employees and retaining current employees of the firm. Applying branding principles in the context of human resource management is called employer branding. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004.)

Employer branding was first introduced in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow who brought two separate disciplines, human resources and brand marketing under one concept. However, it is not a new concept as companies have tackled with these same issues way before employer branding was introduced in research (Mandhanya & Shah 2010).

Employer branding involves managing the employment experience from the very beginning of the relationship when the employee is not yet even part of the company to an employee leaving the company (Biswas & Suar 2016). It is not a function of one unit but a concept that requires effort and planning thorough the organization (Lazorko & Zajac 2014). The employer brand strategy should not be separate but in line with the overall marketing strategy of the organization (Lazorko & Zajac 2014).

According to many researchers such as Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) and Sivertzen et al. (2013) there is growing interest in employer branding. Firms are also focusing considerable amount of resources towards it (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Despite the growing interest towards employer branding, academic research on the topic is still somewhat limited (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık 2012).

Ambler and Barrow (1996) define employer branding as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company.” Mandhanya and Shah (2010) in turn define it as “a long term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm.” Employer branding is a three-step process that includes developing the value proposition, external branding and internal branding of the employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). The employer value proposition (EVP) is the distinctive offering that the employer provides for potential employees and the reason why they want to work for that specific company (Thomas & Jenifer 2016). External branding is marketing the employer brand to potential employees and internal branding is directed towards the current employees of the firm (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004).

Employer branding promotes a firm as an employer and differentiates it from its competitors by highlighting the unique characteristics of its employment offering or environment and by giving a clear view of what makes the company desirable to work for. Having a strong employer brand “generates favourable attitudes is potential employees” (Schlager et al. 2011) and positioning it correctly the employer can become an employer-of-choice in the eyes of potential employees. Employer branding is focused towards both potential employees and current employees of the firm. The employer brand can, thus, be promoted within and outside the firm. According to

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) a distinctive employer brand allows a firm to acquire distinctive human capital. It is one of the few long-term solutions through which companies can address the problem regarding lack of talent (Mandhanya & Shah 2010). By positioning the employer brand optimally and by communicating the brand consistently and distinctively, the company can not only stand-out from its competitors but also attract individuals with a good cultural fit while filtering out not so suitable candidates. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Thomas & Jenifer 2016.)

By engaging in employer branding organizations can also achieve competitive advantage. According to Oliver (1997) resource-based view “examines the resources and capabilities of firms that enable them to generate above-normal rates of return and a sustainable competitive advantage.” The theory states that for firm resources to have sustainable competitive advantage, they should be valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable (Barney 1991). When a firm is set to have sustainable competitive advantage, it is implementing a value creating strategy that is not currently implemented by its competitors and when the competing firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of the strategy. Biswas and Suar (2016) state that unique talent capital that a company has is the only thing that cannot be copied. Achieving a tag as a good company is critical for organizations in attracting and retaining talent as it leads to gaining competitive advantage. The resource-based view theory states that companies can achieve competitive advantage if they invest in human capital. Therefore, engaging in employer branding helps organizations to gain competitive advantage. (Barney 1991, Oliver 1997, Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Jain & Bhatt 2015.)

2.1 Employer branding process

Even though product, service and corporate branding have similarities with employer branding, there are two main differences. The first difference is that the employer brand focuses solely on characterizing the firm’s identity as an employer and is, thus, employment specific. Second, unlike product and service or corporate branding that focus mainly on external audiences, employer branding is focused to both internal and external audiences. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004.)

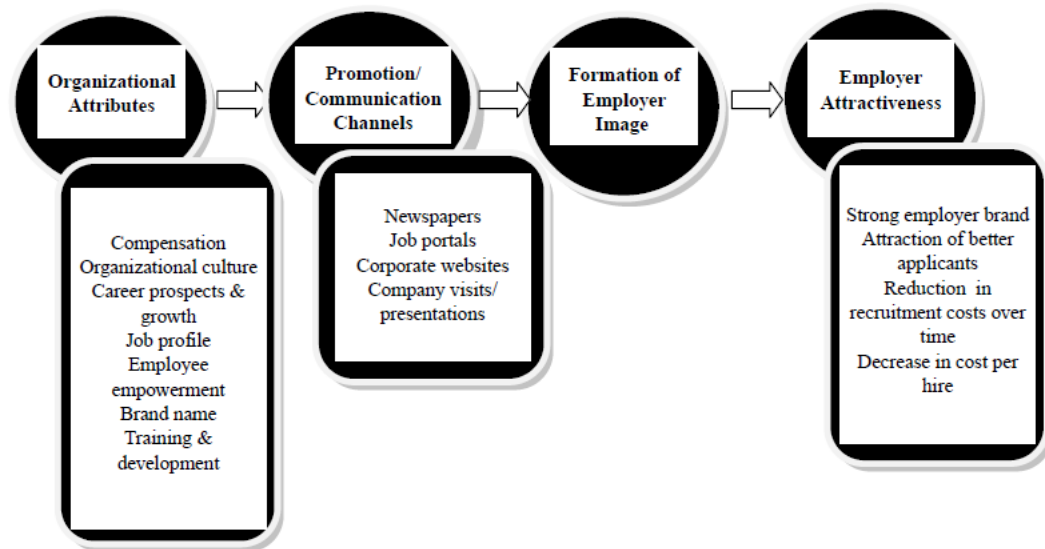


Figure 1. Employer branding process by Chhabra and Sharma (2014)

Employer branding starts from evaluating the organization itself as well as the external environment. Targets of the analysis are for example the organization's values and culture, its strengths and the brand's current image. To have a complete understanding, also the competitors of the company as well as trends need to be analyzed. Based on the analysis, the organization forms its value proposition followed by the actual employer branding strategy. After formulating strategies, the communication channels through which the organization communicates its strategy, both externally and internally, are identified. The employer brand image is then formed in the minds of potential employees through the knowledge about the organization's value proposition. Finally, employer attractiveness is achieved if the employer image is positive. (Chhabra & Sharma 2014.)

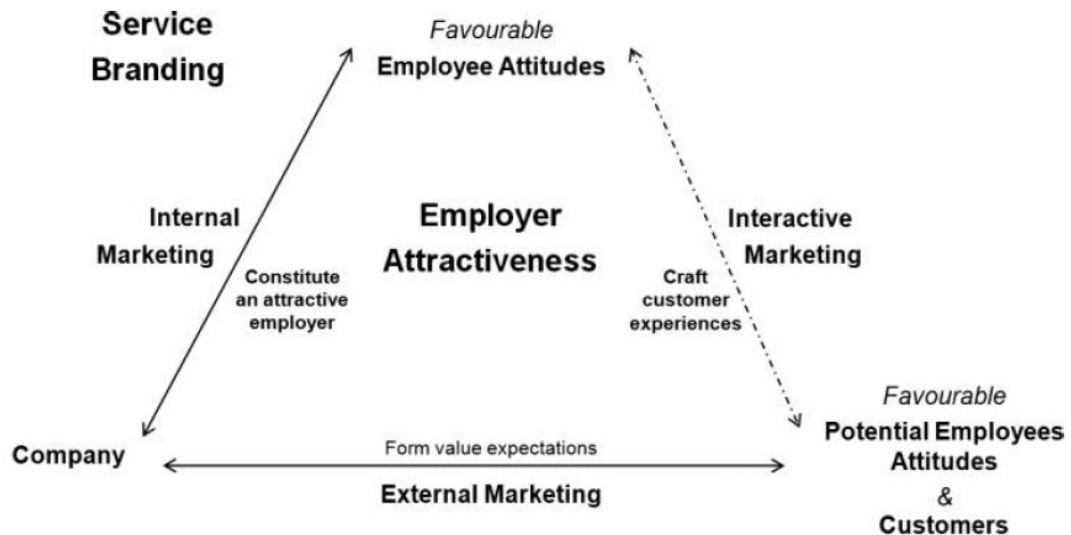


Figure 2. The perceived employer brands and service branding by Schlager et al. (2011)

Employer branding has not only positive effects on attracting potential employees and retaining current talent but it also assists in the creation of a service brand. Employees are in interaction with customers and thus “every employee has an impact on the customer” (Kotler & Keller 2015: 42). Therefore, it is important that employees live the company brand, otherwise, the company will fail in delivering its brand promise (Kotler & Keller 2015: 42). As companies offering services engage in employer branding, the contributions of it extend beyond current and potential employees all the way to customers’ experiences. Customer experience is influenced indirectly by employer branding as a strong employer brand and delivering value to employees results in greater employee satisfaction and identification with the organization. Thus, positive influence on customers’ experience with the company assist in the creation of the service brand. (Schlager et al. 2011.)

2.2 Psychological contract

Psychological contract is the beliefs about reciprocal obligations employees have between them and their organization (Morrison & Robinson 1997). These obligations are based on established formal or implied contracts and perceived promises and have traditionally related for example to job security and steady rewards earned for hard

work (Morrison & Robinson 1997). However, as negative perceptions like downsizing and outsourcing about employment have emerged, so has the focus of psychological contract. Through employer branding, benefits like training and development that the firm offers are advertised to potential employees. Potential employees see also career opportunities and personal growth as the employers' obligations. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Biswas & Suar 2016.)

Psychological contract begins to form when the individual is not yet even a part of the organization. Individuals have pre-existing expectations and they form expectations of their own that might not be recognized by the organization itself. If an employee feels that their organization has failed to deliver these perceived promises or that they have not been fulfilled, the psychological contract has been violated. According to Morrison and Robinson (1997) the violation of the psychological contract can have serious implications. It can appear for example as frustration, anger or disappointment by the employee and have a negative effect on organizational commitment. The violation can also decrease employees' trust and satisfaction towards their job and the organization. (Morrison & Robinson 1997, Maia & Bastos 2015.)

