

# Leadership in the Internal Employer Branding Process

A hermeneutic study of leadership and internal employer branding from a managerial perspective

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## Abstract

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Summary:	<p>Today's society is in constant change and development where globalisation and technology have affected the labour market. As a result, the labour market is different and the employees set higher demands with new requirements for the employer to satisfy. It has thus become increasingly important for organisations to develop strategies to attract, develop and retain employees.</p> <p>The purpose of this qualitative study is to, based on managers' perceptions, describe and analyse the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding and how managers can contribute to the internal employer branding process. A delimitation has been made to only study managers within an organisation in the insurance industry. To collect data, eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted.</p> <p>The results indicate that leadership has an impact on the internal employer branding process, both from an organisational and individual level. The main factors within leadership that can contribute to the internal employer branding process are working with the company's values and visions, creating meaning in the employees' daily work with a focus on communication, and also development opportunities. The result of the hermeneutic analysis together with a theoretical interpretation has led to the implications that the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding is significant to market, internally and externally, an image of the workplace that actually permeates the organisation. Also, that leadership through the organisational culture and managers' activities, contributes to the internal branding process, which is important for the organisation's supply of competence.</p>
Keywords:	Leadership, Management, Internal Employer Branding, Employees, Employer Value Proposition

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# 1. Introduction

Today we live in a constantly changing environment, where increasing globalization, technological progress and a change in demographics have contributed to an increasingly changing labour market. ManpowerGroup's (2019) global study demonstrates the changing labour market as 54% of companies report a talent shortage which is almost double compared to a decade ago. Moreover, Sievertzen Ragnhild Nilsen and Olafsen (2013) demonstrate that it has become more common that people change jobs as a step forward in their careers which leads to challenges for organisations to retain employees. Another challenge is that employees today make new great demands on organisations which means that they must offer more than just a high salary to attract and retain employees (Foster Thompson and Aspinwall, 2009). Today, people put an increasing emphasis on values, development opportunities, social activity and flexibility. Accordingly, it is required that organisations are in constant readiness for development to meet the demands of society and individuals (Bhattacharya, Doty & Garavan, 2014).

Furthermore, an increase in turnover is also shown in the Swedish labour market as Swedes change employments more often (Andersson, 2018). Also, in the insurance industry, Ebert (2019) presents issues regarding competence supply. In some occupational categories, only a few people are available, which creates an unhealthy competitive situation in the job market. In the insurance industry, there are also many employees in customer service, which is a profession with a high turnover (Ismail, 2019). Thus, as for organisations in general, attracting and retaining competent employees is a challenge.

Due to the increasing global talent shortage, organisations are looking for strategies to attract and retain potential and current employees (Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpel & Lievens, 2018). In response to the question of how organisations should handle the challenges and adjustment processes of the labour market, competence supply is often raised. Competence supply includes activities to attract and recruit new employees but also to retain and develop existing employees (Kock & Ellström, 2011). Research shows that organisations' reputation, in terms of status, in relation to competing organisations affects their ability to attract and retain employees (Cable & Turban, 2003). An important tool for companies in the fight for competence is therefore to consider how they profile themselves in the labour market, which image employees and job seekers get of the company as an employer, their so-called employer brand (Backhaus, 2016). Employer branding is a strategy that aims to present a positive and attractive image of the company as an employer, to both current and potential employees. Internal employer branding is considered central for continued growth, as it is about an organisation's work with current employees to retain and develop them (Backhaus, 2016). It is important to actively work with internal employer branding to communicate and create a genuine perception of the company because if the wrong image of the organisation is communicated, and employees do not recognize the identity, the company risks losing valuable employees (Backhaus, 2016).

In today's innovative and changing organisations, leadership is an important component. Yukl (1999) describes that leadership is considered an important and crucial factor in the organisation's effectiveness. An important task for the management is to help the organisation adapt to its environment and create the resources required to survive. Leadership is thus a process of mutual influence between leaders and employees, where

the goal for the leader is to support the employee and develop his or her competence and the organisation as a whole. Leadership has a function to drive the business, the individuals and the group forward, which is essential for an organisation's growth (Yukl, 1999). Today it is important that a leader can attract, create development and commitment among the foremost and competent employees (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng, 2010; Yukl, 1999).

Based on the problems of the labour market, it is interesting to explore leadership and internal employer branding in organisations.

