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## ***The perks of fitting like a glove***

A case study about success factors behind the acquisition and development of young talents through a Trainee Program

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# ABSTRACT

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**Title:** The perks of fitting like a glove - a case study about success factors behind the acquisition and development of young talents through a Trainee Program

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore and gain an increased understanding of the key success factors behind young talent acquisition and development in terms of value creation, and thus contribute to the research field of Strategy - and Human Resource literature. This will be done by a case study of AAK, a leading producer of vegetable fats, to empirically analyze how they work with talent acquisition through their Trainee Program.

**Methodology:** The study was initiated by a theoretical review of existing theory belonging to the field of Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management, Employer Branding and previous research on Trainee Programs. A preliminary framework of key success factors behind acquisition and development of young talents was conducted, with help from existing research. The study is based on a case study and qualitative approach, where the main data have been collected through in-depth interviews. The gathered data have been analyzed by using pattern making, with the aim to create a final framework. The study included both deductive and inductive elements, thus the research process has been conducted using an abductive approach.

**Theoretical perspectives:** The theoretical framework of the study is based on Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management, Employer Branding and previous research about Trainee Program.

**Empirical foundation:** The empirical data has been obtained through a case study of the company AAK. Five employees; two HR representatives, a manager and two trainees working at the head office in Malmö have participated in the study. All respondents are categorized by their involvement in the process of acquiring and developing of young talents in AAK. The data has been gathered through semi-structured interviews.

**Conclusion:** The empiric material combined with the theoretical framework provided insights about factors that characterize successful Human Resource strategies behind acquisition and development of young talents. The presented final framework summarizes our findings. The framework gives a holistic view and description of key success factors behind development and acquisition of young talents in a global company.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PROBLEMATIZATION

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*“Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work.”  
- Stephen King*

#### **THE WAR FOR TALENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE BASED ECONOMY**

It is not enough to be just talented, it is how you handle and sustain the talent that determines how well one can utilize its talent to achieve success. In that sense, hard work beats talent when a talent does not work hard. Talented people in turn, are to be seen as highly valuable resources, especially in today’s modern economy, where knowledge and information are crucial drivers of productivity and growth, possessing great contributing power to economical welfare (OECD, 1996). Thus, organizational success much depends on efficient learning processes, to create new knowledge that in turn fosters innovation and adaptiveness to the fast-paced business environment. The human capital is one driving force of the knowledge economy that has a large impact on organizational performance. External factors, such as the increasing globalization, economic crises in recent years and growing competition, are also discussed as factors that have put pressure on companies to attract employees with the right skills, and to be able to fit the right person to the right position in the organization (Ahnlund, 2011). Furthermore, this have evolved into a huge battle among companies, and as jobs and skills change, finding and recruiting the right people today has become more important than ever, where Talent acquisition is the third most crucial challenge companies face (Deloitte, 2017). Rankin (2000) portrays it as a war for talent, and further highlights the importance of recruiting potential leaders and to retain them in the company. The war for talent hints about a shift in the relationship between the employer and

employee, were the later one have gained increased power due to companies' intensive need to attract the right competencies and create value in the modern economy (Rankin, 2000).

At the same time, the market of labor has changed, in that sense that there has been a generation shift, and the newly graduated talents consists of Millennials, also called Generation Y, born between year 1977 and 1995 (GEN HQ, 2017). Millennials have, to a large extent joined workforces all over the world, but differs from previous generations as they have other preferences of work-life (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). Deloitte (2016) emphasizes that leadership training is a key component in retaining talented Millennials, and leadership skills at all levels needs to be build, organizations need to build, as Millennials take on more responsibility earlier on than previous generations. Furthermore, surveys have shown that a majority tend to leave their current employers within two years if they cite a lack of leadership development (Deloitte, 2016). This implies that Millennials want to manage their own careers in a fast pace and will gravitate to the company with the best offer on the table. Thus, careers and learning, is the second most important human capital trend by importance of 2017, moving companies toward "always-on" learning experiences that enables employees to achieve certain skills with high speed, easily and on their own terms (Deloitte, 2017). Hence, those companies that do not pay attention to this and adjust their supply according to talents preferences are likely to lose the war for talent, and thus also risk falling behind in the knowledge based economy.

It is obvious that to have the right human capital ends up in competitive advantage in the knowledge based economy, and as mentioned, the importance of adapting to the new generation of talents are increasingly important to create value in today's organizations. These conditions of today's business, in turn, have shed the light on the need to implement effective human resource strategies that is aligned with the company's overall goals. The result have been an increased concern for organizational functions, such as Human Resource department, to change from being a separated function to be integrated into the strategic management process of the firm. HR-functions has shifted, becoming more included in an organization's decision making. Thus, the Human Resource concept has evolved towards a more multifaceted approach. Nowadays it contains both traditional aspects such as employment laws, health and safety, salaries, work insurance and conditions, but also soft aspects such as improvement of the organizational culture,

establishment of organizational values and marketing through Employer Branding. The value of integrating Human Resource to the formulation of a firm's business strategy is suggested by researchers of Strategic Human Resource Management. Moreover, Strategic Human Resource Management is a part of the research field of Strategic Management has grown tremendously over the past twenty years among practitioners and academics. The development of this new research field has highlighted the link between Human Resource literature and Strategy literature. The overall idea of the theory is to highlight the benefit of integrating human capital into the firm's strategy to reach overall organizational goals.

Due to the increased rivalry among firms to attract the right talents, the research field called Talent Management has emerged from Strategic Human Resource Management (Huselid, Jackson and Schuler, 1997; Schuler, 1989; Wright and McMahan, 1992). Successful Talent Management implies that a company is good at attracting *“the right people at the right place at the right time”*, which also is equal to efficient talent positioning (Tarique and Schuler, 2010:128). Mäkelä, Björkman and Ehrnrooth (2010:134) refer to Talent Management as *“an organization's effort to attract, select, develop and retain talented key employees”*. With regards to what previously have been discussed about the knowledge based economy and the actual demand for the right human capital in today's business world, an efficient Talent Management strategy could be seen as the key to value creation among today's firms. However, Talent Management is not a trivial concept, as such strategic planning requires time, money and effort from the organization. Organizations differ in terms of structure, size and culture, and thus it is likely that the value gained from Talent Management differs among organizations. Firms could be more or less successful to attract, develop and sustain new talents through Talent Management. Today, it is commonly seen that companies invest their resources and money in the area within Talent Management that involves the recruitment and development of talents, namely Talent acquisition, and especially young talents. These young talents are mainly defined as graduates or recent graduates who only have been out on the labor market for two or three years. One of the most common ways of selectively recruit and develop young professionals at an early stage is through a Trainee Program, also sometimes called Graduate Program. The reason for this is according to Roswall and Sköld (1998), that firms aim to train and shape graduates with little prior experience from other organizations. By doing this, young professionals can be introduced



and adapt easily to the corporate culture, and furthermore, complement the business knowledge they eventually lack from their university degree (Roswall and Sköld, 1998).

In recent years Trainee Programs have become well-established among companies, not least in Sweden, and the number of Trainee Programs among Swedish companies has rapidly increased. In 2002, when the search portal Traineeguiden was initiated, there were around 50 companies with Trainee Programs (Tidningen Karriär, 2013), mainly concerned business graduates and engineers possessing a university degree (Traineeguiden, 2017). In 2016, there were over 200 programs offered (Upsala Nya Tidning, 2013) and it is clearly visible by looking at career fairs, various recruiting sites, newspaper articles and reports, that the scope of industry organizations that offer Trainee Programs has grown, as for example the government and public organizations that in recent years have started to focus and develop Trainee Programs (Assessibloggen, 2014). As trainee positions have increased significantly and become widely known, quality issues associated with the programs have been recognized, both in terms of a wide variation in both salary and content (Unionen, 2017). Moreover, the concept of a Trainee Program is not protected, and thus there are companies who abuse it or use it wrong because of ignorance (Traineeguiden, 2017; Tidningen Karriär, 2013). In 2006, Civilekonomerna and Traineeguiden developed a certificate to facilitate for both companies and applicants. The certificate is developed with the purpose to advise employers in making a well-structured program with the right content, but also to make it easier for applicants by clearly indicate the content and the opportunities that come with (Traineeguiden, 2017). To qualify for the certification, a Trainee Program must fulfill five criteria; (1) The trainee position must be the same as a permanent position; (2) There must be a developed plan for the entire Trainee Program; (3) The duration of the Trainee Program should be between 9 and 36 months; (4) The entry wage for a trainee position should be competitive salaries; (5) The employer must be able to offer the trainee relevant tasks after the Trainee Program (Traineeguiden, 2017).

Through establishing and offering Trainee Program, businesses can climb higher on the student's ranking lists, thus attract more applicants and the talented ones (Computer Sweden, 2007). Therefore, Trainee Program is reasonable to be considered as a strategic tool that company use to create value. Furthermore, companies today are eager to glorify the picture of a successful career by highlighting Trainee Programs as a fast way for new talents to become key players, with the

opportunity to influence the organizational performance of the future. “*We need a new trainee, the old one became CEO*”, is a quote from Tele2’s ad to their Trainee Program, that puts this glorification in place (Tele2, 2010). Tele2 is with their quote straightforward in their communication, convincing young talents that a trainee position, leads straight to the top, and if you look historically, it is true in a sense. Research made by Nova Talent Network in 2014, reveals that 48% of those who completed a Trainee Program, has since become managers, and 45% of former trainees have continued to work for the company for seven years in average (DN, 2016; AllaStudier, 2014). Another company that has transformed the quote into reality is SEB through the former CEO Annika Falkengren who started her career as a trainee. SEB’s international Trainee Program is one of the most popular Trainee Programs among young talents, and 2016 the program had 2572 applicants but only around 20 trainee positions to fulfil (Mail, SEB 2017). However, the time it may take to reach such position, which for Annika Falkengren took 18 years, is a detail that companies are not as eager to enlighten (Nya Chef, 2017).

Trainee Programs are often recognized through its extensive recruitment processes, including a large application pool of people who must pass through several interview steps and tests, before the company selects the best candidate. These extensive recruitments are considered necessary by companies, to ensure that the right talent is selected. Moreover, receiving a spot as a trainee is often described as having passed the eye of the needle (Cinnober, 2013; Metro, 2011; 8till5, 2016; DN, 2016; Tidningen Karriär, 2013). Hence, such selective hiring process results in Trainee Programs weighs heavily on the labor market and gives a stamp of quality and prestige (Metro, 2011). As previously discussed, it is quite clear that Trainee Program represent a new form of recruitment strategy that companies to a large extent have adapted to attract and recruit young talents. The alternative to a trainee position is to offer young talents a permanent employment instead. What is usually emphasized when comparing a Trainee Program with a regular employment, is the accelerated learning and development curve, and the access to the internal network. Looking at the content and structure of the companies who have a certificate from Traineeguiden, these generally include a schedule during the trainee period of established elements, such as rotation within the organization, intensive training and development, feedback and mentoring (Traineeguiden, 2017). These are aspects that altogether are likely to accelerate the learning process of the individual and transform him or her to a young professional during a

relatively short period of time. An “ordinary” fixed position often differs in that sense, lacking in opportunities involving rotation, extensive and intensive training, mentoring and the same access to the internal network.

## 1.2 PROBLEMATIZATION

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It is apparent that human capital in today's business environment is a well-discussed topic and generally included in the firm's strategic planning processes, due to the need of acquiring the right talents in organizations to gain sustained competitive advantage. Presented empirical facts reveal that companies care about spending a lot of resources to attract the right human capital. Thus, the research field Strategic Human Resource Management has grown tremendously over the past twenty years among practitioners and academics, with the overall idea to highlight the benefit of integrating human capital into the firm's strategy to reach overall organizational goals. However, the evolution of Strategic Human Resource Management is a relatively new field of study, origin from the late 70's and lacks a coherent theoretical framework to guide practitioners and researcher (Wright, P., McMahan, G., Snell, S. and Gerhart, B., 2001:b). Yet, Wright et al. (2001:b) suggest that the field of Strategic Human Resource Management is not fully elaborated and there is a need for further theory-based empirical research.

Talent Management can be seen as a relatively new phenomenon, that has gained an increasing attention in the last decade including both companies and institutions who have become interested in the concept, and there exists a significant degree of academic and practitioner interest (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014; Collings and Mellahi, 2009). However, Collings and Mellahi (2009) addresses that Talent Management remains underdeveloped, and Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe (2014) mean that the research on Talent Management has been lagging behind businesses in offering vision and leadership in this field. A key limitation to this, and what often is emphasized among authors is the lack of definitions and theoretical frameworks (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014).

Other previous research that has been within Talent Management embraces the link between Strategic Management of business operations and Talent Management Practices (Collings and Mellahi, 2009), other research identifies the talent required for international business operations and Talent Management practices (Tarique and Schuler, 2010), or looking at managing the various generations of the workforce (Meister and Willyerd, 2010). There are also studies linking Talent Management to diversity management (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014). However, existing research within Talent Management is not extensively discussing the key success factors behind the recruitment of young talents, in relation to value creation for a firm, and thus, it seems to be a relatively uncharted field that needs to be explored in further research.

The rivalry among firms of attracting the right talents has shed the light on employees' perception of the company, known as the employer brand identity (Barrow and Mosely, 2005). Due to the aim of appearing as an attractive employer, the research field called Employer Branding has been developed. From only have been viewed as a marketing strategy, Employer Branding today has a complete strategy and it has become a crucial area of the Human Resource function among companies (Deloitte, 2017). Ambler and Barrow (1996), defines the concept as the functional, economical and physiological benefits that are provided with an employment. The employer is furthermore identified by these benefits (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). An overview of the literature within Employer Branding could provide new findings of how employer brand identity is communicated externally which affects the brand image, and thus, the attractiveness of the company as a potential employer. However, the correlation between Employer Branding and a successful talent acquisition is a relative new explored field that needs further and extended research. Moreover, the research that has been found in the Strategic Management field is, to a large extent, elaborating on the link between human resources and competitive advantage (Schuler and MacMillian, 1984; Wright, Dunford and Snell, 2001:a). Schuler and MacMillian (1984) and Wright, et al (2001:a) both elaborated on competitive advantage from the firm's standpoint looking at the issue from the Resource Based View and demonstrates that human resources can be a source of sustained competitive advantage. Thus, what we know from previous research by Barney (2001); Wernerfeldt (1984); Wright et al, (2001:a); Schuler and MacMillian (1984) is that the fit between the firm's overall strategy and the human resource base is an important factor that affects the value creation in firms, meaning that it is of importance in firms

to attract the right human resource base. Strategies are not universally implementable, instead, it is necessary to attract the right human resource base to be able to implement given strategies (Wright, Dunford and Snell, 2001). However, what have been discussed in the introduction part, is that the ability to manage the process of talent acquisition and development that creates value seems to differ among companies. Thus, it seems to exist key success factors that enable companies to succeed with their strategies.