HRM managers and supervisors have a critical role in psychological contracts. As they are in a central role of defining and executing them, they have the power to minimize possible violations for example by providing realistic job previews and by communicating obligations and expectations once an individual has been hired to the organization. Managing the perceptions and obligations of employees should be paid special attention during organizational change and they should also be managed over time. When organizational change occurs, perceptions are prone to distortion and decay and the violation of psychological contract is then more likely to occur. As the damages of violating the psychological contract can be significant, organizations should rather make no promises at all than to make promises they cannot keep. By fulfilling the psychological contract, the employer brand is enhanced among the company's potential employees. (Morrison & Robinson 1997, Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Biswas & Suar 2016.)

2.3 Brand equity

According to Lassar et al. (1995) brand equity means that consumers place greater confidence in a brand than they do to other brands. The confidence converts into the loyalty and willingness of a consumer to purchase the product or service from the brand on a higher price (Lassar et al. 1995). Keller (1993) in turn defines customer-based brand equity to be “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand.”

The concept of brand equity can be used also in employer branding and it involves employer brand associations and employer brand awareness (Ambler & Barrow 1996, Backhaus & Tikoo 2004.) When talking about brand equity in employer branding concept, it “applies to the effect of brand knowledge on potential and existing employees of the firm” (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Ambler and Barrow (1996) define it to be an intangible asset in the minds of potential and current employees that is built by good marketing and human resource practices. Employer brand equity results in potential employees applying to the firm and encourages current employees to stay and support the firm (Biswas & Suar 2016). Thus, the stronger the employer brand equity is the more attractive the employer brand is seen in the eyes of potential and current employees (Biswas & Suar 2016). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), it is “the desired outcome of employer branding activities.”

Creating, managing and developing positive employer brand equity can provide advantages over competitors. Positive employer brand equity not only attracts potential applicants and helps to increase employee retention but also helps to acquire new talent in even lower prices. (Ambler & Barrow 1996, Backhaus & Tikoo 2004.)

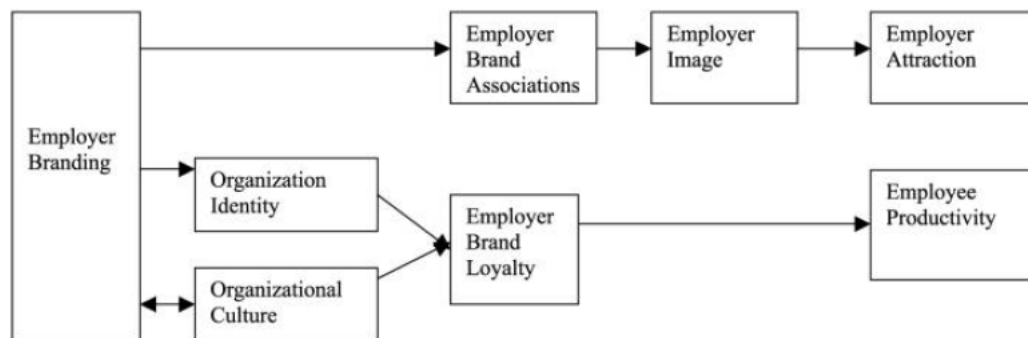


Figure 3. Conceptual framework (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004)

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) employer branding creates two principal assets which are brand associations and brand loyalty. Employer brand associations can be seen as the outcome of external branding and employer brand loyalty as the outcome of internal branding. In chapters three and four, external branding and internal branding will be discussed separately.

2.4 Social media and employer branding

Kaur et al. (2015) state that social media has become one of the most effective ways of communicating brands. It includes for example blogs and Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as LinkedIn and Facebook, and allows the two-way communication and immediacy between the organization and its stakeholders. Social media can also assist in employer branding as well as in finding the right candidates when orientated with prudence. It has, however, limitations and challenges that could turn the use of it in employer branding as a bane. (Kaur et al. 2015.)

When recruiting new personnel and campaigning about employer branding the use of social media has increased. It can be used in building and developing the employer brand further to achieve more effective talent acquisition (Kaur et al. 2015). According to Sivertzen et al. (2013) companies can also build their reputation through using social media in their employer branding campaigns. The more positive the organization's reputation is seen, the more attractive it is to potential employees and this increases their intention to apply for a job in the firm. Thus, social media is an effective tool

organizations should use when recruiting and in their employer branding. (Sivertzen et al. 2013.)

According to Kaur et al. (2015) organizations should increase their presence in different SNS sites and use sites like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and blogs to engage with both potential and current employees. It is also recommended that companies host discussions related to the company itself, its industry and other topics that are seen interesting. Creating a more attractive employer brand can be achieved for example by providing information about benefits, open job positions, employee testimonials and by including videos that show the company's culture and the key aspects of the employer brand. (Kaur et al. 2015.)

3 EXTERNAL BRANDING

External branding enables a firm to attract the best possible employees. In recent years, the demands of employees towards their employers have increased and especially the Y-generation entering the labor market are highly demanding (Lazorko & Zajac 2014). This group is not only concentrated on their personal development but are also self-conscious and are aware of their potential (Lazorko & Zajac 2014). In this chapter, external branding directed towards potential employees of the firm is discussed.

3.1 Employer brand associations

Employer brand associations are the outcome of employer branding. “Brand associations consist of all brand-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and so on, that become linked to the brand node” (Kotler & Keller: 193). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) they shape, determine and develop the employer image potential employees have about the firm. Employer brand image is the functional and symbolic benefits potential employees image they will enjoy by working for a specific firm. Product-related attributes of the employer brand image relate to functional benefits that derive from using a product or service. Functional benefits relate to the elements a person sees desirable in the employer in objective terms. These can be for example salary, benefits the employer offers and leave allowances. Non-product-related attributes correspond to symbolic benefits of the product or service. Symbolic benefits describe the perception one has about the reputation of a firm and the social approval they will enjoy by working for them. From employer branding perspective, these symbolic benefits are more important as they convey meaning, especially when the functional benefits between different employers cannot be well differentiated. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Mandhanya & Shah 2010.)

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) “potential applicants will be attracted to a firm based on the extent to which they believe that the firm possesses the desired employee related attributes and the relative importance they place on those attributes.” Positive employer brand associations should correlate to a stronger employer attractiveness. However, Rampl (2014) states that there is great diversity in findings supporting this. The magnitude and significance of employer brand associations on

employer brand attractiveness seems to vary across cultures and industries (Rampl 2014). Rampl (2014) argues further that job attributes affecting employer brand attractiveness might also differ between industries.

Not all employer brand associations are controlled by the firm itself. These not employer-controlled sources have also an effect on employer brand associations, and thus have a role in forming the employer brand image. That is why it is important to identify the desired brand associations and develop them to achieve effective employer branding. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004.)

Developing and communicating the right brand associations is also important according to two other theories that can be applied to employer branding; person-organization fit theory and social identity theory. Potential employees compare their own values, personalities and needs with the employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Values tell what individuals regard as important, desirable, good, etc. (Biswas & Suar 2013). The better the employee's values match the values of the employer, the more likely an individual is to apply (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). This is called person-organization fit. Social identity theory in turn is about people's sense of self that derives from their membership or connections with social groups (Tajfel 1982 via Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). According to Lam et al. (2010) people's identification with social groups has important implications for maintaining relationships even when the relationship between an individual and a group would have disruptions. Applying social identity theory to human resources, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) state that potential employees are more likely to identify with a brand if they find the employer brand image to be positive. As this happens, they are more likely to apply to the organization for heightened self-image that the membership with the employer promises (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004).

Rampl (2014) studied which employer brand associations predict an employer being the first-choice brand (FCB) among potential employees. According to Rampl's (2014) study, work content and work culture were identified as the only significant drivers for an organization to be an FCB if they result in positive employer brand emotions. The focus of managers should therefore be in communicating a positive work culture and creating work content that potential employees see as exciting.

Rampl (2014) states that the effect of positive employer brand emotions are a critical factor for an employer to be the FCB and these emotions could be created through personal experiences like internship, workshops or other marketing events. (Rampl 2014.)

3.1.1 Brand messages and signals

When it comes to recruiting, potential employees come across messages that an organization communicates for example through career webpages or recruitment advertisements. These messages are interpreted by potential employees also as signals of intentions on the part of the employer. Potential employees can interpret these intentions as promises. Thus, it is important that these messages are accurate and provide sufficient information about the position available as well as about the employer. This helps in improving the accuracy of perceptions potential employees have. If a potential employee gets recruited and the perceptions do not match the reality, the employee can feel that the organization broke its promises or in other words, the psychological contract was violated. A well-designed and realistic job preview as well as realistic and accurate information about the employer reduce turnover and increase trust and perceptions of honesty among potential and current employees, thus enhancing employer branding. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Biswas & Suar 2016.)

3.2 Employer attractiveness

Berthon et al. (2005) define employer attractiveness as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization.” The more attractive an employer is seen by potential employees the stronger the company’s employer brand equity is (Berthon et al. 2005).

According to Berthon et al. (2005) there are five factors that make an employer attractive for potential employees. These factors are interest value, social value, economic value, development value and application value. By using these values as a scale, employer attractiveness can be measured. (Berthon et al. 2005.)

Interest value describes the extent to which potential employees are attracted to an employer by its exciting work environment and novel work practices. Social value relates to the working environment and for example how fun the working environment is and how it provides good relationships between colleagues and team atmosphere. Economic value in turn assesses how potential employees are attracted to an employer providing better salary, compensation, opportunities for promotion, and job security. The fourth factor, development value, describes individual's attraction for an employer that provides advancement opportunities, recognition, self-worth and confidence. Finally, the application value describes potential employee's attraction for employer based on opportunities it provides to implement own knowledge and to teach others. (Berthon et al. 2005.)

Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010) in turn have identified eight factors increasing employer attractiveness originally in Indian context. These are caring (e.g. the organization cares about the well-being of its employees), enabling (e.g. the organization helps its employees to contribute their abilities), career growth (e.g. joining the organization helps individuals to advance in their careers), being credible and fair (e.g. behaving fairly in appraisals and rewarding), being flexible and ethical (e.g. employees have flexibility to perform their jobs and the company behaves ethically), customer brand image (e.g. brand value of the organization's products and services), positive employer image (e.g. the company is good to work for) and global exposure (e.g. foreign assignment opportunities). (Srivastava & Bhatnagar 2010.)

Also, other factors like market value and cooperation value have been identified in research to affect employer attractiveness. Market value describes the extent to which innovative products and services produced by an employer attract individuals (Alniaçık & Alniaçık 2012). Cooperation value in turn "assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides hands-on interdepartmental experience and has supportive colleagues" (Alniaçık & Alniaçık 2012).

There have been different views on which values are the most important relating to employer brand. According to Biswas and Suar (2013) employees do not place much importance for application value and it has, thus, not much significance on the employer brand. Social value, on the other hand, should be taken care with high

importance as it has great effect on employer attractiveness (Schlager et al. 2011, Biswas and Suar 2013). In their study, Verma and Ahmad (2016) also found out that people place the highest importance on social value and that interest value was given the least importance. Schlager et al. (2011) in turn state that social value attracts potential employees. When it comes to corporate reputation, Sivertzen et al. (2013) found out that innovation value and application value have positive effect where as social value and economic value did not have a significant relation to it. According to Schlager et al. (2011) in addition to social value, companies should also focus on delivering development value. Diversity value was also introduced which is also most likely to satisfy employees and help them to identify with the company (Schlager et al. 2011). Diversity value is similar to interest value and it relates to interesting job characteristics such as challenging and broad variety of tasks (Schlager et al. 2011). These findings indicate that the importance of different values on employer attractiveness are most likely related to differences in culture and the industry companies operate in. The importance of different values on employer attractiveness can also differ between gender, age and status of employment (Alniaçık & Alniaçık 2012). According to Chhabra and Sharma (2014) individuals' preferences vary also according to education. For example, students with commerce background rate compensation as high in importance compared to humanities students (Chhabra & Sharma 2014).

Companies should also invest in building a good reputation as it attracts potential employees. According to Jain and Bhatt (2015) Employer Brand Institute's report placed organization's reputation and culture as the most important attributes when it comes to attracting potential employees. These were followed by work environment, career development and leadership (Jain & Bhatt 2015). However, it is important to foster all value dimensions that are the most important for potential employees as they can attract employees better if they are communicated and executed wisely. (Schlager et al. 2011.)

3.2.1 Brand personality traits

Social-identity theory can be applied to employment context as it indicates the "potential for organizational membership to serve as part of a person's social identity

or self-concept” (Rampl & Kenning 2014). Just like products, also employers can be associated with different human characteristics. The set of these characteristics that are associated with an organization as an employer is called employer brand personality. Personality traits can be useful in employer branding as they are related to increasing employer brand affect for potential employees as well as employer brand trust, which both in turn predict employer brand attractiveness. Employer brand personality also correlates with the satisfaction of employees. Thus, organizations should emphasize personality traits increasing employer brand affect and trust to attract potential employees and to aim in establishing their own employer brand personalities. Having a personality that emanates higher value than competitors, organizations can also gain competitive advantage. (Rampl & Kenning 2014, Thomas & Jenifer 2016.)

For employer brand affect, personality traits such as sincerity, excitement and sophistication have a positive effect. From which sincerity is also positively associated with employer brand trust. According to Rampl and Kenning (2014) sincere employer might make people feel secure whereas ruggedness can make the organization seem tough and internally competitive. Establishing a sincere employer brand is greatly related to internal branding. By positive word-of-mouth and fulfilling promises made to new employees, the tag of sincere employer can be achieved. Sincerity can also be established by positive personal encounters or by strengthening positive employer brand traits for example by giving the brand a face. Hence, organizations should avoid looking rugged and masculine and concentrate on building an employer brand that emphasizes trustworthiness and affection. Trustworthiness and affection can also be used in employment advertisements instead of focusing only on functional aspects. (Rampl & Kenning 2014.)

4 INTERNAL BRANDING

Each employee recruited to the firm has a set of assumptions that they bring with them into the firm (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Once the employment begins these assumptions and perceptions are put to the test. How well do the assumptions and perceptions match the reality and how is the company able to deliver its brand promises? This chapter takes a closer look at these issues and internal branding, which is directed to current employees of the firm.

Internal branding or internal marketing is a process where a company paints a picture of itself as an employer and which includes the communication of the brand to employees and how they understand it (Sivertzen et al. 2013). Internal marketing should not be left only for one department's responsibility but it should be integrated across divisions such as the marketing function and human resources of the organization. It also requires the involvement of the executive team. However, this can bring major challenges for organizations as internal branding requires crossing boundaries between departments. In addition, organizations face other challenges like communicating the brand and making it consistent. (MacLavery et al. 2007.)

The main challenge employers are facing is however, how to get employees act according to the company's brand values. Employees of the firm should understand the corporate brand values so that they can deliver the corporate brand promise most effectively (Foster et al. 2010). Engaging in internal branding organizations can better their corporate brand consistencies and thus fulfil the corporate brand promise (Foster et al. 2010). By choosing the best practices for implementing internal branding, organizations can build the bridge between strategy and execution (MacLavery et al. 2007). Some techniques and tools used in internal branding are for example internal communications through employee newsletters and walk-the-talks, training support for new hires and peer recognition programs (MacLavery et al. 2007).

Current employees of the firm have a big part in forming the employer brand image as they are the ones creating the work environment (Rampl & Kenning 2014). The employees are the first to know whether the employer is delivering its brand promises or not. Therefore, it is important that employers value their employees' contributions

and their wellbeing. Internal branding aims at creating a unique culture through implementing the value proposition and communicating the excellent quality of employment to enhance employees' willingness to stay. The two functions of internal branding are thereby to create a workforce that is hard to imitate and to make sure employees stay in the organization. (Backhaus & Tikoo 200, Biswas & Suar 2016.)

Chhabra and Mishra (2008) state that retaining current employees is more important than hiring new ones. Employee retention should be the number one priority of organizations because investing in current employees is far less expensive than recruiting new ones. In addition to talented employees, workforce stability can be the competitive edge of organizations. (Chhabra & Mishra 2008.)

Organizations should pay attention to equity in reward admission based on performance as it can have a positive effect on employer brand. Rewards should be fair and appropriate as employees prefer working for a company where they feel that they are both treated and rewarded fairly. (Biswas & Suar 2016.) In addition, perceived organizational support improves the employer brand when employees feel that their organization provides them with support (Biswas & Suar 2016). Also, perceived organizational prestige, which is the social value employees assign to their identity with the employer relates to internal branding (Biswas & Suar 2016). The prestige of the company has symbolic benefits and if an employee's perception about the company's image is unfavorable, it can cause distress or even employees quitting the job. Perceived organizational prestige influences also potential employees and their willingness to join the organization. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Biswas & Suar 2016.)

4.1 Employer brand loyalty

Employer brand loyalty refers to the attachment that the employees of a company have to a brand or organization. It has two dimensions; behavioral dimension and attitudinal dimension. In employer branding contexts, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) state that behavioral element relates to organizational culture and attitudinal element relates to organizational identity. These elements in turn shape employer brand loyalty (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004) that results in employees shifting from employment contract towards psychological contract (Chhabra & Sharma 2014). Employees willingness to

stay in the organization is described as the behavioral dimension whereas the level of commitment that employees have towards the employer or organization is the attitudinal dimension. In employer brand loyalty, employees commit to the organization they are working for just like customers commit to products in product brand loyalty. Employees feel attached to their employer and are more likely to stay with the firm even when times are harder and even if they might be considering other firms they would like to work for. Loyal employees are also more productive, their attendance is higher and therefore profit per employee is increased together with higher return on investment. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Mandhanya & Shah 2010, Biswas & Suar 2016.)

Organizational culture is characterized by shared experiences, stories, norms and beliefs (Kotler & Keller 2015). It is about how people act and behave. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) the marketing efforts directed towards current employees are aimed at creating a culture within the organization where desired work behaviors are reinforced and where individual quality of work life is being supported. This is done either by promoting the existing value or by making cultural changes (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Together with organizational culture, organizational identity shapes employer brand loyalty (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). It can be understood “as the collective attitude who the company is as a group” (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Relating to social identity theory, people want to identify with the organization if they find its identity as attractive or unique (Dutton et al. 1994).

In addition, organizational trust, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and leaders at the top of the organization can enhance the employer brand. In addition to training and fair performance management, employees’ trust can be increased by employee participation and information sharing. Biswas and Suar (2016) state that CSR initiatives together with the employer brand strategy can be looked from reputational perspective and that “CSR contributes to employee motivation by fulfilling an obligation for the greater good of the society.” Organizational culture that supports CSR has also advantages in attracting talented new employees (Schlager et al. 2011). Leaders on the other hand need to support and give their consent to the propositions of employer branding and live up to the mission and vision of the organization. They need to set visible directions that represent desired culture and behaviors expected

from employees. In their research, Biswas and Suar (2016) state that the most influential and positive predictor of employer branding is leadership of the top management. “Leaders’ vision, action, attitude, charisma, knowledge, and performance all influence EB [employer branding]” (Biswas & Suar 2016). Setting up a system that is transparent, responsive and accountable has a great impact on how employees internalize the vision and mission of the company and how they identify themselves with the organization. Also, human resource practices like leave structure and sabbaticals offered for the staff contribute to the image of the company, to employee satisfaction, and thus to employer brand (Jain & Bhatt 2015). (Biswas & Suar 2016, Vatsa 2016.)

5 METHODOLOGY

This chapter tells about the research method in more detail, describes data collection and analysis, and discusses validity and reliability of this study. Also, Touhula Varhaiskasvatus as a company is introduced and some information about early childhood education in Finland is provided.

5.1 Research method

This study is conducted as a qualitative research using semi structured theme interviews. Information about the employment market was also gathered through observation and by talking to current employees of Touhula Varhaiskasvatus.

The method was chosen to gain a holistic overview on the problem in question. By using a theme interview interviewees own experiences can be emphasized and they can bring forth their own interpretations and meanings to issues discussed (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 47-48). Using theme interview gives also the possibility to cover the issues more profoundly (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 66-67).