What also have been discussed is that several companies seem to consider Trainee Programs strategically important to attract and develop young talents. However, Trainee Program is a relatively new and diffuse concept, and to understand the strategic implications of such program in today's business, the concept requires further research. Theories such as Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management and Employer Branding have characteristics in common, namely that all phenomenon contains the link between human resources, strategy and value creation. However, very few studies composing Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management, Employer Branding and Trainee Program, has been found that aims to understand the key success factors behind the process of successful HR practices when it comes to young talent acquisition and development. Previous studies that belong to the field have mainly based their research on statistical methods of multiple companies or comparable studies. Moreover, most research that is found explore American companies and the benefits of offering internships to prepare students for their future careers (Moghaddam, 2010; Weible and McClure, 2011; Hergert, 2009), which implies that there is a lack of research taking standpoint in talent acquisition from a Swedish company perspective. It will therefore be of interest to limit the research to Sweden since the labor law is strictly regulated here compared to the US, which might have implications for talent acquisition. In Sweden, the average age for taking a bachelor's degree is above the OECD average. Thus, Swedes are relatively late to entry the labor market, which can have consequences both for the society at large and for the individual in question (Ekonomifakta, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to answer the research question below:

- ***What are the key success factors behind acquisition and development of young talents, and how could these be understood through a Trainee Program?***

### 1.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE

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The purpose of this study is to explore and gain an increased understanding of the key success factors behind young talent acquisition and development in terms of value creation, and thus contribute to the research field of Strategy - and Human Resource literature. The study will be conducted through a case-study of AAK, to empirically analyze how they work with acquisition and development of young talents through their Trainee Program.

### 1.4 AIM AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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This study has empirical contributions, theoretical contributions and managerial implications. What can be derived from the presented empirical background is that acquisition and development of young talents is a relatively new concept that companies seem to view as a source of value creation. The process to attract, select, develop and retain young talents is not trivial, and as noted, companies could be more successful in their strategies than others. This in turn indicates that there must exist several key success factors behind Human Resources practices when it comes to talent acquisition. However, there is a lack of studies that aims to further research on the key factors of success. Thus, the empirical contribution of this study will be to explore and understand the success factors behind good Human Resource practices behind young talent acquisition. The study aims to contribute with research to the relatively new field of research, Strategic Human Resource Management, and the closely related research of Talent Management and Employer Branding. The study will contribute with theory that investigates the link between a firm's strategy, value creation and young talent acquisition. Lastly, managerial implications in this study are an increased understanding of talent acquisition and value creation. By knowing the key success factors behind acquisition and development of young talents, managers could possess valuable knowledge to improve the organizational performance in today's knowledge based economy.

## 1.5 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

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The first chapter of the study includes an introduction and background to the subject that is attempted to be studied. This part is followed by the second chapter that comprises literature on Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management, Employer Branding and previous research on Trainee Program, resulting in a preliminary theoretical framework. The third part of the essay pictures the methodology of the study, including research design, research approach, presentation of the selected case company AAK, data collection, the method for analysis and a discussion concerning reliability and validity. The fourth chapter covers the empirical findings combined with the analysis, as well as a presentation of the final framework that aims to answer the purpose of the study. The final chapter concludes the study.

## 2.0 THEORETICAL REVIEW

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*In this chapter, the aim is to explore the current research and theory that belong to the research field of Strategy- and Human Resource literature. The study will include formal theory about Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management and Employer Branding, leading to a concluding presentation of potential key success factors behind talent acquisition through a Trainee Program. The theory chapter also includes previous research about Trainee Programs.*

### 2.1 TRAINEE PROGRAM (DEFINITION)

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In this research of success factors behind acquisition and development of talents through a Trainee Program, the standpoint will be taken from the Swedish definitions and requirements of a Trainee Program. However, the literature review that has been made in this theory part composes international literature and research as well to further enhance the understanding of what the key success factors behind a successful program are. The concept of Trainee Programs is widely known and used by companies all over the world, however, in an international context “Management Trainee Program” or “Graduate Program” are more commonly used (Traineeguiden, 2017).

Nationalencyklopedin (2017) defines a trainee as an “*official newly employed, e.g. a graduate engineer or economist who undergoes internal training with a view to future managerial or specialist jobs within a company*”. Furthermore, Granberg (2003) states that to be recruited through a Trainee Program, is equal to an acclimatization process in the organization. The trainee gains knowledge about the function of the organization in terms of products, processes, structure, values and culture. This is often done through rotation processes where the trainees are able to get an overview of the whole organization and thus gain access to key persons in the company (Traineeguiden, 2017). According to Traineeguiden (2017), a Trainee Program normally runs between 9 to 36 months.



## 2.2 STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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In the late 70's and early 80's, the Strategic Management perspective of the firm became widely purposed among firms and thus, numerous models were developed. The result of the development was an increased concern for organizational functions, such as Human Resource, to shift from being a separated function to be integrated into the strategic management process of the firm. Therefore, the theoretical discipline Strategic Human Resource Management was developed (Wright and McMahan, 1992).

To be able to elaborate further on Strategic Human Resource Management, it is important to distinguish the perspective from the field of Human Resource Management, although they are very closely linked to each other. The Human Resource Management perspective focus on the micro perspective of the organization, looking at the functions of the Human Resource department, namely practices used to manage people in organizations, such as training, appraisal and rewards (Fombrun, Tichy and Devanna, 1984). Schuler and Walker (1990) discusses in their article that Human Resource Management emphasizes short-term goals of the business, and further argues that it includes processes and activities that Human Resource and line managers both use to solve business problems that relate to people. However, researchers have now tried to approach Human Resource Management from a macro level view, thus as a strategic part of the organization closely linked to the firm's overall goals. In turn, the macro organizational approach is known as Strategic Human Resource Management. Strategic Human Resource Management embraces the activities that affect the behavior of individuals in their efforts to compose and execute on the strategic needs of the business. Another similar definition is set by Wright and McMahan (1992), as "the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals".

Wright and McMahan (1992) pinpoint two important dimensions that separate Strategic Human Resource Management from traditional Human Resource Management. The first dimension refers to the connection between Human Resource Management and the Strategic Management process

of the firm. The second dimension highlights the link to organizational goals, by emphasizing the coordination of Human Resource Management practices through a strategic plan. Strategic Human Resource Management includes decision making concerning what human resource behaviors the organization requires, how to compose the human capital resource, such as skills and abilities, and the strategic dimension, the linkage between these decisions and the effectiveness of the organization. The effectiveness of such decisions depends on the firm's business strategy and competition (Wright and McMahan, 1992). Organizations that have adapted to Strategic Human Resource Management involve the Human Resource department in the management's strategic processes, which implies the opportunity to participate and influence the management's decisions. This interaction between the management team and human resource department decentralizes the organizational decisive power, and human resource issues could be delegated through the organization, resulting in a situation where all departments are involved in Human Resource processes (Sheehan, 2005; Kramar, Bartram and De Cieri, 2013).

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### 2.2.1 TALENT MANAGEMENT

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Talent Management is a research field that has emerged from Strategic Human Resource Management (Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler, 1997; Schuler, 1989; Wright and McMahan, 1992), and was developed due to the increased rivalry among firms of attracting the right talents. Furthermore, in recent years, the Human Resource function has shifted, becoming more included in an organization's decision making. This requires Talent Management to be highly linked to the strategy and corporate culture of the firm (Vaman et al, 2012). It was when McKinsey coined the phrase "*The War for Talent*" in the late 1990s, that the concept of Talent Management gained mainstream acceptance (Collings and Mellahi, 2010).

The research field of Talent Management is recognized by unclear definitions and terms, which have caused confusion among many researchers. Talent Management includes several different perspectives of the subject. Thus, the concept lacks a common ground for theoretical basis (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014). One of the most common definitions of Talent Management used is by

Collings and Mellahi (2009), who developed a clear and concise definition of Talent Management as; *“activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions that differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high-potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents, and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization”* (p.304). Moreover, several researchers have elaborated on the process of Talent Management, and they all mention attract, select, develop and retain talents as highly important in terms of creating sustained competitive advantage, hence, contributing to firms’ value creation (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Vaiman, Scullion and Collings, 2012; Stahl et al., 2012; Khilji, Tarique and Schuler, 2015).

Talent Management originates from a viewpoint that implies talents could be compared by looking at their competencies and capabilities, thus, it is the individual performance that counts. This implies that less attention is paid to the context or position of the talent, instead, the focus is how the talent performs and acts (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Both practitioners and academics highlight the importance of Talent Management, describing it as a challenge that is currently faced by managers, and is seen as one of the key strategic issues in the twenty first century (Sturman, 2009; Cappelli, 2008; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Huselid, Beatty and Becker, 2005; Ready and Conger, 2007). A more global dimension of Talent Management (Global Talent Management) emerged aligned with the internationalization of business and the globalization. Stahl et al. (2012) emphasizes the importance of the Global perspective within Talent Management, suggesting that the companies with a high degree and aligned practices of Internal-, Cultural-, and Strategic fit, excel at Talent Management, hence create sustained competitive advantage. In addition Stahl et al. (2012) address those Global companies also have to balance the tension between the effective decision making and implementation at local levels, and standardized systems and processes at a global level. Hence, value is created when the various elements of Talent Management systems are aligned internally, externally and globally. Meyers and van Woerkom (2014) believed that the insight into underlying philosophies of talent, that underpin Talent Management, is necessary to explain how and why Talent Management can contribute to a firm’s sustained competitive advantage. They distinguish four distinct talent

approaches and present the four philosophies; exclusive/stable; exclusive/developable; inclusive/stable; and inclusive/developable. Al Ariss et al. (2014) and Stahl et al. (2012), also talks about the ongoing controversy regarding if Talent Management is about managing talents of high potential or high performing employees only (exclusive or differentiated approach), or about managing talent of all employees (inclusive approach). According to Meyers and van Woerkom (2014), previously mentioned elements such as attract, develop and retain talented individuals with potential, falls into the category of an exclusive approach, thus a war for talents. What could be derived from Meyers and van Woerkom's (2014) findings is that a company's view of a talent is linked to their approach towards managing talents.

Talent Management theories have been driven by the assumption that maximizing the talent of employees is a source of sustained competitive advantage (Scullion, Collings and Calligiuri, 2010). To a large extent, based on previous research, Talent Management has been connected to human resource methods in organizations with the purpose to improve organizational performance (Farndale et al., 2010). However, what also have been revealed from research is that Talent Management is related to organizational challenges. In previous research, academics have identified challenges in organizations related to Talent Management, such as problems to find the right number of leaders (Stahl et al., 2012), and the general shortage of talents in particular (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014). Moreover, as Al Ariss et al. (2014) notes in their research, it is crucial that the definition of what constitutes a "talent" is commonly shared among line-managers, top-manager and Human Resource Department in the organization. If the definition of a talent is not agreed upon, it might lead to internal misunderstandings and the firm will find it challenging to implement and successfully obtain competitive advantage through their Talent Management strategy (Al Ariss et al., 2014). Meyers and van Woerkom (2014) defines talents as *"Individuals that are High-potential; Strategically important; Key position"*, while Tarique and Schuler (2010) and Khilji, et al. (2015) further describes talents as *"Individuals with high levels of Human Capital; Competency, Personality, Motivation"*.

## **MILLENNIALS AND TALENT MANAGEMENT**

An issue of Talent Management that deserves attention is the so-called generation effect, where studies have shown that generations differ in terms of their work preferences and behavior

(Festing and Schäfer, 2014). In their article, Festing and Schäfer (2014) reveals that the Millennials and Generation X, born between 1965 to 1976 (Genhq, 2017), are to a larger extent interested in Talent Management activities compared to the Baby Boomer Generation, born between 1946 to 1964 (Genhq, 2017). This implies that training, development and career advancement are highly important to retain the new generation of talents currently entering the labor market (Festing and Schäfer, 2014). Analyzing, understanding, and addressing these generational differences can lead to a more effective way of attracting, managing, motivating, and retaining employees, and talents in particular (D'Amato and Herzfeldt, 2008). Millennials are known for placing a stronger emphasis on CSR, work-life balance and look for mobility in their early careers. Furthermore, Millennials are searching for a robust and engaging workplace that encourages teamwork, fun, challenging assignments for them to develop and grow throughout a steep learning curve, having a supervisor or mentor who contributes with continuous and immediate feedback. This generation wants to work for someone who appreciates an individual employee's point-of-view and encourages their development. They want to be trusted with a lot of responsibility and that their efforts make a difference at work, as well as they expect diversity in their workplace and autonomy (Festing & Schäfer, 2014; Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; DelCampo, Haggerty and Knippel, 2010; DelCampo, 2007; Vaiman et al., 2012; Gostick and Elton, 2007; Dychtwald, Erickson and Morison, 2006; France, Leahy and Parsons, 2009).

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## 2.2.2 EMPLOYER BRANDING

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The concept of Employer Branding refers to the employees' perception of the company (Barrow and Mosely, 2005). Employer Branding comprises the benefits for companies to appear as an attractive employer, which furthermore has gained increased attention in today's business due to competition of talents. Thus, this theoretical perspective is of interest in this study when looking for key success factors behind acquisition and development of young talents, because a perceived attractive employer by graduates potentially attracts young talents easier than its peers. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) and Barrow and Mosley (2005) suggests that effectively designed Employer Branding strategies could lead to competitive advantage for the firm.

According to Barrow and Mosley (2005), Employer Brand Management consist of three parts; (1) Employer Value Proposition, described as the advantage as the company offers to existing and potential employees, illustrating the organizational values; (2) Brand communication and brand engagement are the second part, which are closely linked to each other, as brand engagement enforces the brand communication. This interaction is furthermore important during the process of communicating the employer brand and the Employer Value Proposition. The degree of brand engagement of employees determines the success of Employer Branding activities. The third part is (3) Managing external reputation. This is widely important for the firm as a good reputation results in an attractive brand image, which in turn can attract talents to the organization. (Barrow and Mosley, 2011) suggest that reputation should be seen as a measurement tool for the firm, that could be used to reveal if the brand image perceived by others is in line with how the firm aims to present themselves.