Qualitative research aims at contextualization and to the understanding of different interpretations and actors' point of views. Reality is seen socially constructed and the researcher and the research subject are in interaction. Qualitative research can be conducted in many ways and it takes a contact with situations that are reflective to the everyday life for example of organizations or individuals. It allows the researcher to gain deeper understanding and holistic overview of the issue at hand. One of the strengths of qualitative research is that it gives data that is subjective to real life. By using qualitative data, the exact consequences from specific events can be identified. New findings and integrations can also be derived as qualitative data can produce fruitful explanations about the issue. (Miles & Huberman 1994: 1-7, Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 22-23.)

Interviews are one of the most used methods in research. Through interviews the researcher is able to gain deep understanding about the issue and motives behind the answers. Interviews are also used when there is little previous research on the issue,

the area of research is unknown, and when the research aims at developing new theoretical views. They allow the researcher to go deeper to the issue and thus, deeper knowledge can be acquired. As qualitative research involves in-depth analysis of the issue, it usually works with only a small sample of people who are chosen carefully for the purpose of the study to avoid bias. In contrary, quantitative research includes large number of data as it aims for statistical significance. (Miles & Huberman 1994: 27, Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 34-36, 59.)

Theme interview is a semi structured interview where the interview proceeds according to central themes. The questions presented to interviewees are not specific but meanings arise through the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. The themes used in the interview are the same for everyone but the style of the question, the phrasing and the order can be changed. The method emphasizes interviewees own experiences, brings forth the voice of the interviewees, acknowledges the different interpretations people have and the meanings they give to issues. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 47-48.)

It is important that the researcher is able to make reliable conclusions by using material gained through interviews. Thus, special attention needs to be paid to the planning phase such as developing interview themes. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000: 66) state that setting hypotheses can be complex when using theme interviews. When the phenomenon being studied is complex, for example when studying individuals' values and value experiences, setting hypotheses can become questionable. This is due to the fact that theme interviews aim rather at finding hypotheses than verifying them. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 66.)

The theme areas used in the interview are based on the theory of the phenomenon and its hyponyms. The hyponyms form the actual theme areas of the interview and which the interviewer then uses as a guide through the interview. The theme areas chosen should be loose enough so that all the aspects of the phenomenon can be revealed. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 66-67.)

5.2 Data collection and analysis

Qualitative research is a continuous process that requires careful documenting (Miles & Huberman 1994: 10-12). Data for this study was collected by interviewing early childhood education professionals who were seen as potential employees of the company as well as gathering information from the service managers of Touhula Varhaiskasvatus about the current state and issues relating to recruiting new talented employees. All data collected was documented carefully in order to ensure its validity.

Data collection for this research started right at the beginning of the process by talking to service managers of Touhula Varhaiskasvatus. While talking about the issues relating to this research, notes were made about what the persons said and what they thought were the main problems and issues relating to recruiting new talented employees. Data collection at this point was, however, little. The main part of data collection started in December 2016 after I had gotten acquainted with theory and former research. This is when I started doing interviews to collect the main data for my study.

Interviewees were selected based on their education and location. Experience was also part of the criteria but was not the most important one as it was hard to get in touch with potential employees from Southern Finland. When searching for interviewees my own connections as well as other people's connections were used to get in touch with potential interviewees. Five interviewees were selected. Names of the people have been changed for this study.

Emilia: 25-year-old kindergarten teacher from Oulu. Graduated as a Master of Early Childhood Education in spring 2015. Since then, Emilia has been working as a kindergarten teacher and has worked in two municipal day cares in Oulu.

Anni: 25-year-old, soon to graduate early childhood education master's student from Oulu University. Anni has done surrogacies thorough her studies in two municipal day care centers in Oulu. Anni's longest surrogacy has been for six months as a kindergarten teacher in an open early childhood education group. Before her studies she worked for six months in a day care center.

Sini: 27-year-old recently graduated childminder from Helsinki. Sini has worked for two months in a municipal day care in Helsinki and has completed her trainings during her studies in municipal day cares.

Heidi: 42-year-old recently graduated childminder from Helsinki. Heidi started working as a child minder in 1990's and has a lot of work experience from Finland and abroad. Heidi has done mainly temporary work as she has not had education to receive permanent work. Currently she is working as a child minder in a municipal day care center in Helsinki.

Sanna: 25-year-old kindergarten teacher from Helsinki. Sanna has done trainings during her studies in municipal day care centers and started working as a kindergarten teacher in the beginning of January 2017 in a municipal day care in Helsinki. At the time of the interview she was waiting to receive her certificate from her studies.

Interviews were conducted in Finnish and two of the interviews were done face to face. Interviewees located in Helsinki were interviewed via Skype. Each interview was recorded using two or three devices and they were transcribed shortly after. Themes for the interviews were selected so that they reflected theory and would help in answering the research questions. The structure of the interviews was planned so that the interviewees would first get comfortable with the situation and the topic by asking basic questions about themselves, their background and their work. After this more precise themes, work culture and community, employer, private employer and Touhula Varhaiskasvatus were discussed. Opening questions for each theme and some questions for issues inside the themes were thought beforehand. During the last theme, the interviewees were shown material from each brands' web page about Touhula Varhaiskasvatus as an employer and current open positions that matched their education.

After the collection of data there are three components in the analysis process. These are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction occurs continuously thorough the research project from choosing for example conceptual framework to abstracting and transforming the data. It is about handling the data so that final conclusions can be drawn and verified. Data display

assembles, organizes and compresses the information at hand for example to extended text so that it permits conclusion drawing. (Miles & Huberman 1994: 10-12.)

Data analysis started by transferring all the transcripts to NVivo program and by creating nodes to collect references about specific issues. Each interview transcript was then carefully coded by using nodes in order to search for emerging patterns and ideas.

Conclusion drawing and verification is the third component of data analysis. The final conclusions may appear only after the entire data necessary for the research is collected but it is common that researchers have prefigured them already in the beginning. By testing the meanings emerging from the data the validity of the research can be taken into account. (Miles & Huberman 1994: 10-12.)

5.3 Validity and reliability

Evaluating and measuring the quality of research is done through using the concepts of validity and reliability. Reliability is the extent to which an assessment tool yields consistent and stable results across researchers, methods and over time. It relates more to the researcher itself and to his or her actions: how reliable is the analysis the researcher has made by using the data? Important is also if the data is used and analyzed correctly. Validity in turn refers to how well the test accurately represents or measures what it is supposed to describe or measure. It includes for example selecting the best research methodology and using different concepts to explain meanings and actions. These measures apply to both qualitative and quantitative research but in qualitative research, the researcher should pay special attention to ensuring the validity and reliability of the research over the research process. This is done for example by describing and tracking carefully what is done and by the researcher being self-aware about his or her biases and assumptions. The researcher should make sure that record is kept to important audiences; for the researcher him or herself, the readers and other researchers. (Kirk & Miller 1986: 19, Miles & Huberman 1994: 278-280, Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 189, Corbin & Strauss 2008: 298-303.)

Validity and reliability are not symmetrical concepts as reliability can be achieved without validity. The concepts are based on the idea about objective reality and truth, to which the researcher is able to gain access. It can be said that research should aim at objectivity, where both reliability and validity are simultaneously realized to their greatest extent. Objectivity yields consistency and means that conclusions depend on the data available. Objectivity is achieved if two or more researchers come to the same conclusion by analyzing the same material. (Kirk & Miller 1986: 20, Flick 2007: 15.)

In theme interview, the quality of research can be increased by creating a good interview frame and by thinking about possible alternative questions for deepening the different themes. Attention needs to be paid also to technical issues like recording and its quality. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 184-185.)

In this research, reliability and validity were increased in many ways. Reliability was increased by creating clear themes and by thinking about questions beforehand for deepening the themes discussed. Respondents for this research were selected so that they represented potential employees and were not currently working for private companies. This meant selecting professionals from the field with different education, location and experience. Thus, data was collected across full range of different respondents with different backgrounds.

Also, triangulation increased the quality of this research. Triangulation in research means using more than one research method to increase and manage the quality of the research. By treating equally the data gathered by different methods and by combining them against the theoretical background, knowledge about the issue at hand can be increased at different levels, thus helping the researcher to gain more insights. By using triangulation, the researcher can also take different perspectives on the issues. There are different types of triangulation researchers can use. These are investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, methodological triangulation, data triangulation and systematic triangulation of perspectives. Methodological triangulation means using triangulation within or between methods to gather data in order to maximize validity. Data triangulation in turn means using data from different sources, such as persons or at different times. (Flick 2007: 37-51.) In this research both methodological and data triangulation were used.

5.4 Touhula Varhaiskasvatus Oy

Touhula Varhaiskasvatus is a company offering private day care services in Finland. The company has grown to be the largest service provider in the field and has over 130 day care centers across the country. The company has grown by setting up new day care centers as well as buying competitor firms. The company has three brands, Touhula Liikuntapäiväkodit, Aarresaari Päiväkodit and Vekara Päiväkodit, which all emphasize different profiles. Touhula Liikuntapäiväkodit emphasizes exercise and the brand promise is that children will move at least two hours daily in the day care. Aarresaari Päiväkodit is a pirate themed day care profiled to adventures, music and exercise. Vekara Päiväkodit in turn emphasizes the importance of the child with a slogan “The smallest matters the most” and has day care centers with different profiles such as music, culture, media, language and nature education.

The first Touhula Liikuntapäiväkoti was opened in 1986. Since then the company has grown to employ over 2000 people and offers day care for over 7000 children in over 30 different locations from Helsinki to Rovaniemi. The first big acquisition was made in 2014 when Touhula Varhaiskasvatus bought Aarresaari Päiväkodit. In 2016 the company brought Vekara Päiväkodit which had 16 day care centers at the time. The company has also bought a few smaller companies, Vekararinne päiväkodit operating in Rovaniemi and Muksun maailma to name a few.

As the company is steadily growing each year, it must be able to attract not only new customers but potential employees as well. Currently the three brands have a different employer identities. Touhula Liikuntapäiväkodit describes itself as a dynamic and youthful employer with invigorating working environment. They emphasize customer and child orientation as well as exercise in their operations. Touhula Liikuntapäiväkodit expects their employees to be interested in exercise pedagogy, to have good communication skills and to have a fearless attitude towards work.

Aarresaari Päiväkodit is a very different employer from other public and private service providers. In Aarresaari, each employee is encouraged to find their inner pirate and the employees are expected to be happy, positive, solution centered and motivated team players. In Aarresaari, differences are embraced and employees have know-how

in music, exercise and adventures. Vekara Päiväkodit in turn concentrates on their employees' professionalism and that employees enjoy their work. Work is based on common values and principles and employees have the possibility to influence their work. Training and development is also seen important.

Each brand and employees in the day care centers have a great support network. Service managers and regional managers are running the operations concerning the day care services as well as pedagogy whereas for example IT helps day care centers with technical problems. Touhula Varhaiskasvatus has also people working in marketing, human resources, billing, business controlling and premises, which are all there to make the everyday life of day care centers easier.

In March 2017, the company launched its new brand called Touhula. After the brand renewal, there are four themes under one brand name, exercise, arts and culture, languages and adventure, and only one employer identity.

5.5 Early childhood education in Finland

In recent years, public sector has been introduced to market forces in Western countries (Plantinga et al. 2010) such as Finland. This introduction is assumed to match supply and demand better, to be more cost efficient, to increase dynamic efficiency and to lower prices. Private providers are also able to adapt more rapidly to changing circumstances than the public sector. (Plantinga et al. 2010.) Private early childhood education has grown in Finland and continues to grow in the future as municipalities have economic difficulties and some of them are not able to match supply with demand. Private day care centers are more common especially in big cities such as Espoo with around one third of children in private day care and Oulu where private day care centers cover almost 40 percent of all day care centers. (Kauppalehti 2014, Kaleva 2016.)

Early childhood education in Finland is regulated by early childhood education law that is governed by the Finnish national board of education (Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö 2016.) From the employer perspective in the private sector, the collective labor agreement of private social and health sector regulates the agreement

between an employer and an employee. Public day care providers, meaning cities and municipalities, follow general municipal labor agreement. The collective labor agreement states for example salary and holidays that are to be followed in the employment relationship.

The nature of early childhood education as societally regulated sector brings frameworks, expectations and restrictions to the everyday work of early childhood education professionals (Puroila 2002). These are the same for every day care provider and for all early childhood education professionals regardless of whether they work in public sector or for a private service provider. These frameworks, expectations and restrictions create perceptions about the work itself (Puroila 2000) but these perceptions can also differ between the public and private sector.

Private early childhood education is a growing business that completes services provided by the public sector. Even though these two service forms complement one another, they are competing from the same talented pool of employees.

6 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis and discussion section consists of four parts. The first part discusses attributes relating to work content and culture that potential employees value. The second part concentrates on employee related attributes and third part to private employers on the field. Fourth section discusses and analyzes Touhula Varhaiskasvatus as an employer.

6.1 Work content and work culture attributes

According to person-organization fit theory, when employees' values match those of employer's, they are more likely to apply to that organization (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Thus, in order to know what values to emphasize in external branding, organizations should know what values their potential employees hold dear.

Data shows that early childhood education professionals value equality within work community, openness, consideration, diligence, conversational and commendatory work environment, and approbative work culture. Also, the situation in personal life can affect the values employees appreciate about their work community. For example, Sini mentions that she appreciates flexibility as she is a single parent with two small children. In her study about leadership in day care, Hekkala (1999) states that values such as caring, justice, equality, kindness, atmosphere, communication and supporting respect within the work community stood out. These values are same or similar to this research's findings and can, therefore, be seen as reliable and valid. Overall, early childhood education professionals appreciate humane values.

For an employer to be the first-choice brand, the work content and work culture of the organization should be seen as exiting by potential employees (Rampl 2014). As they are significant factors, finding out what aspects of work content and work culture are important and exciting for potential employees and what attributes they value helps in finding out what makes an employer attractive for early childhood education professionals.

Four main things stood up from the employer branding perspective relating to work content and work culture attributes. These are freedom and flexibility to design and execute, child-orientation, coworkers, and the manager of the day care.

6.1.1 Freedom and flexibility

Generally, the work of early childhood professionals is diverse. Each day is different and they feel that their job is important. Especially kindergarten teachers have the freedom and flexibility within the national early childhood education plan to design their jobs as they have a lot of influence over how things are done and taught. All interviewees agree that the use of own ideas and the freedom to exploit them pedagogically makes the work enjoyable.

“Best parts of my job are the freedom to do and execute. There are frames to consider tough, like the national early childhood education plan that gives support.” – Anni

“You get to be creative and come up with even little crazy ideas and exploit them pedagogically. There are no specific frames on how to teach a number as the children’s interests are so different. You get to invent and use your own enthusiasm and childlike mindset.” – Sanna

6.1.2 Child-orientation

The children are important for early childhood education professionals. One of the best parts of the job are the job and the children itself; working with them, playing with them and seeing them learn. The most appreciated value for early childhood education professionals in work culture is child-orientation, which all five interviewees mentioned clearly. Everything the professionals do, should derive from child-orientation and everything should be thought from the children’s perspective.

“Being with children, that’s the best part. Sometimes they make you feel forceless but at the end you get so much energy and positivity, and everyday realizations. Especially in that small children’s’ group; seeing them happy by learning even some small thing. And the development you see even within a few weeks, the big leaps they take.” – Heidi

“Probably the most important thing is that this work is done for the children. Like the children are always number one priority in all decisions and we think about everything from their perspective.” – Emilia

“The children are the best part of my job. That you can be part of their growth and development and that you can bring something meaningful to their lives. You have also the ability to influence the first steps in their lives and to make them as favourable as possible.” – Sanna

6.1.3 Coworkers

Working with a team and coworkers is also mentioned by the interviewees as one of the best things about their jobs. Coworkers are not only seen as a support but also their strengths can be exploited and used to better the activities done in the day care. All five interviewees state that their job satisfaction is related to their coworkers, some also mentioning separately the kindergarten manager’s role in it. Thus, job satisfaction seems to arise from the values employees hold important for work community and culture. Coworkers should be open, kind, helpful, treat others with respect and work as a team towards a common goal. Hekkala’s (1999) study supports this. Hekkala (1999) states that the relationships within the work community are seen as important by kindergarten managers.

“It’s lovely to work in a team. You always have the support from others. ... And the different strengths people have. You can exploit that and plan together.” – Anni

“But I think that in general job satisfaction is guaranteed by working as a team. I think it is important that no one goes solo or does things according the way only they want as we’re in a field like this.... I think coworkers are one of the most important things, and of course the manager. I think that coworkers build the work community and make it how it is.” – Sini

“One of the good things is that you meet other adults doing the same job. They have similar experiences and you’re able to share them. If you get stuck with some model of thinking and say it aloud, there is always someone who sees it from a different angle.

So it's really good that there are many people and they are different from another, young and old, women and men. Everyone has a different angle on things, so you'll always figure out a solution. Smart cooperation in that way. That's what I like." – Heidi

Total of three interviewees have had negative experiences about work communities where there was tension between the employees, which influenced their job satisfaction. Data shows indisputably that the better the atmosphere at work is, the more satisfied employees are with their jobs. Coworkers are the building blocks of good work community and it is seen that both the employees and the manager are responsible for building and maintaining it.

"In my last training, the work community was immensely workable. Or my group was. I believe it's partly because they pulled together so well and worked well as a team. ... Appreciating and respecting others, being friendly. That's what makes work community enjoyable. And all the small things like saying good morning when you come to work. Being nice and friendly, respecting others." – Sanna

"There was this one day care that I went to do a surrogacy. And I can say that was the last time. I was there for a week and it was just awful. The atmosphere was so negative among the employees. You could notice that the groups did not come along with other groups. And I immediately felt that they didn't care about me because I was there only for a short time and was a young student. I felt they thought that I knew nothing about anything. As I sensed the negative attitude, I was tired and didn't feel like doing any work." – Anni

"In my second training, the work community was tense in a way. There was power struggle between the workers that who is responsible for what. I found it a little distressing, they didn't go on the children's terms." – Sanna

6.1.4 Manager

The effect of the day care manager on work community and culture is evident from all five interviews. All interviewees emphasize soft, humane values that the manager

should possess. The manager should be honest, open, present, trustworthy and a person who listens to his or her employees. Genuine interest in the well-being of employees, ability to communicate openly and to give support seems also to be important.

“That kindergarten manager was very close to the employees. She was very trustworthy person who valued and listened to employees. She was a good leader. I believe it had significance on why the work community was so good.” – Sanna

“I think it’s extremely important that the boss is of course honest and has the courage to give both constructive and positive feedback. You can’t develop yourself if you don’t know what you need to work on.” – Sini

“You notice how much the manager influences. Especially in that other day care I have worked for, the manager is super sweet and takes care of her employees. The atmosphere is good, she goes around talking to people and visits groups. You can notice how much it influences that the manager is close and not distant, shares responsibilities and talks to everyone. That the manager wants to know how the groups are really doing.” – Anni

6.2 Employer attributes

Interviewees participating to this study were asked about what they value in their employer, either the manager of the day care or the municipality they worked for. All five interviewees stated that they value pedagogical leadership and child-oriented employer. They value an employer who is equal and fair and both develops its operations and gives employees the opportunity to develop themselves. They value employers with humane values like a manager who is easily approachable, open and who gives positive and constructive feedback, and recognition for a job well done. Other values were for example honest, respectful and helpful. Employees also seem to value an employer who allows the use of own expertise. These values are same or similar to work culture and work community attributes and values.