## 2.3 FOUR DISTINCTIVE PROCESSES OF ACQUIRING AND DEVELOPING TALENTS

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Through an extensive literature review of Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management and Employer Branding, four common themes among existing research has been crystallized; namely the importance of; *attracting*, *selecting*, *developing*, and *retaining* talents in organizations (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Mäkeleä et al., 2010; Vaiman et al., 2012; Stahl et al., 2012; Khilji et al., 2015).

In the following chapter research belonging to Strategic Human Resource, Talent Management, Employer Branding, complemented by research made on Trainee Program, where the latter can be seen as a part of Talent Management, have been collected and evaluated to further elaborate on the four processes; attract, select, develop and retain talents. These four practices encompass most Talent Management activities, and since Trainee Programs involves attracting, selecting, developing and retaining talents, these practices will provide the context for our case study with the aim to identify the key success factors of acquiring and developing young talent. In the

empirical chapter these factors, illustrated in our preliminary framework (chapter 2.4), will be tested and analyzed.

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### 2.3.1 ATTRACT

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The ongoing war for talent, as expressed by McKinsey already in the late 90's (Collings and Mellahi, 2010), have put pressure on companies to develop effective strategies to attract the right talents to their organization. Successful Talent Management implies that a company is good at attracting "*the right people in the right place at the right time*", which also is equal to efficient talent positioning (Tarique and Schuler, 2010:128). Talent positioning in turn, is relatively similar to a general market analysis. It is about defining the target group of talents and covers their desired needs, to be able to create a message that matches what these persons finds attractive (Beechler and Woodward, 2009). As Latukha (2011) also concludes in her research about Trainee Programs in particular, companies must define their target group for the Trainee Program and communicate a clear picture of their offer to the potential trainees and what they expect from them. It is important for organizations to understand the beliefs of their targeted applicants to decide what types of recruitment interventions and investments that should be used to attract them. According to Festing and Schäfer (2014), this is of a generational concern, where differences in work-related values and attitudes, are more influenced by generational experiences than by differences in employees' career stages, maturity or age. As previously stated, young talents of today are represented by Millennials, implying that companies today must consider the generation effect and how that affect their target group when it comes to setting a strategy in how to attract talents (Festing and Schäfer, 2014; D'Amato and Herzfeldt, 2008).

To attract young talents, a firm could benefit from implementing an effective Employer Branding strategy. As mentioned, Employer Branding consists of three components; (1) Employer Value Proposition; (2) Brand Communication and Brand Engagement; and (3) Brand Reputation (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). Thereby, an effective tool to use, to attract talents through Employer Branding, could be to design an effective Employer Value Proposition. Barrow and Mosley (2011) elaborates on the concept of Employer Value Proposition, describing the concept as an advantage the company offers to existing and potential employees, illustrating the organizational

values. Thus, firms that manage to design an attractive Employer Value Proposition that communicates how superior they are compared to other peers are likely to increase the interest of their organization, which could more effectively attract new talents. Moreover, to design a successful Employer Value Proposition, Barrow and Mosley (2011) and Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), suggest firms to internally express and communicate to the current employees an impression of the firm that is aligned with the company's values. The external process is also highly important, meaning that the company must define their target groups and communicate a brand image that is in line with their perceived picture of the talents ideal employer. Lievens et al. (2007) and Aaker (2004), furthermore highlights the importance of alignment and authenticity in the brand communication. Employees and stakeholder must communicate an authentic description that is in line with the shared image of the organization. This enforces the credibility of the brand, which is likely to affect the firm's ability to attract talents. Companies benefit from attracting the talents in an early stage of their career. Research by Lievens and Highhouse (2003) and Elving et al. (2013), propose that an early interaction with the talent increases the perceived attractiveness of the company. Recommended strategies to attract today's young talents, Millennials, includes interactive networking sites, open houses events, referral programs, internships and online job boards (Phillips and Roper, 2009) and Trainee Programs (Traineeguiden, 2017). Through these kinds of activities, current employees could express their motivation, perceived benefits and stories about the firm and the organizational culture. By using engaged employees as ambassadors in the brand communication, firms could enforce the attractiveness of the company (Barrow and Mosley, 2011). Elving et al. (2013) further suggest that the involvement of current employees in these activities also increases their motivation to work for the company.

Brand communication comprises all interaction between the company and the public, including media and word-of-mouth (Balmer and Greyser, 2003; O'Sullivan, 2004). The image that the firm enables to communicate about the brand results in a reputation of the brand. Hence, it has been increasingly important for firms to be aware of how they are recognized in media or how frequently they are searched for on Internet search pages (O'Sullivan, 2004). It is therefore essential to sustain a good brand reputation to succeed with the process of attracting talents. Today, there are several organizations that publish Employer Branding ranking lists, portraying



the “most attractive employer” (O’Sullivan, 2004), and this is sought by organizations, since this is likely to result in that the company gets recognized, a boosted reputation, and an increased attractiveness, thus, attracting more talents. What is also discussed by Barrow and Mosley (2011), is the relation between Employer Branding and the total impression of the company. If a company is successful financially, they are likely to be perceived as an attractive employer, and thus, the employer brand reputation tends to be enforced during successful times.

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### 2.3.2 SELECT

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The accomplishment of having a successful strategy for attracting talents, then leads to the stage when it comes to distinguish and select the right talents. Pfeffer (1998) highlights a well-prepared recruitment process as widely important, stating that firms must attract a large amount of applicants, as then they will have the opportunity to choose among many potential talents. Further, he emphasizes that selective recruitment processes are highly important to gain value from human resources in today's organizations (Pfeffer, 1998). This is also pointed by Rankin (2000) who argues that the recruitment process of new potential leaders is central to avoid increased costs due to customer dissatisfaction and increased management training. Collings and Mellahi (2009), emphasize the benefits of attracting and select talents early, and argues that it could be done through talent pools, namely recruiting high potential students without having a defined position for them. In a later stage companies could pick talents from the talent pool to fill available positions. Companies could use talent pools as a tool to improve the recruitment of talents, but to be efficient, talent pools requires intensive recruitment strategies (Collings and Mellahi, 2009).

In his research, Pfeffer (1998), recommends firms to carefully set up a selection criteria that is based on abilities that the candidates possess that is complex to change through education and training. Rankin (2000) suggests that it is easier to educate and develop people that possess the right values and attitudes, instead of people that have the right knowledge but lacks the attitude to adapt to the organization culture. This reasoning implies that it is important to attract the right people, however, the selected talents might not be individuals with the highest grades or

extraordinary merits, and instead the match between the graduate's attitude and organizational values is of higher importance in terms of the firm's value creation. This perspective of searching for and selecting the right people has thus led to the fact that traditional recruitment processes have become obsolete. Traditional hiring practices, including to examining resumes, checking references and conducting interviews, have instead of being replaced with psychological assessment, behavioral interviews, personality assessments and job knowledge tests, to improve the company's chances of matching the right person to the job (FMI, 2007). Every time a recruitment process is finalized, it must be evaluated to be as effective as possible (Pfeffer, 1998). Moreover, Pfeffer (1998) suggest recruitment through interview screening and case solutions, which in turn requires both time and effort from the involved recruiters and graduates. However, he argues that the extensive recruitment process comes with benefits, such as the selected candidate gains higher motivation to work while feeling specially selected. The graduates that have enough patience to take part of such time-consuming process, indicates that they are deeply interested in working for the organization (Pfeffer, 1998).

As mentioned earlier, attitudes and personal qualities play an important role, and although it is considered valuable to have satisfied employees in an organization (Gostick and Elton, 2007), organizations emphasizes the importance of engaged employees, recognized as individuals with high-impact (Wagner and Harter, 2006; Gostick and Elton, 2007). Unlike a satisfied employee, who may be comfortable with his or her status quo, thus not show any extra initiative or achievement (Wagner and Harter, 2006), an engaged employee is willing to go the extra mile to help the customer and usually understands how this effort makes a difference on the bottom line (Gostick and Elton, 2007).

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### 2.3.3 DEVELOP

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To maximize and utilize the full potential of the selected talents, development and training of talents is an important part for organizations to achieve value creation. Pfeffer (1998) emphasizes the importance of training and educate the selected key people, which is aligned with Rankin (2000) and Wagner and Hartner (2006). They all suggests that extensive training of employees as

well as assigning them supervisors and mentors who can give them feedback on their performance, leads to better use of human resources and thus value creation in organizations. However, Pfeffer (1998) emphasize that this could disadvantage the firms as employees tend to be busy during peaks. Thus, companies have to consider when the training should take place to be able to gain value from it (Pferrer, 1998). Rankin (2000) further suggests that, during education and training of the talents, it is important to reward qualities and abilities of the talent that could lead to the desired organizational performance.

To develop young talents, to increase and sustain their motivation is crucial, as it affects to what extent the knowledge learned will be integrated into the workplace, and thus positively affecting the performance of the talent (von Treuer et al., 2013). Von Treuer et al. (2013) found in their research, to increase motivation, it is crucial that the design and delivery of training highlight the relevance and the utility of the program. In turn, this will maximize the return on investment. However, the generational effect plays an important part here as well. When it comes to increase motivation and engagement among talents, each generation has a separate and distinct protocol (Dychtwald et al. 2006). Hence, the development activities of young talents should be tailored specifically for the targeted generation. Moreover, there is also a difference of a talents approach towards learning and development, depending on the industry. According to Dychtwald et al. (2006), there is a significantly above-average preference for individuals to learn and grow in professional and business services, information and technology and construction.

Furthermore, Joyce and Slocum (2012), found in their study that executive's role in developing and sustaining young talent is critical, since they are the key assets of organizations, and to operate effectively, talents should be managed in the light of an organization's strategic needs and opportunities.

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#### 2.3.4 RETAIN

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As previously argued it is highly important in firms to develop a strategy to attract, select and develop talents, however, to get return on the investment that have been put in the previous steps, it is equally important for organizations to retain the young talents. According to Stahl et al.

(2012) there are no best practices in retaining talents, instead, it is an individual challenge for organizations to handle. The authors suggest dealing with the problem by primarily figuring out why performers leave. This can be done by comparing attrition rates against the growth of high performers over time to diagnose problems in its recruitment, leadership development, and performance management process (Stahl et al., 2012). Stahl et al. (2012) argue that companies are aware that retention of talents requires more than only competitive compensation such as financial incentives, namely to take a multifaceted approach. However, research from Heath (1999) suggest top managers and HR executives often fall victim to an “extrinsic incentives bias”, meaning that they have a tendency of overestimating how much employees care about extrinsic job features, such as pay, while underestimating the motivation provided by intrinsic job features such as decision making authority or strong working relationship. Lawler (2003) mentions that those companies that overemphasis on financial rewards could actually prevent value creation, by attracting people who join an organization with the purpose to only download expensive training and information, but then leave for a better-paying job elsewhere. This is something Pfeffer and Sutton (2006:124) also mentions as; *“When employees hold the upper hand, and companies battle for top talent with money alone, then their best people will keep leaving for more money, as they are working for nothing else.”*.

Latukha (2011) researched among potential factors behind a trainee’s decision to resign a Trainee Program. The study revealed that important factors of a successful program are to have a shared understanding of its importance and to have support from the entire organization. This implies the degree of membership to the organization that the trainee perceive, impacts the success of the program. The program will not be successful if the trainees do not perceive themselves as complete members of the organization or equal partners to the other employees and their manager (Latukha, 2011). The graduates that participated in Latukha’s research (2011) revealed that the programs did not focus on personal development to that extent as expected. Thus, the research proves that lack of personal development impacts trainee retention (Latukha, 2011). This is aligned with Stahl et al. (2012), mentioning that personnel development appears as an explicit objective in most annual performance evaluations. However, Stahl et al. (2012) emphasis that investment in training and development alone are insufficient, thus organizations have to make leadership development an integral part of their culture and actively involve their senior leaders in

the process. In order to excel in leadership development, the line manager involvement is considered to be one of the most effective tools (Stahl et al., 2012). The authors suggest that their responsibility is to coach the talents and encourage them to take the opportunities of job-shadowing in the company. Career development is very important, and thus, it is crucial that the line manager motivates the employee to try out new positions in the organization, instead of being selfish and forcing the talent to stay within their department. Aronoff (2004) and Muehlemann, Schweri, Winkelmann and Wolter (2007), also support the importance of mentoring when it comes to retaining employees in their research. Furthermore other research emphasizes that the alignment between company values and employee values improves employee performance and motivation, increasing the opportunity that the talent does not resign from the organization (Goshal 2005; Galagan 2008).

Sometimes trainees, after the completion of their programs, leave because they perceive that they are lost within the organization, since they feel that they do not get the same amount of attention to their careers as before. Furthermore, a sense of breaking the psychological contract with the organization sets in, resulting in disengaged employees who are likely to quit at the first viable opportunity to where they will get opportunities for growth. This often happens two or three years after finishing the program. Hence, organizations should put the focus on the two to three-year mark, having a strategy containing to keep the trainees engaged by giving them challenging assignments and opportunities for learning. To do this, it will be necessary for the Trainee Program alumni to be tracked on career movements, growth, satisfaction, performance, engagement etc (Gusain, 2017).

While previous generations generally have had expectations on spending one to five years in a position before being promoted, Millennials want to know where they are going to be next month (Dychtwald et al., 2006; Cappelli, 2008). Thus, continuous feedback loops are important, however, long-term planning of career development is also a crucial factor to avoid retention of today's talents. Latukha (2011) found that a reason behind resignation among trainees was a perceived lack of long-term affiliation. The trainees revealed that they attended the program with the expectation that they will gain a management position. However, the research implied that companies hired the talents due to their capability to have enough skills for the required work-

tasks, without attention to long-term affiliation. The implication was that the majority of the trainees decided to leave the company after finishing the program. For companies that use Trainee Programs as part of their talent acquisition, this further implies that to fulfill the expectations of the trainees is another issue that companies must manage to retain their talents. As already mentioned by Stahl et. al., (2012), and what Latukha (2011) also found, was that companies had an issue of understanding the motives behind the trainees' decision to leave. If managers increase their understanding of the trainee's motives, and act upon those, the retention rate can possibly decrease (Latukha 2011). Furthermore, if companies target the right talents from the beginning, they will also attract those who are likely to remain in the organization (Latukha, 2011). She argues that companies already in the attraction process through an extensive mapping of their potential target talents and clear communication of what the organization offer and what they expect from the graduate, proactively, increases their chances to attract the talents who are likely to stay in the organization (Latukha, 2011). Thus, it is important to keep in mind how the starting attraction process of a talent is interrelated to the final step of retaining the talent within the organization.