“Openness and the willingness to share. Basically, the willingness to develop the work, operations and early childhood education. That the operations are child oriented.” – Emilia

“I value expertise and empathy. And a kind of warmth. That you dare to go talk to that person and tell exactly how you feel. That you don’t feel like you’re thrown cold water on, you know, if you have to talk about unpleasant things for example. And honesty, of course, and that the manager dares to give constructive feedback in addition to positive one. ... And I hope that at some point, when I bring this up for my manager that I want to do a course of fairytale massage she’ll be like yes, of course! That yes you get to go and so. I think it’s really good that she would support that kind of courses and overall developing myself.” – Sini

“That the employer values what you do and gives credit for it. ... Employer who knows how to pay attention to everyone and who is equal. Encouraging but if there’s something to give feedback on, like even not so good, they would do it in a constructive way.” – Heidi

“An employer who is fair and equal to all. Second, an employer who gives the employee opportunities to use own expertise, to educate oneself, and to bring up ideas about how to develop the working culture and is open to them.” – Sanna

6.2.1 Employer’s obligations

The reciprocal obligations employees have between them and the organization they work for is called psychological contract. As potential employees have pre-existing expectations about these obligations, it is beneficial to know the most important ones. This way employers can emphasize and manage those obligations and enhance their employer brand. The biggest obligation for employers among early childhood education professionals seems to be that they take care of their employees and are concerned about their wellbeing. The employer or the day care manager should also be available for his or her employees.

“Manager who is available, kind of. It’s important. ... And that the manager ensures that those planning times are set for each group and takes care of the working community. That everyone feels good. And keeps development discussions.” – Emilia

“I think that the bottom line is that you take care of yourself but the manager is there to secure your back. ... It’s important that the manager is within reach when the need comes. ... But it’s the employers’ responsibility kind of. That they emphasize wellbeing at work and that the employees have enough strength. That’s really important.” – Sini

“My employer has the responsibility that I can do my job well and lawfully within the resources that we have. That they have put enough money there that I can do my job. And that I manage it. It’s the people, so that I don’t burn out and I am able to stay in this field.” – Sanna

6.2.2 Equipment and premises

Having good equipment and premises is seen as a good attribute. Data shows that they also have an effect on employees’ job satisfaction. Premises that are designed to serve as a day care work better and have positive influence on not only children but also the employees. However, data does not support equipment and premises being an attribute potential employees are looking for from their employer and a factor that would affect their decision to apply. As many municipal day cares can have old premises, and as good equipment and premises influence job satisfaction, private employers could still emphasize them in their external branding.

“Group premises [talking about what makes work enjoyable]. You notice that it is much better if the premises are actually designed to serve as a day care. They work better then. And you can divide the space and create pleasant environment for children’s play. It influences on their ability to concentrate. And when the premises are poorly designed, it causes noise and affects children’s restlessness a great deal.” – Anni

“This is a very old former university building so it’s a little funny how the premises are all not so suitable for day care use. ... Sure, it would [when asked about if the

premises were designed for day care use would make her work more enjoyable]. For example, crafting supplies wouldn't be two floors up but right there. There are a lot of things that you should have eyes on your back. It's quite a challenge. There's not enough room for storage. You can't really do anything in a spur of the moment. You have to think in advance that do you go during your brake or the day before to get some supplies ready.” – Heidi

6.3 Employer attractiveness

Employer can be attractive for potential employees by five factors: by its economic value, development value, social value, interest value and application value. According to Alniaçık & Alniaçık (2012) organizations should understand what makes an employer attractive for job seekers. By finding out what makes an employer attractive for early childhood education professionals, private employers can utilize the information in their employer branding and in their external branding campaigns.

6.3.1 Economic value

When it comes to employer attractiveness and economic value, the results are somewhat contradictory. Even though each interviewee directly stated that salary is not important for them, they feel that they do not get enough pay. This indicates that salary might not be a determinant factor in employer attractiveness. Early childhood education professionals have accepted the low payrate and despite it, they want to work in the field. This seems to be due to the fact that early childhood education and working with children is seen as a calling, which came up in all five interviews.

“For me it's personally not so relevant that the pay should be higher. ... I'm more amazed that I get to do things that I enjoy during the day, I have fun and I get paid for that. So, the pay is not very relevant for me, at least yet.” – Sanna

“You don't do this job for the pay. That's why it's probably very much a calling, that you want to do this job. It's a terribly small salary when you think about the responsibility, really. But it's not determining factor for me. If you want to do this job you have to accept that the pay is not going to be very high.” – Anni

On the other hand, other determinants of economic value are important for employer attractiveness. The importance of job security was directly mentioned by four interviewees. Each appreciate security in their jobs and four interviewees stated that they applied to work in a municipal day care as they see municipalities as a secure employer. Jain and Bhatt (2015) also state that “public sector is considered more stable in nature because of the available support from the government even in turbulent times as compared to private sector.” Analysis indicates that public employers are more attractive to potential employees than private employers.

However, both interviewees from Oulu region state that even though they think job security is important and they have only temporary employment relationships, they do not stress about becoming unemployed. This is probably because the work situation is good especially for kindergarten teachers in Finland. Short employments might not, however, be attractive for potential employees. The effect of short surrogacies for work motivation was evident in Puroila’s (2002) study. Short surrogacies not only decreased employees work motivation but also made the employees question their own know-how (Puroila 2002). Employers should therefore think how they communicate about short employment relationships to potential employees. Job security and longer contracts can, thus, make employer seem more attractive in the eyes of potential employees.

“It’s really important [secure job]. Before I had temporary positions due to maternity leave for example. So, you know that you have at least that 10 months of work or when the mom decides to come back to work, you’re out of job. So, you kind of think about that you have to start looking for a new one. So, you kind of don’t get in [to the job]. Or you can get in but then you feel irritated because you have become attached to the children and the place.” – Heidi

“Continuity is important. That you can plan your life further when you know that your job is not fragmentary. And that you don’t know for how long. That you’re there for a short time and after that they’ll reconsider.” – Anni

“I applied for the municipality because I think it is a reliable employer. Salary will definitely be on time and they comply with the collective agreement.” – Emilia

Two interviewees, Anni and Heidi mentioned opportunities for advancement being important for them. Anni stated that in the future she would probably like to work as a day care manager or in an administrative position. Advancement opportunities could be more important for university and applied sciences students and especially for those studying or who have completed their thesis as they are better able to advance in their careers to higher positions. However, Emilia or Sanna did not mention advancement opportunities as important. Also, Puroila (2002) states that longer contract and changed job description when moving from a kindergarten teacher as the manager were seen as meaningful and invigorating. Here both job security and advancement opportunities are important factors for day care managers which implies that economic value is important in employer attractiveness. Thus, it could be that advancement opportunities are relevant for employer attractiveness only for those potential employees who aspire to advance to higher positions in their careers.

“They’re [advancement opportunities] important, actually. First you want to work in the day care but I have thought about working in administrative tasks or working as a day care manager in the future.” – Anni

6.3.2 Application value

Using own ideas and having the freedom to exploit them is one of the most evident factors that makes early childhood education professionals enjoy their work. Application value is, thus, important factor also in employer attractiveness. However, a question arises whether it is more important in external or internal branding. As it seems, professionals in the field can use their own ideas and exploit them in general basis. Therefore, it can be seen as a norm. This can lessen the importance application value has when it comes to attracting potential employees. None of the interviewees mentioned that they had applied to their current position because of the envisioned benefits application value would provide them. Many interviewees also mentioned that they see sharing information and teaching others as important. Some also see advancement opportunities and information sharing going hand in hand. What one person learns in a training, can be taught or shared with other employees to benefit the whole day care and the children.

“I just went to an exercise and play instructor training and I got a lot of ideas from there. ... And now we have a meeting after Christmas and I will tell there that what I figured out in the training. ... So, sharing information is important. And if I don’t talk to others about it too much, it will be harder for me to execute those ideas that I got. And when I tell what good ideas I got, then maybe they’ll become part of the whole day care. Those good ideas.” – Emilia

“So, of course if you know new things and go to some course excited, it’s really important that you can then introduce what you learned to everyday life. ... And it should be so that the know-how is also distributed a bit to other employees.” – Sini

6.3.3 Development value

Development value includes advancement opportunities, recognition, self-worth and confidence. All interviewees see advancement opportunities, mainly trainings and other development opportunities as very important. Three interviewees, Anni, Sanna and Sini say that they either hope or appreciate that their employer encourages and provides advancement opportunities. Emilia in turn states that it is good that the employer sees trainings as important, whereas Heidi finds advancement opportunities being a big advantage and that it is good that the employer takes them into account.

“You kind of have to keep up with the continuing development that’s happening. You can’t think that everything’s good now and we’ll go on with the same plan. You have to continually develop and I at least hope that the manager can always provide advancement opportunities and trainings.” – Anni

“I find it very good that the manager encourages that kind of trainings and development.” – Sini

In her study, Puroila (2002) states that early childhood education professionals have the need for occupational growth and that the different knowledge, talents and readiness they acquire during their education are only the first step in their professional development. The desire for development stems from the changes happening in the environment and from their own interest in developing and finding new challenges

(Puroila 2002). Puroila (2002) also states that early childhood education professionals see in-service training as a significant factor in their personal growth process. Hekkala (1999) in turn states that kindergarten manager value developing themselves as well as becoming better in their jobs. Also, different leadership trainings were seen as important by the kindergarten managers (Hekkala 1999). Hekkala's (1999) and Puroila's (2002) studies support the finding that early childhood education professionals value advancement opportunities. As stated earlier, employees also value an employer who gives feedback and recognition. Thus, development value can play a big role in attracting potential employees. By emphasizing development value in their employer branding through trainings, recognition as well as self-worth, an employer can stand out from their competitors in the eyes of potential employees.

6.3.4 Social value

Social value relates to the working environment: how fun it is and how it provides both good relationships between colleagues and team atmosphere. As discussed earlier, employees job satisfaction is greatly related to their coworkers and atmosphere at work. The following quote describes and represents well how the interviewees feel about work atmosphere and relationships with coworkers.

“I see that the atmosphere between coworkers is important. Second is that they get along well and there's no harm if they wouldn't be just coworkers. The employer should somehow invest and encourage them to work for their teamwork and interaction.” – Sanna

Good relationships and team atmosphere can also be something that employees are looking for from their employer and envision as a benefit by working for them, as Emilia states:

“I will apply again to this day care because the work atmosphere and work community are the best. I could also apply to those units that have the same boss because I know that she is good. I won't apply to my old manager's units.”

As it can be seen, work atmosphere and work community play a big part in Emilia's future job-hunting: she wants to apply to day cares that have or are likely to have great atmosphere and avoid day cares that her old manager works in, which she had terrible experiences from.

As social value is such an important aspect in job satisfaction and some evidence suggests its importance in employer attractiveness, companies could use social value to emphasize work atmosphere also in attracting potential employees. By creating an image that by working for the employer individuals are going to have fun and experience good team atmosphere within their own units as well as within the whole company, a determinant of job satisfaction could be turned into a benefit potential employees envision to have by working for that employer.

6.3.5 Interest value

Exciting work environment and novel work practices can attract potential employees. This is called interest value. The basic operations from day to day activities to early childhood education are similar if not the same across public and private day cares in Finland. The national early childhood education plan also determines day cares' operations. Data supports this as it shows that early childhood education professionals see the basic work to be similar in public and private day cares. However, as the professionals have a lot of freedom to plan and execute early childhood education, day cares can have very different methods or angles to teaching. There are also different pedagogical orientations day cares can emphasize in their operations.

When the interviewees were introduced to the three day care brands Touhula Varhaiskasvatus has, the reactions ranged from an interest to a reluctance to apply, depending on the interviewee's interests and personality.

“Here I could apply for [Aarresaari Päiväkodit]. Somehow this attracts. This is a little bit like some drama thing. ... It would be nice to get acquainted with adventure education any way.” – Emmi

“Art day care would be one where I could apply, there I would have more to give. People who are very sporty and would have a lot of ideas to exercising with children could apply here [Touhula Liikuntapäiväkoti].” – Heidi

Therefore, different orientations or themes day cares have can either become an asset in attracting potential employees and as a way to differentiate a day care from others or a strain and cause reluctance to apply. However, a day care with a theme, profile or specific pedagogical orientation cannot change and attract every potential employee with different interests and personalities. As Thomas and Jenifer (2016) state, organizations should dare to be different and they should not want to appeal to everyone. These day cares could, thus, use their differences as their advantage in attracting potential employees though interest value.

6.4 Private employer attractiveness

Private companies are not seen as attractive employers than municipalities are in the eyes of potential employees, especially in the southern Finland. As all the interviewees have none or only a little experience from private employers it could be argued that the situation is the same for potential employees in general. Also, many interviewees' perceptions about private employers are based largely on hearsay. Thus, the knowledge potential employees have about private service providers and them as employers in general is little. This can affect potential employees brand associations like perceptions and attitudes about private employers and their desirability.

6.4.1 Reputation

The reputation on private employees seems to differ between potential employees in northern Finland and southern Finland. Interviewees from Oulu region did not have anything bad to say about private employers in general, although Emilia mentioned negative thoughts many people had about private employers when she was still studying. However, nowadays she has not heard that working in a private day care would be horrible and she has not developed that kind of image about them either. Also, Anni did not have anything negative to say about private employers in general. For both Emilia and Anni whether the day care is public or private has not been a

determinant when searching for a job. This suggests that private employers are more familiar to potential employees especially in the Oulu region. This is supported by the fact that roughly 40 percent of early childhood education services is provided by private companies in Oulu region.

In southern Finland, the reputation of private employers is different. Two out of three interviewees from south directly mention that they feel that private day cares are not supervised to the same extent than public day cares. Heidi in turn states that *“These private day cares are their own wild, it’s not the same there than here within the city of Helsinki.”* These relate to the differences in quality levels potential employees in the south see between private and public day cares. Other shortcomings mentioned were related to operations like substitute policies, planning time and introductions and to the quality of operations in the form of competence of employees. It would seem that private day cares and private employers are not seen as stable or to have as good quality as public day cares. Also, all three interviewees from south would rather apply for a public employer. Thus, private employers are not seen as attractive as public employers in the southern Finland. However, Sanna states that the reputation of private employers is better among kindergarten students than among union members. She states that private employers seem attractive for many students when they are graduating as they image working in a private day care would be better. Therefore, private employers’ reputation could be better in southern Finland among students than among professionals who have already entered the working life.

The analysis is supported by Touhula Varhaiskasvatus’ service managers’ perceptions of how private service providers are seen. According to them, private employers are seen in a more negative light than municipal employers. This is because private employers are not seen as secure as municipal employers and due to worse pay. Especially in the Helsinki metropolitan area the pay gap can be quite large between employees working in public or private sector, public sector having the bigger pay. However, some potential employees seem to think that the pay is better when working for a private employer. One service manager also states that potential employees feel that the quality of early childhood education is not as good as in municipal day cares.

According to the service managers, there are also factors that make private employer seem attractive. Some potential employees seem to feel that private employers have good trainings and they give employees the freedom to plan and execute. Also, fast development and change, and having a lot of young and open employees are sometimes seen as attractive.

Data shows that the reputation of private day cares seems more fragile. Negative reportage or hearsay about private day cares can affect the overall reputation more easily and they can also guide potential employees' perceptions about private employers. However, it also seems that this problem is recognized to some extent. Even though potential employees have heard bad things about private day cares and private employers, they do not think that all private day cares are bad or operate in a certain way.

“Then there’s that if they [private day cares] make some mistake, that mistake spreads. Everyone hears about it and the reputation is very hard to clean.” – Heidi

“Based on what I’ve read and heard, I’ve developed an idea that many private day cares have shortcomings.” – Sanna

“But sure, that’s how it goes. If some small thing happens within some small community it kind of ruins the whole community’s reputation. But I won’t blindly believe that all private day cares operate like that. That’s no private day care would have good conditions.” – Sini

6.4.2 Features

The biggest feature of private day cares is their emphasis on specific education or profile like exercise, art or music. It was mentioned by all five interviewees. This is seen either in positive or neutral light by potential employees. Different emphasizes can also be a way to differentiate private day care from public day care in the eyes of parents and employees as was stated earlier. In addition, two interviewees also mentioned better pay and private employer being more flexible than public one.

“Those public day cares don’t often have that emphasis. And private day cares often do. Exercise or media education for example. ... I know that the pay might often be higher.” – Emilia

“Well maybe private day cares are trying to profile themselves of some kind. ... Maybe it’s more stiff in the public sector and everyone has the same benefits and services available. In the private sector, you can offer something extra or something else maybe easier.” – Sanna

6.4.3 Work content

Work content between public and private employers is generally seen as similar in the eyes of potential employees. However, those interviewees who have more knowledge about private employers or have worked for one mentioned cleaning or preparing food like breakfast being part of employees’ tasks in a private day care. This does not seem to be a problem as long as it stays in small cleaning tasks such as wiping tables or sweeping the floor. Potential employees feel though, that it is not their job to clean and prepare food but it should be left for workers in that field. Also, the lack of specific roles between kindergarten teachers and childminders was mentioned by one interviewee.

“I have heard that cleaning and things like that are included [to the work content] in the private sector. I mean cleaning and cooking might be included. ... But then again, I’ve heard that in some places they’re not. That they can have hired staff like the city has. ... And yeah, I also think it’s wrong in a way. The time is short already for planning and preparing, and even being with children. You feel that you don’t have enough hands, so cleaning shouldn’t be part of your job. It belongs to those who are trained to do it. Wiping tables and things like that are OK.” – Emilia

“But in that private day care we had to do laundry. ... And there [her current work place] we have separate people for cleaning and cooking. ... So, it kind of gives us more time being with children. I’ll say that the laundry thing was a bit problematic. It felt like there should be someone else doing it. You can wipe tables and sweep floors

when the children are next to you so that I don't see as problematic. It depends in what dimensions they go.” – Heidi

Even though small cleaning tasks are not seen as a major problem, if cleaning is part of the work content, the attractiveness of private employer could decrease compared to public employers who have hired staff for those duties. This is supported also by Touhula Varhaiskasvatus' service managers who state that one of the reasons why private employers are seen in more negative light is their everyone does everything mentality, where even kindergarten teachers are sometimes required to clean.

6.5 Touhula Varhaiskasvatus

The company's name, Touhula Varhaiskasvatus, is known quite well by potential employees as four of five interviewees have heard about the company. Potential employees with university degrees know more about the company than childminders, whose knowledge is nonexistent. General knowledge about the company includes its brands, its emphasis on exercise and that the company operates nationwide. The knowledge potential employees have, though, is very little. All three kindergarten teachers with university degrees recon that they have heard about Touhula Varhaiskasvatus for the first time during their studies. This suggests that the company is more known among professionals with academic degree than among professionals with vocational education.

6.5.1 Employer attractiveness

Even though all three interviewees from South Finland were reluctant and somewhat suspicious about private employers in the beginning of the interview, all of them and interviewees from North Finland think that Touhula Varhaiskasvatus seems like a good employer. All interviewees could or think they could at some point apply for the company or some of the brands depending on their personal interest in exercise or arts for example. Sanna being the most reluctant one to apply states that the reasons are merely because Touhula Varhaiskasvatus is a private employer and she has heard negative things about private employers in general. Both interviewees from the north had positive thoughts about private employers to begin with and therefore, having

positive thought about Touhula Varhaiskasvatus was expected. Both also had heard positive things about the company from their friends working in Touhula Liikuntapäiväkodit. Interviewees from the south in turn were more suspicious and had some negative thoughts about private employers and stated to prefer public employer over private one. However, as they got more acquainted with the company by familiarizing themselves with the provided material, the company did not seem so bad after all, which seemed to surprise the interviewees themselves. Some interviewees did, though, question if things really were like they were said in the materials.

“This [Vekara Päiväkodit] seems just lovely from an applicant’s viewpoint. They have really thought that employees also have it good. And then there’s that child’s interest. But they have really thought about how to better employees coping and how to develop the work.” – Anni

“It’s great that they [Vekara Päiväkodit] have training and skills development. It’s really important. If you get the feeling that the work doesn’t give any content anymore, you can kind of get more depth by taking different courses and such.” – Heidi

The company and its brands seem attractive for potential employees because of three main reasons: child-orientation, company’s concern for the wellbeing of employees, and training and skills development. Other factors making Touhula Varhaiskasvatus as an attractive employer were the size of the company, invigorating work and working environment, and the appreciation of employees. The company got also positive comments about its employees who were described as professional and to be interested in their work. Person-organization fit theory support this notion as the values potential employees have are also values that make Touhula Varhaiskasvatus an attractive employer.