Pfeffer (1998) states that the sharing of financial performance information throughout the organization is valuable to make the employees feel trusted and comfortable. Thus, to retain young talents one could assume that an important detail of a successful talent acquisition strategy could be to continuously keep the talents updated with relevant information concerning organizational performance.

## 2.4 PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK; KEY SUCCESS FACTORS BEHIND ACQUIRING AND DEVELOPING YOUNG TALENTS

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Through an extensive elaboration of the findings within the four distinctive processes of acquiring and developing young talents; attract, select, develop, retain, conducts in a preliminary framework where thirteen key success factors have been identified (see figure 1), which will be presented below.



Figure 1. Preliminary framework; Key success factors behind acquiring and developing young talents

*Shared Definition of Talent.* For the company to find the right talent that fits into an organization's strategic goals, there should be an underlying definition of talent, shared by the entire organization, especially between the management group and the people involved in the recruitment process.

*Efficient Talent Positioning.* Attracting the right people at the right place at the right time.

*Executive Manager Involvement.* To develop and sustain the talent the executive's role in the talent acquisition process is important, since they are the key assets of organizations and are involved in the organization's overall strategic needs and opportunities.

*Effective Employer Branding strategy.* By having an effective Employer Branding strategy, companies can attract a broader scope of potential talents, hence a larger selection group which in turn generates a larger number of potential talents.

*Selection Criteria.* It is important to carefully set up selection criteria based on abilities that the candidate possesses that is complex to change through education and training. This implies that it

is easier to educate and develop people that possess the right values and attitudes, to adapt to the organizational culture.

*Extensive Recruitment Process.* To select the right talent for the right job and make a good fit, it has to be an extensive recruitment process, including several steps that can assure that you select the right talent of the attracted potential candidates.

*Generational Adaptation.* Every step within Talent Management, how to attract, select, develop, retain, must be adapted to the generational target group.

*Extensive Training and Education.* To match the talents demand of accelerated development and also to utilize the talents full potential, continuous training mixed with education is required. This is also important, since it is proven to affect the retention of the young talent.

*Talent Motivation.* Young talents motivation can partly be seen already in the selection criteria as a personal characteristic. However, it is important to sustain the motivation among the talents. Thus, it is crucial for organizations to identify what motivates their young talents.

*Evaluation of Talent Management process.* To be able to address flaws of an organization's talent acquisition process, and enable to improve, continuous evaluation is crucial.

*Expectation Management.* If a company doesn't fulfill talents expectations of what the company has promised the talents, this can affect the retention of the talent. Thus, clear communication and transparency are required to avoid the risk of not meeting the talents expectations.

*Mentoring.* It is moreover important to assign the talent a mentor who can give them continuous feedback on their performance, as this is an important part of the talents ability to accelerate in its learning process. In turn, this leads to better use of human resources and thus value creation in organizations.



*Membership.* To retain young talents, it is of high importance that the talents feel that they are being included and seen in the organization, and that they feel that they have the ability to make a real impact.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

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*In the following chapter the choices of methods for our study will be presented. The applied research design will be of a qualitative character, where we through in depth interviews with representatives from AAK, intend to study the subject of the research's purpose. The background of the methodological choices, as well as how the selection and implementation have been chosen, will thus be presented more in detail, as well as other aspects observed for the research validity and reliability.*

### 3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

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There exist two main perspectives on theories role in research, inductive and deductive approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The inductive approach considers theory as the result of the research in question, thus, has its starting point in the collected empirical material, with the aim to generate new theory. The deductive approach on the other hand, aims to examine the existing theory in the field. Thus, in a deductive approach existing theory forms the basis for the design and testing of hypothesis. Moreover, there is a third approach, abductive approach, which consists of observations and empirical data, as well as theoretical reasoning (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). Thus, in this research, the abductive approach has been used, since the study is based on both existing theory in Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management, Employer Branding and previous research on Trainee Programs, and the respondent's reasoning regarding the subject in question. As the research subject, Trainee Program, as a part of Talent Management, is a relatively new field of study and is to be argued as suitable to explore previous research of the field, but also to fill the existing gaps with new empirical data derived from the conclusions made in this research. In that sense, this study has characteristics of both induction and deduction (Stein, 1993).

To increase the understanding and to identify key success factors behind a Trainee Program, as being a part of an organization's talent acquisition and development, the qualitative approach has

been used. A qualitative approach is suitable when there is little knowledge within the research area and when the study aims for a deep understanding (Jacobsen, 2010; Yin, 2014). Based on a subjective reality view, qualitative research methods have its starting point in that individuals, through interaction with each other, contribute to the creation of the reality they live in (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The purpose is to create an understanding of this reality by examining the different impressions that exist around it (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The purpose of a qualitative method is to gain access to the individual's "inner" experience, as the main interest lies in the understanding of the true reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, as there is a lack of prior empirical research within the specific field of what key factors there are behind the recruitment of young talents throughout a Trainee Program, an exploratory method has been chosen, as the study aims at exploring this phenomenon. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) an exploratory approach implies openness and unique insights. This unique insight can be accessed by interviewing experts within the subject (Saunders et. al., 2012).

To increase the understanding of the research subject and to establish a theoretical framework of potential key success factors of recruitment and development of young talents throughout a Trainee Program, the starting point of the study was to review existing theoretical literature. To gather data and to elaborate further on the preliminary theoretical framework, a case study of a real company was made. The data was furthermore analyzed through the pattern matching approach, as recommended by Yin (2014). Throughout the study, it has been important to enable flexibility and reflection, and hence, sensitizing categories (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 1994) have been applied, instead of static categories. During the analysis, the standpoint was taken from the preliminary framework. However, it ended up in a final framework that has another structure than the preliminary one, not limited to certain categories. This was possible due to the choice to apply sensitizing categories.

This study is idiographic, as it aims to highlight individual unique events, while research seeking to achieve generalization is called nomothetically. A case-study is suitable to study the more empiric phenomenon, as the method is based on idiographic richness, which nomothetic surveys are not able to study (Larsson, 1993). Thus, to be able to explore the field of talent acquisition,

reach unique findings and conduct in-depth interviews with experts, a single case-study has been chosen as the research method, instead of a statistical survey of multiple companies.

## 3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

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### 3.2.1 THEORETICAL STUDY

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The role of the theory in this research has been to settle the preliminary theoretical framework, which has contributed to finding out potential success factors behind the recruitment of young talents and development throughout a Trainee Program. It was important to reach a comprehensive review of the literature that already exists within the field of study, as this enabled us to develop knowledge of the subject and to interpret data and possible patterns (Yin, 2014). The chosen theoretical perspectives are to be argued as highly relevant to the purpose of this study, which also is the reason behind the choice. Formal theories are to be defined as theories that are based on theories that could be applied to many research areas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which in this research is Human Resource theory, derived from Talent Management, Employer Branding, and Strategic Human Resource Management. This contributes with an overview of how companies deal with their human capital. The theoretical framework also consists of substantial concepts, which are defined as theories that are aimed to cover a particular subject (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, the substantial theories are research concerning talent acquisition and development as a part of Trainee Program.

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### 3.2.2 CASE STUDY

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This study aims to in-depth understand a phenomenon and explore the topic in its context, and thus a favorable method to choose is a case-study, as suggested by Saunders et al., (2012). A case study was preferable in this study as is based on direct observations in a single organization and personal interactions, including sampling from numbers of individuals (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson, 2015). The lack of previous research implies that there is a need for a case study that

aims to understand the phenomenon of recruitment and development of young talents in-depth. Furthermore, a comparative study was considered but ruled out due to the fact that in an in-depth study, we get the opportunity to conduct research on a company on a deeper level, its strategy and its unique parameters. Thus, it becomes more difficult to find a similar company to compare with, as there are more differences between organizations on a deeper level. The aim of this research is to find out how acquisition and development of young talents throughout a Trainee Program successfully are applied and managed in a company. Thus, a case study is preferable as the research aims to answer a “how” question (Saunders et al., 2012).

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### 3.2.3 THE SELECTION OF CASE COMPANY

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The case company that has been selected for this thesis is AAK. The Trainee Program of AAK can be seen as an example of Talent Management, that includes relevant dimensions belonging to the perspective such as attract, select, develop and retain. Thus, this program was suitable to in-depth investigate, to test our preliminary framework and to find key success factors behind acquisition and development of young talents.

To fulfil the purpose of this study, it was very important for us to find a company that was experienced in acquiring and developing talents, thus likely to possess valuable knowledge about the research subject. The Trainee Program is well-established since 2012, and is fulfilling the requirements of an approved Trainee Program according to Traineeguiden, which means that the company possess experience of acquisition and development of young talents (Traineeguiden, 2017). Moreover, we looked for a company that was currently spending time and resources to acquire and develop young talents. This since we expected that an engaged company should be willing to share their views on the subject in detail. Since one of us was a former employee at AAK, she knew that AAK’s Trainee Program was argued to be an activity that the company spends a lot of effort, time and money on. This was furthermore confirmed during the interviews, where the HR representative explained that the number of applicants and available positions have been growing the last years, from 449 applicants in 2015 to 1529 applicants in 2017. The number of available trainee positions has increased from 4 available positions in 2012, to currently 23

available trainee positions in 2017. Thus, this implies that the company is keen to enable young talents to take on responsibilities throughout the organization through a Trainee Program, as they keep spending resources to develop the program and expanding it. Furthermore, only two trainees have left the company since the start of the program (HR representative, AAK, 2017), which indicates that the majority of the trainees have decided to stay in the company after the program. This indicates that AAK is likely to possess a successful Talent Management strategy to acquire and develop talents, which further contributes to make AAK a suitable company to answer the research question. Overall, AAK is also argued to be a suitable company for this study, since one of us is a former employer at the company, and thus possess access that has given us the opportunity to interact with key-persons of the organization.

## **AAK OVERVIEW**

AAK is a leading producer of specialty vegetable fats, founded in 2005, due to a merger of the Swedish company Karlshamns AB and the Danish company Aarhus United. The head office is located in Malmö, Sweden, but the company is to be considered as global, with production facilities, purchasing and sales office located around the world. AAK's products are utilized by the cosmetic industry, as substitutes for dairy fat and cocoa butter and solutions for fillings for chocolate and confectionery products. Their business consists of three main business areas, namely Food Ingredients, Chocolate & Confectionery Fats (including the cosmetic unit) and Technical Products and Feed (AAK, 2017).

The AAK Trainee Program lasts for 12 months, and the context and structure of the program are explained by AAK as a mix of on-the-job learning, individual development activities and formal training. The trainees are recruited to a specific, full-time position from the start of the program, but also collaborate with each other throughout the year during modules, workshops and cross-functional trainee projects (AAK, 2017). The program has two modules during the year, a four-week operational module which focuses on improvement of production facilities to meet customer demand, and a two-week commercial module, focusing on value creation for the customers. With exception from the operations track and commercial track, the program does not

include any rotations despite from a four-week international assignment, where the trainees switch positions and assignments (AAK, 2017).

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### 3.2.4 SELECTION OF INFORMANTS

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As one of us already had an established network within AAK, there was a possibility to gain access to valuable informants involved in AAK's Trainee Program and Talent Management. Through collaboration with the HR representatives, the set up for the interviews and potential informants were discussed. Furthermore, when conducting a qualitative interview, it is of the utmost importance to select informants that are well grounded into the subject that is to be investigated (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Thus, to find the ones that were the most involved in the recruitment and development of young talents, we examined the organizational structure to understand the HR-function of the organization. In this research, five in-depth interviews have been conducted, with respondents that possessed expertise about the Talent management processes of AAK. Thus, the interviews resulted in a comprehensive empirical material, which in combination with the theoretical framework enabled an in-depth analysis and interesting findings. The scope of informants enabled access to information from people working on different organizational levels, different functions, as well as a different amount of work experience from AAK. Thus, the validity of the results was increased (Saunders et al., 2012; Jacobsen, 2010).

In the following table, (table 1), the informants at AAK are presented. To consider the informants' anonymity, we have chosen to name them either HR representative, Trainee or Executive Manager. The HR representatives have been presented as men to not reveal their anonymity. Moreover, we have chosen to present the former trainee and the current trainee, both as trainees, and both as women, to ensure their anonymity in the empirical discussion.

Informants role at AAK	Organization level	Age (Generation)	Location	Joined AAK	Interview format
HR	Head Office Malmö	Gen X	Malmö	2011	Face-to-face
HR	Head Office Malmö	Gen X	Malmö	2016	Face-to-face
Trainee	Head Office Malmö	Millennial	Malmö	2016	Face-to-face
Former Trainee	Head Office Malmö	Millennial	Malmö	2014	Face-to-face
Manager to Trainee	Head Office Malmö	Gen X	Malmö	2015	Face-to-face

*Table 1, Selected informants at AAK*

### 3.3 DATA COLLECTION

The primary data collected in this research are derived from in-depth interviews and emails with employees of AAK, involved in the process of acquisition and development of young talents. To conduct interviews were a natural choice that matched the purpose of the study. Furthermore, to increase the understanding of a complex subject, there is a need to collect in-depth data. Hence, a survey would not provide enough in-depth material needed to fulfill the aim of this research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In-depth interviews have contributed to an increased control of the sample and the data that is collected from each informant, which is also suggested by Easterby-Smith et al. (2015). The study also consists of secondary data about the case company, which have been collected from the company report and the company's web page. The risk of not being able to control the obtained secondary data was mitigated, as one of us is a former employee of AAK. Thus, we got access to richer company information, such as marketing material and similarly documentation (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). This material thus was used to confirm the information that was found on the website and in the company report, which further increased the reliability of the study.

#### 3.3.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

To conduct data that gain an increased understanding of the subject in question in relation to the respondent's worldview, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In this research, it was important to understand the meaning that the respondents attached to Talent Management, the Trainee Program and the context around it in AAK. Thus, semi-



structured interviews are a favorable choice to ensure to fulfill the purpose of the study. Furthermore, we approached an open interview technique, and set up a topic guide that worked as a loose structure for the interview, with room for additional questions if needed (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The preliminary framework was converted into suitable questions, which aimed to test the existing findings made from the theory. The interview guide consisted of a general face-sheet to put the interviewed person in a context. This was followed by questions regarding the success factors founded and presented in our preliminary framework, which was conducted from our four themes crystallized during the literature review; attract, select, develop and retain. This setup was made in order to facilitate the analysis, where the purpose is to investigate the relation between the key success factors behind recruitment and development of young talents through a Trainee Program as proposed by theory, with the empirical data that has been found about the talent recruitment and development process in AAK. To ground the interview questions on the selected theoretical framework is furthermore suggested by both Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) and Jacobsen (2010). To avoid that the respondents influenced each other's answers, the topic guide was not given to the informants on beforehand. However, the aim of the study was communicated in advance. The interviews were held at the AAK head office in Malmö, an environment that the respondents were familiar with, as well as the interviews were held separately and face-to-face. Altogether, these circumstances around the interviews enabled genuine answers regarding the respondent's perception of the research subject, which sustained the reliability of the study.