“Of course, the bigger the company is and the wider it has spread, it builds trust for me as an employee.” – Sini

“But of course, it’s good for a big organization to be organized. It influences its abilities to act and serve the employees.” – Sanna

Analysis suggest that Touhula Varhaiskasvatus is a potential employer in the northern Finland when professionals in the field are searching for a job. In the south, however, the company is not considered as an option before getting more familiar with it and even then, public employer can seem more attractive.

6.5.2 Employers and employees' responsibilities

Data shows that potential employees do not feel obligated to behave or act in a certain way if they would work for the company or for any of its three brands despite the emphasis on different themes and how they affect operations in the day care. For example, in day cares where the emphasis is on exercise potential employees feel that they would need to act accordingly and be interested in sports and exercise. Potential employees also feel that skills and knowledge on specific theme or emphasis are valued. Thus, following common pedagogy and values is what potential employees feel as their responsibilities. This could, again, be due to the nature of the field: generally early childhood education is similar across the nation.

Employers' responsibilities are strongly related to what they say they offer for their employees and are drawn straight from the recruitment calls or from information on what is it like to work for the company. Also, data shows that training is important in the beginning of the employment relationship as well as training related to the emphasis the day care for employees to be able to implement. Thus, it is important that recruitment calls and information found on webpages is accurate and does not make promises the company cannot keep. Employees who feel that the psychological contract has been violated can experience a decrease in organizational commitment (Morrison & Robinson 1997). Violation of psychological contract can also have a negative effect both to external and internal branding.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides both theoretical and managerial conclusions as well as limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

7.1 Theoretical implications

Attracting potential employees to organizations has become increasingly difficult (Mandhanya & Shah 2010). Especially in the private early childhood education field employers have difficulties in attracting talented applicants for open positions. By engaging in employer branding and by lining the employer brand strategy with the overall marketing strategy, private employers in the field can make themselves more attractive and manage the awareness and perceptions potential employees have about the company as well as reduce recruitment costs over time.

According to Sivertzen et al. (2013) employers need to know what makes the organization attractive and which factors lead to a good impression. Using this knowledge, organizations can plan their employer brand strategies, run their employer brand campaigns, contribute to their employer brand equity, and position the employer brand correctly to become an employer-of-choice (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Sivertzen et al. 2013, Chhabra & Sharma 2014)

Potential employees in early childhood education value humane values. They value equality, openness, consideration, diligence, conversational and commendatory work environment, and approbative work culture. From work content and work culture potential employees also value freedom and flexibility to design and execute their jobs, child-orientation, open, kind, helpful and respectful coworkers, and a manager who is honest, open, trustworthy, gives feedback and recognition, and is there for the employees. From their employers, early childhood education professionals value pedagogical leadership and child-orientation. Employers should be equal and fair, possess humane values, allow occupational development and the use of own expertise, and develop their own operations.

For Touhula Varhaiskasvatus, their name is known but potential employees have very little information about the company. The company is better known among potential employees with academic degrees than among those with vocational education. However, after getting acquainted with the company, it seems as an interesting and attractive employer for potential employees. Touhula Varhaiskasvatus is attractive due to its child-orientation, concern for employees' wellbeing, training and skills development, the big size of the company, its appreciation of employees and its invigorating work environment.

When it comes to employer attractiveness, the most important values could not be identified as all five of them seem to be important at least in some aspects for potential employees. Economic value is extremely important in the form of job security and also opportunities for advancement are seen attractive but only for those potential employees who want to proceed in their careers. Interest value in turn could be beneficial in attracting potential employees when the employer offers different pedagogical orientations but only then, when potential employees are attracted to the pedagogical orientation personally. Development value, application value and social value are the only values that are surely attractive for potential employees as they are defined by Berthon et al. (2005).

Also, some of Srivastava and Bhatnagar's (2010) employer attractiveness factors are applicable to early childhood education field. These are caring, enabling, being credible and fair, and being flexible and ethical. Career growth factor can be relevant for employees who want to proceed in their careers. Positive employer image can be a factor for private employers that reduces their attractiveness as they are not seen as attractive as public employers.

In the light of this and earlier research, private employers should concentrate on social and development values to attract potential employees. Even though economic value has not been placed much importance, private employers should communicate about job security to attract potential employees. As reputation has an important role in attracting potential employees, private employers could use application value to increase corporate reputation.

The knowledge potential employees have about private employers is very little. This influences private employer attractiveness and perceptions potential employees have about them. In general, public employer is more attractive for potential employees. There are regional differences though in private employer attractiveness and reputation. In the northern Finland, private employers' reputation is quite positive and they are a choice of employment where public employers are. In the southern Finland the situation is opposite. Potential employees are more attracted to public employers and would rather apply to work for them than for private employers. The lack of supervision, private companies being more unsecure employers and their worse quality in pedagogy are the main reasons why public employers are seen more attractive. The difference in work content, mainly cleaning, can also make public employer more attractive. However, it can be that private employers are seen more attractive in the eyes of kindergarten students. This is probably because university students are more familiar with private employers as they have heard or even learned about them during their studies.

7.2 Managerial implications

Schlager et al. (2011) state that by embracing employer branding tactics, an organization is more likely to gain a strong position in the labor market. As the early childhood education labor market is highly competitive, it is recommended that private companies in the early childhood education field engage and invest in employer branding. It also helps in achieving competitive advantage by investing in human capital (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004) and indirectly in the creation of a service brand (Schlager et al. 2011), which is important for private companies in the field.

Attracting the best talent from the employee market is important and, hence, it is necessary that organizations create appealing employer value propositions that evoke emotive and tangible benefits for both potential and current employees (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Mandhanya & Shah 2010). The closer the organization's value proposition and the attributes that potential employees desire are, the higher the employer attractiveness is (Chhabra & Sharma 2014). According to person-organization fit theory, potential employees are also more likely to apply to an organization if the employees' values match those of the employer's (Backhaus &

Tikoo 2004). In addition, private employers should think which of those values they possess, create their value propositions accordingly, and emphasize them in their employer branding to attract potential employees. By combining their distinctive employment offering with organizational attributes that differentiate the organization from its competitors, the management of organizations can formulate working employer branding strategies. In the early childhood education field, private employers should promote characteristics like security and child-orientation that are seen attractive and important by potential employees. Managers should also communicate values that potential employees see important and characteristics that make public employers more attractive. Managers can also use personality traits like sincerity to increase employer brand affect and trust (Rampl & Kenning 2014). Brand associations relating to positive and enjoyable work culture can also increase employer attractiveness. As many public employers do not have much information about their work culture, private employers can gain advantage by emphasizing work culture related attributes and values potential employees hold dear in their external branding. Equipment and premises can also be used to enhance the employer brand as they influence employees' job satisfaction.

The EVP and employer brand should be communicated for example through career webpages, seminars and conferences, social media, and career fairs. Chhabra and Sharma (2014) state that potential employees "prefer to learn about the employer brand through job portals but actually 33 percent of respondents reported to have gained information of the same by company visits/presentations." Therefore, it is important that human resources and marketing work closely together. Career webpages should be informative and represent well the employer brand by clearly stating the distinctive employer offering. As students are also potential employees, private employers should also concentrate on career fairs to enhance their company's reputation. All three university students who participated to this study had heard about Touhula Varhaiskasvatus during their studies whereas vocational school students did not have any knowledge of the company whatsoever. This indicates that private employers including Touhula Varhaiskasvatus should concentrate on communicating their employer brand both in universities and university of applied sciences and in vocational schools, to build knowledge and reputation. As potential employees in the south seem to appreciate an employer that is large and trustworthy, Touhula

Varhaiskasvatus could emphasize its structured and well-coordinated operations and support functions to make it more attractive in the eyes of potential employees.

The problem private employers like Touhula Varhaiskasvatus encounter is the general, unfavorable attitude towards private employers in the field and potential employees lack of knowledge about the company. Therefore, organizations should concentrate on building awareness among potential employees. Reputation should also be built as positive corporate reputation increases potential employees' intentions to apply to the organization (Sivertzen et al. 2013). By increasing their reputation and by engaging in both external and internal branding, the companies can become more attractive in the eyes of potential employees. However, this is a problem that requires long-term orientation for the companies.

According to Knox and Freeman (2006) the messages relating to employer branding towards potential employees need to be reinforced by the company's employees. Thus, organizations should also use employee testimonials to enhance their employer brand. These testimonials should include and reinforce attributes that potential employees value, such as job security, and development, application and social values. Also, insights to work community and work culture could be provided.

Important is, though, that what companies say and promise in their external branding and job previews is truthful. Managers of organizations should be careful with what type of brand messages and signals they send to potential employees for example through webpages or recruitment events. By creating accurate messages and by providing sufficient information, employers can improve the accuracy of perceptions early childhood education professionals have about the company as well about private employers in general. Realistic communication also reduces turnover and increases trust, and contributes indirectly to employer branding (Biswas & Suar 2016).

For employer branding to be beneficial, external branding should be effectively legitimized by internal branding. This means that in order to achieve the benefits of external branding, internal branding must be accomplished with agility and the effort of external and internal branding should be integrated. (Mandhanya & Shah 2010.) As Kaur et al. (2015) state, the "application of employer branding in managing human

resources of a firm can act as a source for building commitment and loyalty among employees, thereby reducing labor turnover.”

7.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study gives private employers important insights on what potential employees value and what makes an employer attractive for them. However, all participants from the southern Finland were from Helsinki and in the northern Finland from Oulu. The validity of this research could have been enhanced if potential employees would have lived in different cities. Many participants had also recently graduated or entered the working life within a few years. Validity of this research could have also been increased by interviewing potential employees with many years of experience from the field.

In the future, research could concentrate more on factors affecting employer attractiveness and which are the most important ones for potential employees. This way employers would know what factors to emphasize most in their employer branding. Future research could also concentrate on finding out how private employers can enhance their reputation and correct wrong perceptions potential employees have about private companies in the field. This would be important for private companies as their reputation especially in the southern Finland is not as good as in the north. Also, regional differences could be studied further by concentrating on East and West Finland.

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