### 3.4 METHOD FOR ANALYSIS

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Yin (2014) suggests pattern matching as a well-established method to connect existing theory with reality, enabling the researchers to find patterns and conduct in a rich data analysis. Thus this method has been applied when presenting the empirical findings, in order to find patterns between collected data and the preliminary framework of key success factors suggested by theory (chapter 2) and fulfil the aim of the research (Yin, 2014). By applying pattern matching throughout the entire study, it was possible to analyze the preliminary theoretical framework with the empirical data (Bryman & Bell. 2011). The data was divided into different subcategories, as

the interview guides differed slightly between the interviews. This enabled visualizing patterns and different angles in the informants' answers which may be of importance. Through this approach, it was possible to elaborate further on the preliminary framework and make relevant changes, as suggested by the empirical findings, which lead to a final framework.

### 3.5 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

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To conduct a credible research, it is crucial to address validity and reliability concerns. To ensure that a qualitative research is trustworthy, it is important to consider the reliability of the study (Eneroth, 1997). In this research, the reliability has been addressed in several ways. During each interview, the purpose of the study has been explained in an identical manner, which implied that all respondents got the same information. The trustworthiness has further been ensured through recording and transcription of every interview. However, one of the interviews was conducted in Swedish, and thus there could be a risk that there have been mistakes made in the translation (Jacobsen, 2010; Saunders et al. 2012). To mitigate lost in meaning from translation in this study, the translation was reviewed in detail by both of us. In a qualitative study, there is a risk that the results can be reflected by the researchers' interests and perspectives of relevance (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this study, it has been important to mitigate the risks of research bias, as one of us are a former employee of the case-company. This could possibly lead to the implication that the amount of data generated from the in-depth interviews has been elaborated through subjectivity, which may have influenced both empirical and analytical analysis. Moreover, in this study, all the informants were based at the head office in Malmö. This could possibly have affected the reliability of the study, as there is a risk that the respondents are biased by the company in general or a certain corporate culture at the head office, thus not completely honest as they might perceive that it is their duty to protect the company. However, these risks, both researcher bias and company bias, have been mitigated by asking follow-up questions during the interviews, to clarify that the message that the informant aimed to tell us is clearly understood, as well as using multiple sources throughout the study.

Validity is another concept that must be taken into consideration to ensure the credibility of the study. The concept is usually divided into external validity and internal validity. Internal validity

refers to the extent as a causal linkage between the interrelated variables of a study is warranted. External validity on the other hand, refers to the generalizability of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In a qualitative research the analytical generalizability is measured, meaning that it is measured in terms of existing theory, thus to what extent the research could declare a theoretical concept or phenomenon. The result of a qualitative method is often not representative of a larger population. In this case, limiting factors, such as a relatively short history of the case-company's Trainee Program and an ongoing reconstruction of the HR strategy involving new executives, as well a lack of recruitment processes of young talents outside the Trainee Program, have altogether influenced the extent of the number of interviews, resulting in a relatively small selection. Thus, the sample could not guarantee statistical randomness nor the result is representative of the entire population. That implies further that the statistical generalizability, to measure towards the number of cases or population, is not taken into consideration (Yin, 1994). Bryman and Bell (2011) further suggests that generalization, within qualitative method, could be derived from the theory presented, thus requiring potential theoretical conclusions.

The method of analysis, pattern matching, has positively affected the external validity of this study, because during the process of pattern matching, it was possible to evaluate if the preliminary theoretical framework was aligned with the findings from the empirical study. Moreover, a critical standpoint has been taken when elaborating on the theoretical framework. The presented theoretical concepts of Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management, Employer Branding and previous research on Trainee Program, are exclusively based on scientific literature or research, which further implies that the theory in use are tested by previous research. In that sense, the secondary sources that have been used represents an analytical and processed perspective of the chosen theory.

The research design further impacts the study. This study has been conducted through a single case-study. This is a research form that has been criticized for missing validity due to difficulties to generalize the observations. This because a single-case study has less capability for replication, thus not as strong support and theoretical propositions as a multi case strategy could have offered (Saunders et al., 2012; Yin, 2014). However, the single-case study strategy was chosen to be able to collect in depth findings, and this can be done more efficiently when focusing on one single

case (Larsson, 1993). Moreover, as noted by Cresswell (2007), there is a higher probability that a study will be replicated if the collected data have been detailed recorded and researcher bias taken into consideration. Thus, to increase the validity of this case study, it has been crucial to record and transcribe each interview. The validity of the study has also been strengthened as we constantly have examined self-reflectivity during the research process, by continuous reflecting and exploring our relationship to the research subject throughout the research process (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Yin (2014) further suggests that to increase the validity of a case study, it is important to establish clear designs, including main questions, units of analysis, links between data and suggestions, and processes for data interpretation. This design should be established before collecting data. This study has followed the recommendations from Yin (2014), and thus carefully sustained a clear set-up before initiating the process of data collection. The iterative process of pattern making that has been approached throughout the study has also contributed with validity according to Yin (2014).

Furthermore, to establish both reliability and validity of the study, we have taken triangulation into consideration, thus approached cross-verification of the data (Poole, 1990). This has been ensured through an extensive background check of relevant material and in-depth interviews. Respondent validation has been ensured in the sense that if we have noticed that the respondents answered different to the same question, in particular questions that are of a false or truth nature, we have ensured to ask follow up questions to ensure validity of the study. Moreover, inter-rater reliability has been ensured as we have been two persons that have conducted this study. This implies that we have both interpreted the collected data, both have been present during the interviews, as well as we have read each other's transcriptions of the material, to ensure reliability (Poole, 1990).

Moreover, the final framework model of key success factors behind talent acquisition and development that have been constructed is flexible as sensitized categories have been applied. Through the use of sensitized categories, this study has been able to discover new concepts and ways of looking at the process of developing and acquiring young talents in organizations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). Thus, as this approach has been used throughout the research process, this study is also useful for further research to a larger extent.

## 4.0 EMPIRICAL DATA AND DISCUSSION

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*In the following section the empirical material of the study is presented and analyzed. The preliminary framework presented in chapter 2, has been applied to the empirical findings about acquisition and development of young talents in AAK. Empirical data and analysis have been combined to provide a relevant and living structure. The empirical findings and discussion have resulted in new contributions to the preliminary framework, thus, the chapter is summarized by a presentation of our final framework.*

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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#### **THE WORLD OF AAK, FRIENDLY BUT UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

To be able to conduct this qualitative study around acquisition and development of young talents in AAK, it was important to first understand the fundamentals of the organizational culture, such as the work context of the respondents, as well as what role Human Resources plays in the organization. Starting with the working environment in AAK, a common pattern recognized was that the respondents perceived AAK as having a decentralized structure, where decision making paths are short. The HR representative refers to AAK as a “small-big” company, in that sense that they have started to build size, with production plants and offices around the world, but are still a small company by mentality. The interviewed trainees both described the environment as open, helpful and caring, were AAK is perceived as a company having faith in their employees. As one of the HR representatives describes:

*“People are friendly by heart, and it might sound a bit weird but people are amazingly keen and helpful. Everyone is helping out, always, and if you talk to the wrong person that person will refer to the right one who is into the subject of matter. People don't give up until they are completely sure that I have got enough help...”*

HR representative

The HR representative emphasizes that the corporate culture in AAK is warm, friendly, and that people put a lot of effort in helping each other. However, these values are not written down and clearly communicated throughout the organization;

*“I think we must put words to the culture we have, and that is our values, but our values, as you might have recognized, they are not settled. Therefore I want to connect our values to the culture we really have...”*

HR representative

Moreover, he mentions that AAK is currently restructuring their entire Human Resource processes. According to the HR representative, they do not have a common recruitment process across the entire organization of AAK to hire young talents. He further explains that recruitment of young professionals, with 3-5 years' experience, is mostly done through local processes and not by an internal benchmark. However, it became clear during the interviews that the Trainee Program is the only structured way that AAK recruits young talents. The process is structured in that sense that all trainees must go through the same recruitment process, and to a large extent they complete the same training during the program. In that sense, AAK approaches Talent Management through their Trainee Program, as this is a concrete example of how the company, by a settled strategic plan, attracts, selects, develop and retain talents to the organization (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Vaiman, Scullion and Collings, 2012; Stahl et al., 2012; Khilji, Tarique and Schuler, 2015). The reconstruction strategy indicates that AAK are heading towards a more strategic approach of acquiring and developing young talents. The three-year strategy includes changing from local recruitment processes to an entire global process, where routines for acquiring and developing human resources within the company are going to be clearly defined. This is further in line with Stahl et al., (2012) who argues that to excel in Talent Management, it is important that the various elements and systems are aligned internally, externally, and globally. The HR representative is excited about the reconstructing process, and emphasizes the need to define and have an aligned understanding throughout the organization of concepts, such as what the meaning of Talent Management is to AAK, including an underlined definition of talent, that currently not exists. This is important for AAK to have a successful talent positioning. Similarly, research within Strategic Human Resource Management argues that a

defined strategic plan of the HR-process creates value in a company (Wright and McMahan, 1992). The HR representative further elaborates on what definitions and restrictions that should be included:

*“I feel that it is important that we have a shared definition within the company of, what is a potential talent? What does talent mean to us? What is a potential review, what does that mean to us? What does Talent Management mean to us? What does succession planning mean to us? What does Workforce planning mean to us? - In order to get a common understanding of the concepts”*

HR representative

The HR representative further reveals that a talent for AAK is a person that both possesses the potential are able to both perform. This further implies that a person that possesses only one of the characteristics, potential or performance, is not to be considered as a talent according to AAK. What previous research emphasizes, and what thus is illustrated in our preliminary framework, is the importance of a shared understanding among their line managers, top-managers and Human Resource Department, for what constitutes a talent (Al Ariss et al., 2014). Research implies that the lack of definition of a talent in AAK could damage their Talent Management strategy (Ariss et al, 2014). This is due to an increased risk of misunderstandings, meaning that the company will perceive difficulties to achieve competitive advantage through their Talent Management processes. However, this is not a remarkable finding, because a shared understanding of different concepts in an organization, is commonly considered by researchers as a crucial characteristic of a united and well-being corporate culture.

## 4.2 EFFICIENT TALENT POSITIONING

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In the preliminary framework, efficient talent positioning is presented as a key success factor behind acquisition and development of young talents. Talent positioning is considered by theory to be successful if a company is good at attracting *“the right people in the right place at the right time”* (Tarique and Schuler, 2010:128). During the interviews, it became clear that the Trainee Program is an important part of this process in AAK.

## **THE AAK TRAINEE PROGRAM, AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF A MUCH BIGGER PUZZLE**

In 2010, the AAK Trainee Program came to be created as a part of a strategy set by the new CEO Arne Frank. At that time, AAK struggled with demographical problems, and had too many people who were at their peak or past their peak in their career at multiple functions, and furthermore there was a lack of young energy to challenge their flat line thinking, which was a part of why AAK was financially flat lined. During an investor presentation in November 2010, only seven months after CEO started his position, he promised to double the firm's EBIT in five to six years. A part of this strategy was to build a leadership pipeline, with the purpose of supplying the organization leaders and managerial resources in the long run. Thus, the starting point in AAK's leadership pipeline is to have very strong young talents with leadership potential taken into the organization, which is where the Trainee Program comes into play. AAK's target group for the Trainee Program, are young talents, or young graduates with potential, one can also say. The incentive to implement a Trainee Program can be understood through the lens of Strategic Human Resource Management, as the company connected Strategic Management processes; to increase financial performance, and Human Resources processes; to introduce a Trainee Program. Such link between Human Resources and organizational goals through a strategic plan of the Human Resource process are crucial dimensions of Strategic Human Resource Management (Wright and McMahan, 1992). Theory further emphasizes that value is created in organizations if the management enables to make effective decisions regarding how to compose the skills and abilities of the human capital (Wright and McMahan, 1992).

## **REDUCING THE RISK OF BAD TIMING WITH A TRAINEE PROGRAM**

Talent positioning depends largely on good planning and there is always a risk that a young professional will leave the organization, and thus may jeopardize AAK's strategic goals within talent positioning. However, by establishing and continuing a Trainee Program, where AAK annually acquires and develops new young graduates in an accelerating pace, as a part of their leadership pipeline building, they can reduce the risk of not having the right people at the right place in the future.



## 4.3 ATTRACT

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### **TRAINEE PROGRAM, THE MILLENNIAL DREAM?**

As our preliminary framework suggests, a generational adaptation is crucial to attract, select, develop and retain young talents. Thus, it is important to create a message that matches what the targeted group, young talents, finds attractive (Beechler and Woodward, 2009). According to research, young talents of today have different requirements than previous generations (Festing and Schäfer, 2014). Millennials are known for their willingness to develop fast, take on responsibility in an early stage as they also want to make an impact within the organization. To enable that, they need the right tools, such as continuous training in personal development and leadership, mentoring and guidance, and access to an internal network and senior managers. These Talent Management activities are associated with Trainee Programs in general, and are covered by AAK's Trainee Program. Furthermore, the way Trainee Programs are pictured in social media today, the way companies market it, and not least, that there is a search portal for it, TraineeGuiden, contributes to the fact that a Trainee Program is considered to be something exclusive, hence appealing. This is also something one trainee addresses, as she was really sure that a Trainee Program is something more than just an ordinary job;

*“One thing I knew for sure was that i wanted a Trainee Program, I did not want a normal job, so I didn't apply for any normal jobs.”*

Trainee

Furthermore, the same trainee shows characteristics that are often associated with a Millennial, as she compares a Trainee Program to a normal job. She sees a Trainee Program as an opportunity to develop much faster, and furthermore also get the right support and training she needs to enable this;

*“...And I think it was because you know, in these kind of programs you get a lot of support, during the year or years, and then you are able to find out how far you can go. While if you get a normal job it is more like, ok this is your position, and you need to work on this and maybe in one-two years we maybe see that you can do more, and then we give your more. But here, with the program it's more like they are pushing you all the time.”*

Trainee

It first and foremost was the Trainee Program in particular, who got the two interviewed trainees attracted to apply, and not AAK as an organization itself. One of the trainees explains that she perceived that in Scandinavia, Trainee Programs are associated with development opportunities, as well as capabilities to travel, meet a lot of people and thus an ability to grow. As mentioned, organizations often market their Trainee Programs as a fast way for new talents to reach management positions, as Tele2 for example, and that they include rotation opportunities. This perception seems to be the same in AAK, which is further why they in their market poster want to send out a clear message, that their program is not a Trainee Program, or Graduate Program as they have used as a synonym;

*“This is not a Graduate Program.*

*This is not touring through departments doing “Projects”.*

*This is not a shortcut to Management Positions.*

*These are real Trainee Jobs.”*

AAK’s Trainee Program, Job-advertisement

What AAK means with "real Trainee jobs" is that the trainee gets a fixed position from the outset, and thus can be compared to a regular employment in this regard. A regular employment differentiates, in turn, usually means relatively little rotation within the company, and this is what differ AAK’s program from the rest, according to one HR representative, as many other Trainee Programs offer a lot of rotation. Still, AAK has chosen to call their program a Trainee Program, which may be due to the fact that a Trainee Program today is a recognized concept among young talents, as one of the trainees confirms when she explained that her first interaction with AAK, was on the Internet;

*“Internet, I was searching the word Trainee Program Scandinavia, and it popped out. I had no idea what the company was about, like many other people apparently.”*

Trainee

Thus, this implies that AAK can strategically benefit in attracting young talents by naming their program for acquiring and developing young professionals, a Trainee Program. Furthermore, as Lathukha (2011) emphasizes, it is highly important to communicate a clear picture to the trainees of what can be expected from the program, to retain talents, which is something AAK does when

they in their market posters state how the program differs from an “ordinary” Trainee Program. The main difference according to AAK is the rotation part, and this seems to also have been perceived by applicants, as one of the trainees compares AAK’s Trainee Program with another company’s;

*“Compared to Arla, I like this one a lot because you are in a position one year, all the time, so you are not just rotating all the time to another position and another country and then again and then again...”*

Trainee

Thus, what can be concluded from the case of AAK, and what is a new contribution to our primary framework, is that the name itself, Trainee Program, is associated with status and certain, positive expectations. Hence, the name is considered valuable to use to acquire and develop talents, and thereby a crucial success factor that adds new insights to previous research.

### **EMPLOYER BRANDING, IS IT REALLY NEEDED?**

The preliminary framework pictures an effective Employer Branding strategy as crucial component of acquisition and development of young talents. In line with what Philips and Roper (2009) and Traineeguiden (2017) suggest, AAK is marketing themselves and the Trainee Program through being present at universities and career fairs, as well as online marketing in terms of job postings, to attract today’s young talents, according to the HR representative. However, none of the interviewed Trainees have the perception that AAK market them any further. One of the Trainees had never heard of AAK before she searched for Trainee Program on the internet, and the other one was studying in the small-town Aarhus, where AAK have one of their factories, thus, this is why she knew of them;

*“...they do not do that much marketing of AAK, it is more like, when they have opened their application for the Trainee Program, then they do the posters and then they send it to professors, and then the professors send mails.”*

Trainee

Thus, this indicates that AAK does not have an efficient Employer Branding strategy. As pictured in the preliminary framework, an efficient Employer Branding strategy is considered to be a key

success factor in order to strengthen a company's reputation and recognition (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Barrow and Mosley, 2005). However, in contrast to what our preliminary framework suggests, this does not seem to be a key success factor for AAK when it comes to attracting the right talents.

The HR representative further confesses that they have not implemented an Employer Value Proposition, meaning that AAK has not written down nor communicated the value that the company offers to existing or potential employees. He describes AAK as anonymous on social media, such as LinkedIn. However, the approach towards Employer Branding seems to differ on country level. The HR representative refers to Mexico and US as two countries where he perceives that AAK works with Employer Branding to a larger extent. Such differences between sites around the world, further confirms what have been discussed previously, that AAK lacks a united, entire global Human Resource strategy. According to Barrow and Mosley (2005) the use of an Employer Value Proposition implies that a company aims to communicate how superior they are compared to other peers, which is likely to increase the attractiveness and interest of their organization, which furthermore is likely to result in an increased number of applicants. Furthermore, a high number of applicants is in itself also considered as attractive, which further increases the attraction among young talent (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). Even though there obviously exist several benefits of an effective Employer Branding strategy that could potentially benefit the employer, AAK still do not have implemented such strategy. In contrast to theory, AAK instead believes that too many applicants can result in unnecessary work if you end up with an overrepresentation of qualified candidates, as one HR representative explains it;

*“... Too many qualified candidates, that's a luxury position, but it comes at a high cost in terms of all the other things we cannot spend our time on.”*

HR representative

AAK instead tries to reduce the gap between attraction and selection, by making sure already in the attraction process to attract the right talents that match their selection criteria. This is done through a conscious advertisement strategy, which aims to only attract those who fulfill the criteria of being faster than average in learning and reading. AAK constructs ads and job-

descriptions of the Trainee positions with a certain layout, to attract the right talents with the right potential, who are young graduates with a reading speed and learning capability that is faster than average;

*“If you read the ads, they are quite hard to read. But if you are good at learning, if you are good at reading, you get attracted. So by the way of doing the advertisement, we are getting the right people to apply”.*

HR representative

Thus, in the case of AAK, the number of applicants are not that important, nor to market the program to a broad target group. Instead AAK seems to direct their communication based on the specific profile of potential applicants that they would like to attract. This further questions the preliminary framework, in the sense that Employer Branding seems to be less important than previous research suggest. However, the HR-representative reveals that AAK will extend the program, from offering 9 available positions in year 2016, to 23 positions in year 2017. Thus, it is reasonable that AAK will be needed to attract a larger target group in the future to fulfill the positions with right talents, and thus, the company might have to consider strategies such as Employer Branding, in order to increase the number of applicants.

#### 4.4 SELECT

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##### **EXTENSIVE RECRUITMENT PROCESS, KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE**

What could be derived from previous research, and illustrated in the preliminary framework, is that the process of acquisition and development of young talents is associated with an extensive recruiting process. AAK is no exception, as their recruitment for the Trainee Program contains many different steps of interviews and tests, which are divided into a screening process and a selection process. Pfeffer (1998) states that an extensive recruitment process can result in the candidate gaining higher motivation to work while feeling specially selected, and this can be exemplified in AAK, as a trainee explains that she feels a responsibility to prove herself by doing

things without being asked, as she wanted to show that the company did the right decision investing in recruiting her;

*“No one applies you to, but when I started I was all the time trying to prove myself, of course I wanted to do a lot of stuff to show that, it is me they want here, and that is why they chose you, because you were able to deliver, and you want to be like; okay I want to make sure that they know I work hard. I expected that they would want me to be perfect now, and that I needed to be perfect tomorrow.”*

Trainee

Furthermore, one of the HR representatives also mentions that the last step of the recruitment process of the Trainee Program is an interview with the CEO himself. He further describes that this is one of AAK’s strongest cards in competing with other companies during the processes, as the candidates feel extremely special. Moreover, according to the HR representative, the CEO is very good at recognizing the trainees by name and to show his interest in their projects if he meets them. It further implies that the trainees are a strategic investment that is highly valued by top-management. In the preliminary framework, the executive managers’ involvement role in the talent acquisition process is listed as a success factor. This is due to the fact that the executive is involved in the organization’s overall goals and thus possesses key knowledge to develop and sustain the talent in the organization (Joyce and Slocum, 2012). However, the benefits, as AAK perceives, by involving the CEO in the recruitment process, contrasts previous findings as it adds a new dimension to executive involvement, namely a perceived “trainee ego-boost” to be both connected and recognized by the CEO.

### **ABSOLUTE SELECTION CRITERIA, A SUBSTITUTE TO TALENT DEFINITION?**

As illustrated in the preliminary framework, and discussed by Ranking (2000) and Pfeffer (1998), a carefully considered selection criteria, based on measuring a candidate’s abilities that are complex to changes, are considered to be a success factor behind to acquiring talents. AAK follows this suggestion and applies selection criteria to acquire the right talents. These abilities are measured through educational background checks, online assessments, interviews, technical knowledge, learning capability and some of the personal traits that are more or less side by side comparable. Moreover, according to FMI (2007) this can possibly improve AAK’s chances of matching the right person to the job. Furthermore, one of the HR representatives explains that

these kinds of measurements also helps reducing the likings of hiring- and HR managers, and enables AAK to build a comparable ground. Furthermore, AAK approaches a Grandfather Principal, meaning that managers manager has to approve all people decisions, in order to reduce biases in the system. This extensive process will give AAK a full picture of a candidate, which is important for the fit. In fact, AAK are aware of biases such as sunk costs when it comes to the decision of closing down positions and leaving them vacant, if they don't find the right people for that particular position, as one of the HR representatives explains;

*“We only fill the positions if the quality is good enough, and we have very strict absolute criteria, so it’s not just the best candidate.”*

HR representative

What has been found during the interviews is that the description of a talent according to the HR representatives is in alignment with AAK's selection criteria. Thus, even though AAK yet does not have an underlined official talent definition, they do have an absolute selection criteria, which can be seen as a substitute for a talent definition as such, as the target group of the program are young talents. This contrasts the preliminary framework, implying that an underlined definition might not be considered as a necessary success factor if the company has an absolute selective criteria involving clear restrictions about what abilities the candidates should possess. Thus, AAK's use of selection criteria implies that they are conscious about having a united mindset about what abilities the organization values of a potential trainee.

In the preliminary framework, selection criteria as a success factor, are further associated with the company's aim to select candidates that possess the right values and attitude, to adapt to the organizational culture. As Rankin (2000) suggests, it is easier to educate and develop people that possess the right values and attitudes, rather than people that historically have performed well. This is also something AAK talks about, when they are trying to select the right people, where none of the informants within AAK think that talent necessarily has to do with grades, thus, something that is excluded when evaluating a candidate;

*“...we don't look at grades from universities, because you cannot see how many hours one has put into it. If you are getting really good grades - Great! Are you doing it 15 hours or 80 hours a week?”*

HR representative

When it comes to the values, one of the HR representatives explains that if talents values are not in line with AAK's common values, it doesn't matter how much potential and performance one got, and thus it is highly important that the trainee is living according to AAK's values.

### **BALANCING A COMPLEX TALENT POSITIONING**

AAK's strategy is to narrow down the path as early as possible in the recruitment process, and their online learning capability test can be seen as the first mark for that, where they are looking for the top 25% of applicants. This test is also used by AAK as a measurement point, to ensure that they don't have too big of an overrepresentation, where as of today, 33% of their applicants are in the top 25%. This is an overrepresentation according to AAK, that ensures them that they manage to get the right people to apply as one HR representative explains;

*"...In average 33-38% of our applicants that are in the top 25%. That is an overrepresentation, telling us something about that at least that we are getting the right people to apply. But then if they have the personality or the aspirations and so on and so forth, that's a different story..."*

HR representative

The fact that AAK closes down positions if the fit is not good enough indicates that AAK is striving for excellence in their talent positioning of attracting the right people at the right place at the right time, in accordance to Tarique and Schuler (2010). To be able to hold up its strict selection criteria is further something one of the trainees addressed as a success factor of AAK's Trainee Program;

*"...but here, maybe that is the reason why it go so well... Here, they really need this type of person and, if they don't find that type of person, they are not going to hire anyone for that position..."*

Trainee

However, as talent positioning, or succession planning as they call it at AAK, also involves the timing of having the right person in the right position. This can be seen as a challenge for AAK, as one HR representative explains they have had issues of finding the right person and had advertised the same position four years in a row before they found her. Moreover, the HR representative emphasizes that it is important to know what to do today, in three years, and in five



years' time, in order to have the right person at the right position in a future of ten years' time, as he explains;

*“... looking at our potentials now, in three years, five years, do we have someone who we believe can be Site Manager of Karlshamn in ten years? And how should we then build him or her in order to get there in ten years? What steps does that person take in his or her career to get there?”*

HR representative

To summarize, AAK seems to be aware of what is behind successful talent positioning, namely attract right people, fit and timing (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). What could be derived from above discussion about talent positioning in AAK, is that the company emphasizes the importance of making a long-term strategic plan, succession planning as they call it, for their human resources. AAK furthermore express that they rather wait to recruit until they have found the completely right person to fill the available position. However, what could jeopardize the entire talent positioning at AAK, could be that if they are too selective in finding the right people, they might miss out the timing perspective, but if they are not too selective, they might miss out on getting the perfect fit. In that sense, efficient talent positioning in AAK is to be seen as rather complex, where the company reasonably has to consider what parameters; fit, right people or/and timing, is most important strategically or to find a balance between them. Substantively, the HR representative confessed that this could be a potential problem in AAK. He explained that AAK might have to be a bit more loose and flexible in their selection criteria and thus risk less fit, to not miss out the timing aspect.

## 4.5 DEVELOP

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### **THE IMPORTANT TRANSITION FROM UNIVERSITY TO THE “DARK SIDE”**

One success factor behind acquisition and development of young talents that was suggested by the preliminary framework was to utilize the talents full potential through extensive training and education. During the interviews, it became clear that the Trainee Program contains crucial dimensions that focus on development of the talent, thus confirming the preliminary framework. AAK's Trainee Program is structured in a certain context, as it aims to accelerate the

development of young graduates into young professionals, where the trainees need to transition from university environment into a corporate environment, as the HR representative means is to “joining the dark side”;

*“They need to transition from university environment into a corporate environment. We do science for profit, not science for science, so get them on boarded to the dark side, of building a profit that is basically what I tell them.”*

HR representative

One part of this transition, is to break down the circular learning process graduates have been taught during university, meaning that students learn new topics every quarter and as soon as they have been examined, they drop that and move on to learn the next one. Furthermore, this is according to one of the HR representatives the reason why they do not believe in rotation within their Trainee Program, as he associates this with a circular learning perspective, and thus he believes that giving the trainees a broader view on multiple functions within AAK would not generate any value. Similarly, Pfeffer (1998) suggest that to gain value from training, companies have to consider when the training should take place. However, giving all the trainees a global overarching umbrella perspective, also called helicopter perspective, is important, and this is why AAK’s context and structure of the program has a mix of on-the-job learning, individual development activities and formal training, as the HR representative further explains;

*“For people that have the leadership potential, we need to make sure they all the time keep the AAK helicopter perspective, or at least are capable of going there.”*

HR representative

For AAK to accelerate the development of young graduates and turn them into young professionals in only one year, one of the HR representatives mentions that having the right support is very important;

*“Typically in company where people are unsupportive, with no specific attention to this, that would probably take somewhere between 2,5-3,5 years before they regards themselves as young professionals.*

*We try to do that in one year.”*

HR representative

Thus, the trainees within the AAK Trainee Program are supported with a mentor and this, according to one of the trainees, was one of the reasons why she applied. Furthermore, the graduates are facing a big difference when coming from a university to AAK. As one of the Executive Manager explains, in universities, students today are so ambitious, aiming to be the best, having the highest grades, and are characterized by a very self-centered thinking, as he explains;

*“...all of them wants to be best, it is all about “me me me”, but it is very different when you work. “*

Executive Manager

However, at AAK, it is important to put oneself aside and let others shine, as one has to build relations with others, such as colleagues, customers and other stakeholders. As the Executive Manager explains, the trainees are ambitious, but also competitive, where it is a lot about who are the best. Thus, he means that this is where the mentors have to help out, in order to guide the trainees, learning them to find a balance.

## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAVING A MENTOR AND A FUNCTIONING MENTORSHIP**

As one of the HR representatives explains, mentorship is a good support for the trainees own career development. Furthermore, both trainees interviewed address mentorship as one of the most important things. This also confirms the preliminary framework where mentoring is suggested as a crucial dimension of acquiring and developing young talents. Previous research mainly discusses the importance of continuous feedback by the mentor, to accelerate the talents learning process (Pfeffer, 1998; Rankin, 2000; Wagner and Hartner, 2006). However, what has been found in this study of AAK, that contrasts the mentorship dimension in the preliminary framework, is the importance of fit between the mentor and the talent. For the mentorship to work accordingly, it is important that the mentor and the trainee have a good chemistry, and capability of building trust, and continuous contact. An observation made about the mentorship of AAK is again the generational effect, which also contrast previous research presented in the preliminary framework. One of the trainees describes her mentorship as successful, where there is an understanding between her and her mentor, which means that she feels that she can trust him and

thus share her feelings and thoughts. In that sense, fit and generational effect are crucial parts of the mentorship in AAK, which in turn adds value to their development of young talents. Furthermore, as they are based at the same office, they can maintain a good contact and they have meetings once a week, as the trainee explains;

*“... We are really really really connected. Like, we really understand each other very well. We are sitting next to each other, we joke with each other, and we criticize each other also. So we kind of, you know, I know I can trust him.”*

Trainee

The mentor then, of the same trainee, is talking about himself, as being from another generation that differs from today's generation of Millennials, and further explains that it is important to be available, understand them, and taking them serious. The trainee further mentions she does not believe that all the trainees have the same experience regarding a successful mentorship, whereas the lack of a close relationship can harm the purpose with the mentorship;

*“... and maybe, if you did not have that such closeness, you would not share so much as you should do...”*

Trainee

This is something one of the HR representatives confirms, explaining that there is a current challenge within the mentorship within AAK, as the standard among the mentors differs. Thus, this has also become a part of the strategic reconstruction within AAK, whereas mentorship in the future shall become a part of Talent Management, to assure quality. This indicates that, within AAK, they understand the importance of not only having a mentorship, but a functioning one, to provide the right support and guidance the trainees need to maximize their development.

## 4.6 RETAIN

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### LONG TERM STIMULATION

During the interviews, it turned out that the Trainee Program is a large investment for AAK. Thus, to get a return on the investment, a crucial parameter is to make sure that the trainees stay after completing the program, especially in AAK, where their one year Trainee Program only is the starting point of a far more long-term investment. The big investment in the trainees and the program, is something that the trainees also proved to be well aware of, and thus also feel a responsibility to stay in the organization after the program, as one of the trainees explains;

*“The huge investment that the company does, also comes with a responsibility for the trainees. I don’t want to lose that.”*

Trainee

This expression further hints that the trainee feel responsible towards AAK to continue her employment, which is an interesting dimension found from our research, that preliminary framework has excluded. Instead, previous theory focuses on the responsibilities that the company possesses in order to retain the talent. However, as Gusain (2017) mentions, a reason for why trainees tend to leave the organization two to three years after completing a Trainee Program, is because they perceive that they do not get the same attention as during the trainee year. Thus, they feel lost and perceive less growth opportunities, and look for other job alternatives where this could be found. This is something one of the Executive Managers also expresses;

*“It is the nature of being a millennial, If you don’t get what you want, you get it somewhere else.”*

Executive Manager

What could be derived from our preliminary framework is that to retain the young talents, it is important to fulfill trainees’ expectations and to sustain trainee motivation during the year. Theory further suggests, that it is equally important after the program is finished, to stimulate the

trainees' growth, satisfaction, and engagement, by continuing giving them the attention, support and development opportunities they need (Gusain, 2017). During the interviews both trainees revealed that they perceive that during their year as trainees in AAK they have received a lot of attention, such as being recognized by the CEO, support and feedback by a mentor, and access to a large network including senior executive levels. Thus, according to Gusain (2017) this kind of attention must be sustained. Furthermore, one of the trainees expressed that a crucial factor for her to stay, was to continue to have the same support from her mentor;

*“An important factor for me to stay would be to still being able to have support from my boss. I wouldn't like it if my boss said; yeah, now you are done so now you are on your own. I would be a little bit like; yeah, but I still need to learn, so I need that to have someone like, guiding you all the time. “*

Trainee

What also has been revealed during the interviews is that the trainees are aware of that they are valuable for the organization, thus can expect long-term stimulation, as one of the trainees explains;

*“You know, because when you are signing the program you are kind of signing a contract on that you are going to have a long-term relationship with your company, kinda like, they want to invest in you, and not just the first year. So that is really important for me, that they are going to still keep it.”*

Trainee

As can be concluded, trainees have expectations even after the program, and as our preliminary framework suggest, it is crucial to keep fulfilling these expectations to retain the talents within the organization. Furthermore, communication and transparency are required to avoid the risk of not meeting the talents expectations and affect their motivation. Here, AAK has shown a tendency to be very accommodating and flexible towards the trainees, as one trainee explained her opportunity to switch position after the program when she asked, as she during her year as a trainee discovered another business area of more interest to her. This implies, that even though the basic idea is that a trainee, after finishing the 12-month long program, continues to work in the organization, at the position or department they were assessed from the start, is not “written in stone”. Thus, AAK let her switch to a position that was in line with her motivation. To listen to

what motivates the trainee and sustain the motivation, are crucial dimensions that could possibly affect trainee retention, exemplified in our preliminary framework, and confirmed by research by Lathuka (2011).

AAK explains that after the Trainee Program is finished, the trainees are invited to a lunch with the CEO Arne, to evaluate the program and suggest possible improvement. However, the company does not examine any explicit measurement, such as key performance indicator (KPI), of their acquisition and development of young talents, which contrast the theory and our preliminary framework that suggests companies to continuously evaluate and follow up Talent Management processes. Furthermore, the HR representative argues that an important indication of the program's success is that only two trainees out of sixteen have left the company since the start of the program. AAK is aware that the reason behind the trainees' decision to leave, was due to poor management, thus they have now acted upon this by adding mentorship into their Talent Management process. This is also confirmed by Stahl et al. (2012) and Lathuka (2011), who both argue that an important part of the retention of talents are to evaluate the motives behind the decision to leave and to act upon that.

## 4.7 AAK TALENT APPROACH

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### **TRAINEE PROGRAM; AN EXCLUSIVE APPROACH OF UNDERSTANDING A YOUNG TALENT WITHIN AAK**

To conclude, the empirical discussion indicates that AAK's way of understanding and managing a talent is through an exclusive approach (Meyers and Woerkom, 2014). This is exemplified by the establishment of their Trainee Program, which contains a strict selection criteria, meaning that the program is not for everyone, as one of the HR representatives explains;

*"So we are, I don't like the word elite, but we are very conscious about who we let enter the trainee program".*

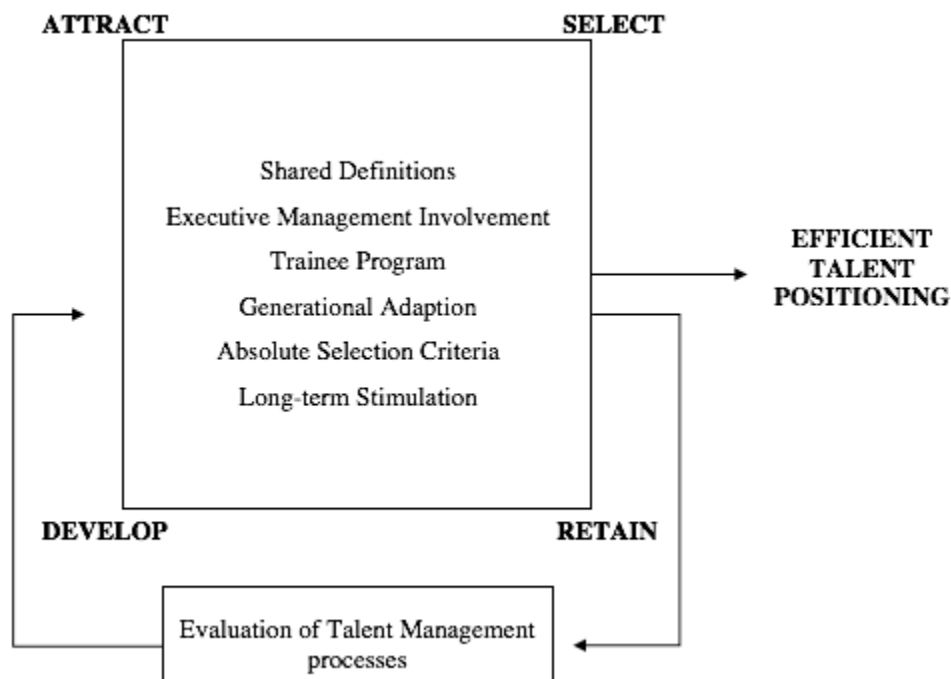
HR representative

Furthermore, the HR representative explains that it is possible that an internal applicant can be unsuccessful in the recruitment of their Trainee Program. Thus, only individuals with the right potential are intended to be attracted, selected, developed and retained.

#### 4.8 FINAL FRAMEWORK; KEY SUCCESS FACTORS BEHIND ACQUIRING AND DEVELOPING YOUNG TALENTS

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In the following chapter the final framework of the study is presented, which describes the key success factors behind the acquisition and development of young talents. The framework provides valuable insights of what dimensions of Talent Management affect efficient talent positioning, thus considered to be the key success factors behind the process of acquiring and developing young talents. Hence, the final framework answers the purpose of the research.



*Figure 2. Final Framework; Key success factors behind acquiring and developing young talents*



The final framework illustrates the four distinctive processes of acquiring and developing young talents; attract, select, develop and retain. Furthermore, the final framework includes six key success factors that generate efficient talent positioning. These success factors in turn, can be seen as evolving and thus need to be continuously evaluated to ensure efficient talent positioning.

*Shared Definitions.* It is crucial to set clear definitions of all key components within a company's Talent Management processes, e.g. Talent, Succession planning, and Talent Management, which are shared by the entire organization. This is in order to be successful at Talent Management and thus talent positioning.

*Executive Management Involvement.* It is important that the executive managers, including the CEO, is a part of the acquisition and development of young talents. Partly because the Talent Management can be seen as an important part of an organization's strategic goal, and furthermore it makes their involvement make the talents feel special and thus increase their motivation.

*Trainee Program.* Is perceived as an exclusive way of developing young talents in an accelerated pace, as the program involves activities that is considered to be crucial for successful Talent Management and thus enables efficient talent positioning. Furthermore, if the program is running annually, it reduces the risk of bad timing within talent positioning. Lastly, "Trainee Program" as a name itself is crucial, as it is has a wide recognition among today's young talents and therefore can increase the opportunity to attract the right talents.

*Generational Adaptation.* Accelerated development opportunities and the right support, such as mentorship, appear to be typical success factors to attract, develop and retain the millennial generation, and must therefore be kept under review if the next generation requires something else.

*Absolute Selection Criteria.* Absolute selection criteria should include the organization's talent definition, and furthermore an extensive recruitment process to reduce biases and thus increase the right fit between the talent, the organization and the position.

*Long-term Stimulation.* To achieve efficient talent positioning, it is important that the young recruited talent is stimulated in the long-term as well, especially after a Trainee Program. Expectation Management, talent motivation, membership, and continued development and mentorship is important for the retention of the talent.

*Evaluation of Talent Management processes.* To make improvements of the acquisition and development of young talents, continuous evaluation is of importance. In the final framework, it is considered as an ongoing process that can be used to improve the outcome of the other key success factors.

## **CONCLUSION; FINAL FRAMEWORK**

The final framework has been modified from thirteen success factors in the preliminary one, to include six success factors. In our empirical discussion, we found that to have an *Effective Employer Branding Strategy*, seems to be less important, than previous research suggested. Thus, this success factor has been removed from our final framework. *Efficient Talent Positioning* has also been re-conceptualized, instead of being considered as a success factor, it is by this study concluded to be the outcome of the entire process of acquisition and development of young talents. Furthermore, the success factor *Shared Definition of Talent* in the preliminary framework, has been modified to be renamed *Shared Definitions*. The reason for this is that we found that it was crucial to set a clear definition of all key components within a company's Talent Management processes.

In the final framework, *Selection Criteria* and *Extensive Recruitment Process* have been merged into *Absolute Selection Criteria*, as it is highly important to select the right person to the right place, and the selection criteria should furthermore be aligned with the organization's definition of a talent. In order to ensure that the talent fulfill the criteria, an extensive recruitment process is required, thus these success factors have been merged into one. Furthermore, the success factor *Generational Adaptation* still exists, but it has been merged with *Extensive Training and Education* and *Mentoring*, because we discovered a connection between the current generation of talents, Millennials, and their extensive need for support to accelerate their development. Thus, it is important that the organization is aware of knowing what characterizes the current generation

in order to fulfill the talents' needs. What we also found is that *Talent Motivation, Expectation Management* and *Membership*, are aligned with each other as they are all important factors to retain the talent in the organization. Thus, we have composed them into a generic term, called *Long-term stimulation*.

Previous research argued that to evaluate the acquisition and development of young talents is of importance in order to make improvements. We still consider evaluation to be important. However, our study indicated that the evaluation process is an ongoing process that can be used to improve the outcome of the other key success factors. Moreover, we found that a Trainee Program, both in its function and the name in itself, contributes with value to an organization's Talent Management. Thus, *Trainee Program* constitutes as a new success factor that has been added to the final framework.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

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*The following chapter presents the insights and conclusions of the study. Furthermore, suggestions for continued research are presented as we have identified a number of areas, or additional perspectives that may be relevant to investigate further.*

### 5.1 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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The purpose of the study was to explore and gain an increased understanding of the key success factors behind young talent acquisition and development in terms of value creation in organizations. The intention was to contribute to the research field of Strategy - and Human Resource literature. Initially, a preliminary theoretical framework was developed, based on findings from existing literature, which gave us an indication of what could be a potential answer to the research question. The study has been conducted through a single case study, which provided us with in-depth findings about the process of acquiring and developing young talents in a global company. We further conducted our analysis of the empirical data by using pattern

matching which enabled us to negate, acknowledge and develop the preliminary framework. Through our interpretive approach, we have added new insights to the research field as well as challenging the existing ones that are illustrated in the preliminary framework. Thus, we enabled ourselves to discover new relationships between existing theory and empirical data, which resulted in the final framework. This further implies that our final framework contributes to a richer understanding of acquisition and development of young talents that creates value in an organization.

The final framework provides a holistic, substantial and relevant illustration of the key success factors behind the acquisition and development of young talents, and thus answers the purpose of the study. The final framework consists of the same four distinctive processes as were presented in the preliminary framework; attract, select, develop, and retain, and these processes are of high importance for companies to consider in their Talent Management process. These processes are well-established dimensions of Talent Management proven by previous researches for decades. Thus, we consider them as crucial components to include, increasing the validity of the final framework. The empirical discussion is based on these four analytical levels, however, within the four processes, six key success factors have been found. Moreover, the key success factors are needed for the organization to sustain efficient talent positioning and thus create value, through a continuous evaluation of the success factors.

The final framework illustrates a new meaning of efficient talent positioning, compared to the preliminary framework. Instead of being seen as indifferent with the other key success factors behind the acquisition and development of young talents, efficient talent positioning should rather be seen as the outcome of them, which is illustrated in the final framework. The attraction process illustrates that an effective Employer Branding strategy, i.e. attracting a large number of applications, seems to be less important in acquisition and development of talents than expected from previous research. What this study has found, in contrary to previous research, is that a bigger group of attracted applicants does not necessarily equal better chances of a better selection group. Instead, the importance lies with having a strategy that enables to only attract the right ones, thus, decrease the gap between the attraction and selection processes. Furthermore, it is important to have a clear definition throughout the organization of the key components of Talent

Management, in order to define the target group through absolute selection criteria, and furthermore communicate a clear message that the target group finds attractive. The selection process is recognized by an extensive recruitment process, to reach a fit between the talent, the organization, and the position. In addition to previous findings about executive involvement in the process of acquiring and developing talents, a new dimension was found. In this study, continuous interaction between the Executive Manager and the talent, turned out to increase the trainee motivation. Furthermore, the development process illustrated that continuous training is important and to offer the right support, such as mentorship plays a key role. However, it is also equally important to keep the talent motivated and fulfill the talents expectations. This is further linked to the retention of talent, where long-term stimulation is important to sustain the talent in the organization. Overall, generational adaptation turned out to permeate the entire process of acquiring and developing young talents, in particular the talents need for development and support. Lastly, what this study also found, is that a Trainee Program contains many key activities within Talent Management, and thus enables efficient talent positioning, and is perceived as an exclusive way to accelerate the development of young talents. But above all, the study showed that the name itself, Trainee Program, creates a value when associated with rapid development and exclusivity, thus attracting young talents today, namely Millennials. Hence, Trainee Program is considered to be a key success factor behind the acquisition and development of young talents. Thus, this study has contributed with new insights that previous studies did not consider in relation to Trainee Programs.

## 5.2 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

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To strengthen the validity of this study, it was furthermore important to construct a final framework that included attributes such as; relevance, relative explanatory power and integration between theory and empirical findings. This was due to the fact that these attributes, according to Glaser (1978), can be used to determine the validity of the framework. The relevance of the study is high, as the final framework can provide a holistic perspective on the process of successfully developing and acquiring young talents in an organization. According to our extensive background check, it is of high strategic importance in today's organizations to possess the right human resources, in order to improve performance and create value. Thus, this study is of high

relevance for both existing and future organizations. The framework can assist managers in decision making and to set up strategies in their Talent Management processes, and thus contribute with valuable insight to reach efficient talent positioning. Previous studies have found that it is necessary to attract the right human resources to be able to implement given strategies and reach competitive advantage. However, very few studies composing Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management, Employer Branding and Trainee Program, have been found that aim to understand the key success factors behind the process of successful Human Resource practices when it comes to young talent acquisition and development. Thus, this study has an explanatory approach, as it aims to discover new findings belonging to a relatively uncharted field. In addition to previous research, this study identifies that the process of attracting, selecting, developing, and retain talents, conducts in efficient talent positioning, given that a company consider success factors such as shared definitions, absolute selection criteria, executive management involvement, Trainee Program and long-term stimulation. Moreover, the success factors have to be continuously evaluated as a part of ensuring a successful Talent Management process. This is a new way of looking at the process of successful acquisition and development of young talents, thereby, we argue that the framework possesses a high explanatory power, and reduces gaps in existing human resource - and strategy literature. Moreover, this study consists of an extensive integration of theory and empirical findings, which have resulted in a comprehensive perspective that explains the factors behind the successful acquisition and development of young talents, which in turn contributes to validity of the study.

### 5.3 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

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The validity of our study could potentially be limited by the structure of Trainee Programs. The Trainee Program in AAK does not include any rotation, as many other Trainee Programs do, and thus, the certain structure of this program in particular, limits our research. Moreover, generational adaptation is limited by the fact that no generation shift has yet occurred, thus it is difficult to determine the explicit effects generations have on the process of developing and acquiring young talents. This study has also been limited by the time aspect, in the sense that the program is relatively new, as it was implemented in 2010. Thus, we were not able to conduct a longitudinal study of a long period of time to further investigate the value created, which limited our research. Furthermore, another important aspect to point out is periodic trends in the market.

What this study found, is that Trainee Program is one key success factor behind acquiring and developing young talents, and can be seen as an alternative recruitment trend that has grown as the number of Millennials have increased in the labor market. Thus, it may be thought that Trainee Programs may be challenged in the future or, alternatively, get a new meaning in line with the new generational change in the labor market.

As the collected empirical data of this study are derived from a company that operates globally, the findings about acquisition and development of young talents can be useful in an international context. Moreover, we are convinced that the findings in the final framework represent reality, as the collected data, origin from a listed company, with many stakeholders to consider and thus are likely to provide us with trustworthy and transparent information about the process of acquiring and developing young talents. Moreover, the information was derived from in-depth interviews with experts within the field, and thus the findings represent a robust and actual description of reality.

#### 5.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

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We are currently finding ourselves in the knowledge economy, where the war for talents in today's organizations seems to grow to set up effective strategies to attract, select, develop and retain talents is more important than ever. Hence, the successful acquisition and development of young talents is of high relevance for further research. This study has been conducted through a case study based on a company that conducts their business within the food industry and furthermore quite niche. Thus, to explore the subject in other contextual conditions would be of interest for further research. Furthermore, it would be of interest for future research to conduct a multiple case study, and thus make use of our findings and compare them with companies from other industries or countries, to find out whether the process of successfully developing and acquiring young talents differs. Another suggestion for further research would be to adopt a more in-depth examination of certain aspects of the processes of acquiring and developing young talents. As our study is based on qualitative data, future research could make use of that, but complement with quantitative data about talent performance to measure the value created in order to provide new insights.

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## 7.0 APPENDIX

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### Appendix 1

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE: TRAINEE

##### 1. General Questions

- Background: Name, Age, Nationality, Education
- What is your role at AAK?
- How long have you been working for AAK?
- What does your team look like?

##### 2. Trainee Program

- When you applied for a job after graduation, what did you consider important?
- Why did you apply for a trainee program?
- How do you define a talent?
- How do you perceive that AAK define a talent?
- How would you describe your interest in leadership?

##### 3. Attract

- How did you find AAK?
- Why did you apply to AAK
  - What did you find attractive?
- Why did you apply to the AAK trainee program in particular?
- What did you find attractive with the program?
- How do you perceive AAK as an employer?
- How do you perceive that AAK works with Employer Branding?

##### 4. Select

- Could you describe the recruitment process for AAK's Trainee Program, and your feelings around it?
- Why do you think that you were selected for this program?

##### 5. Develop

- What type of career development do you consider to be important for you?
- Describe how the development/training procedure was structured within your trainee program.
- Give example of how you have developed your skills through the program?
- What skills have you developed through the program?
- How did you conceive feedback during the program?
  - Express your feelings around it.
- Have the development opportunities within the program matched your expectations you had when you accepted the program? How/ Why?
- If you could choose, is it any other training/ development you would like to add, what and why?
- To what extent have you been responsible to drive your own development within the program?

- What network opportunities do you perceive that you have within the program?

## **6. Retain**

- To what extent were the opportunities after the trainee program communicated before accepting the offer?
- Before the start of the program, in what role did you see yourself after the trainee program?
- How has your future opportunities after finishing the program been communicated by AAK?

## Appendix 2

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: FORMER TRAINEE**

#### **1. General Questions**

- Background: Name, Age, Nationality, Education.
- What is your role at AAK?
- How long have you been working for AAK?
- What does your team look like?

#### **2. Trainee Program**

- When you applied for a job after graduation, what did you consider important?
- Why did you apply for a trainee program?
- How do you define a talent?
- How do you perceive that AAK define a talent?
- How would you describe your interest in leadership?

#### **3. Attract**

- How did you find AAK?
- Why did you apply to AAK
  - What did you find attractive?
- Why did you apply to the AAK trainee program in particular?
- What did you find attractive with the program?
- How do you perceive AAK as an employer?
- How do you perceive that AAK works with Employer Branding?

#### **4. Select**

- Could you describe the recruitment process for AAK Trainee Program, and your feelings around it?
- Why do you think that you were selected for this program?

#### **5. Develop**

- What type of career development do you consider to be important for you?
- Describe how the development/training procedure was structured within your trainee program.
- Give example of how you have developed your skills through the program?
- What skills have you developed through the program?
- How did you conceive feedback during the program?
  - Express your feelings around it.



- Have the development opportunities within the program matched your expectations you had when you accepted the program? How/ Why?
- If you could choose, is it any other training/ development you would like to add, what and why?
- To what extent have you been responsible to drive your own development within the program?
- What network opportunities do you perceive that you have within the program?

#### **6. Retain**

- To what extent were the opportunities after the trainee program communicated before accepting the offer?
- Before the start of the program, in what role did you see yourself after the trainee program?
- How has your future opportunities after finishing the program been communicated by AAK?
- Why did you decide to stay at AAK after finishing the program?
- Did you switch department after finishing the program? Why?
- Have your perception of AAK as an employer changed, during the program? (give examples).

## Appendix 3

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: HR REPRESENTATIVE**

#### **1. General Questions**

- Background: Name, Age, Nationality, Education.
- What is your role at AAK?
- How long have you been working for AAK?
- What does your team look like?

#### **2. Strategic Human Resource Management**

- What role does Human Resource have in AAK?
  - How does it affect org. performance?
  - Do you perceive that your HR strategies are linked to overall organizational goals?

#### **3. Trainee Program**

- How do you perceive AAK as an employer?
- Who initiated, and for how long has AAK Trainee program been running?
- Why does AAK have a trainee program?
- Why does AAK have the current structure of the program?
  - Has the program's structure and content change during time? How and why?

#### **4. Attract**

- How does AAK define a talent?
- What is the target group for the trainee program? (Country, Education, Age, Competencies)
- How do you attract the target group?
- How do you work with employer branding?
  - Internally?

- Externally?

### **5. Select**

- Could you describe the recruitment process for AAK Trainee program and why you have constructed it in that way?
- How does AAK approach selection criteria?
- How important is it that a candidate's values are in line with AAK's?
  - How does AAK evaluate that?
- Does AAK offer same trainee positions every year, or do these change, why?

### **6. Develop**

- How much do you invest in development and training for the trainees during the program?
  - Why this certain types of training?
- How do you work with feedback, why have you chosen to include mentorship in the trainee program?
- To what extent is the trainee responsible to drive their own development within the program?
  - How does AAK ensure this?
- Can you explain the reason behind letting the trainees be a part of the real projects and ability to make an impact from day one?
  - To what extent do you feel that you can delegate responsibility to the trainees?
- How do you perceive the trainees network opportunities within the program?

### **7. Retain**

- How does the program end?
- Do you have any kind of alumni network for former trainees? Why?
- How do you evaluate the program?
  - Is there any room for improvement that you are aware of?
- How do you measure a trainee's performance?
- How do you and make sure that you fulfill the trainee expectations?
- To what extent are the opportunities offered to the trainee after the program, communicated?
- Why do you think former trainees have left AAK?

## **Appendix 4**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: EXECUTIVE MANAGER**

#### **1. General Questions**

- Background: Name, Age, Nationality, Education.
- What is your role at AAK?

- How long have you been working for AAK?
- What does your team look like?

## **2. Trainee Program**

- How do you perceive AAK as an employer?
- Why does AAK have a trainee program?
- What do you perceive are the benefits of working with a trainee?
- What is your general impression of the trainees you have met within AAK?

## **3. Attract**

- How do you perceive that AAK define a talent?
- What is the target group for the trainee program? (Country, Education, Age, Competencies)
- How do you perceive that AAK works with Employer Branding?

## **4. Select**

- Have you been involved in the recruitment process of the Trainee Program? Describe your role in the process.
- Do you perceive that AAK approaches selection criteria when it comes to the selection process of trainees?
- How important do you believe it is that a candidate's values are in line with AAK's?
  - How does AAK evaluate that?

## **5. Develop**

- To what extent are you involved within the development of the Trainee Program?
- How does AAK work with feedback and mentorship in the Trainee Program?
- To what extent is the trainee responsible to drive their own development within the program?
  - How does AAK you ensure this?
- To what extent do you feel that you can delegate responsibility to the trainees?

## **6. Retain**

- How does AAK measure a trainee's performance?
- How does AAK make sure that the organization fulfills the trainee's expectations?
- In case of your role as a Executive Manager, do you perceive that you can affect the trainee's destiny after finishing the program?
- Why do you think former trainees have left AAK?