### ***1.1. Research Overview***

The employer branding strategy is used today within organisations' competence supply work (Cascio & Graham 2016; Sivertzen et al., 2013). The concept of employer branding was originally introduced as follows: *“the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”* (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p.187) and thereafter several definitions have been discussed by various researchers and within different orientations. It is a strategy that aims to increase the organisation's attractiveness in order to continuously meet future competence needs. It is also about internal work with activities to make current employees experience the organisation as a good employer and make them believe in its values and objectives. Ambler and Barrow (1996) consider that organisations which use developed models for employer branding, retain their most competent employees longer than other organisations and that they have the best opportunity to attract the most qualified candidates. The strategy is used by many companies today as there is a perception that competent and motivated employees are important for success in the competitive labour market (Backhaus, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Cascio & Graham, 2016; Erwing, Leyland, De Busy & Berthon, 2002). This has become the key to success in many organisations, therefore it is of great importance to design an employer branding that differs from others (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Lievens, Van Hove and Anseel (2007) describe that branding for employers is an under-explored subject. Thus, it is difficult to present an agreed definition based on all researchers. However, something that is recurring in research is that researchers divide employer branding internally and externally. Internal employer branding is focused on marketing to current employees and how they can be retained. This because the organisation's employees must understand and be committed to the organisation's goals and values. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), internal employer branding also is about the work that the organisation does to develop the existing competence within the organisation. External employer branding focuses mainly on potential employees or job seekers and can be linked to attracting and recruiting staff. It also concerns the impact on the public and other brands to create a clear picture of what identifies the company, makes it desirable as an employer and different from other organisations (Backhaus, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Gilani & Jamshed, 2016; Miles & Mangold, 2004; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016; Theurer et al., 2018). The work with employer branding is thus mainly to use a tool to attract and retain talents. Also, about utilizing these talents and thereby create competitive advantages by increasing the company's profitability, brand awareness, customer satisfaction and employee performance and commitment (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Moreover, employer branding is defined by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) as a three-step process, where both internal and external branding occurs. The



first step means that the organisation should develop and create a brand that represents the organisation as an employer. The second step include marketing the brand to external parties, potential employees and other stakeholders. Finally, the last step involves marketing the employer brand internally and implementing the work in the organisation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). It is thus the last step of the process, the internal employer branding process, which will be focused on in this study.

Furthermore, there are existing research concerning the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding, even if it is limited. Barrow and Mosley (2005) point out the importance of leadership in the contribution of employer branding. They believe that leadership is an important part of the communication work to strengthen credibility and to spread the corporate “spirit” further. How transformational leadership affects employee engagement and employer branding occurs in previous empirical research (Ghafoor, Qureshi, Khan & Hijazi, 2011; Zeeshan, Qureshi, Bashir & Ahmed, 2020). The study of Zeeshan et al. (2020) indicates that employer branding and transformational leadership are united, as the goal of transformational leadership is, among other things, to retain loyal employees and to create a good reputation for the organisation, similar to employer branding which aims to retain and attract competence. Zeeshan et al. (2020) study emphasizes that organisations should focus on their leadership and their internal employer branding to retain and attract competence and to be able to create a long-term good reputation. Similar to this, Ghafoor et al. (2011) study indicates a significant relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement practices and employee performance. Moreover, Kashyap and Rangnekar's (2016) study shows that the role of servant leadership helps in building and influencing a positive employer brand image. Thus, there is previous research which indicates that leadership has a significant responsibility in the internal employer branding. However, there is less empirical research that focuses on the internal context and current employees than on the recruitment context and potential employees (Theurer et al., 2018).

The past two decades, interest in employer branding within research has increased (Theurer et al., 2018). Employer branding is interdisciplinary and Theurer et al. (2018) present three main perspectives that have been presented in previous literature. A *job market perspective* indicates that employer branding has been suggested to be particularly useful in highly competitive job markets (e.g. Erwing et al., 2002). From a *functional organisational perspective*, employer branding has shown to be a design for career management and a communication tool for company values, for example regarding sustainable development and corporate social responsibility strategy (e.g. Hughes & Rog, 2008). From an *HR cycle perspective*, the employer branding studies have been focused on both potential employees for recruitment and current employees for retention and productivity (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In this research, I mainly use the HR cycle perspective in the literature.

Furthermore, there are previous empirical studies on employer branding where the results show benefits for organisations working with employer branding (e.g. Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Berthon Erwing & Hah 2005; Biswas & Suar, 2016; Gilani & Jamshed, 2016; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). The majority of these studies are qualitative based on interviews or focus groups, but for instance, Biswas and Suar (2016) and Sivertzen et al. (2013) studies are quantitative, conducted through questionnaires. The studies are conducted in different contexts and countries and have different orientations and perspectives applied to the concept. However, the empirical literature

has placed an emphasis mainly on the recruitment context (Theurer et al., 2018). This research will instead be focused on current employees for retention and productivity. Furthermore, it will contribute with research regarding the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding. Since internal employer branding is a strategy that is based on the value of the human resources in an organisation, there is a pedagogical relevance to investigate this area.

## ***1.2. Purpose and Research Questions***

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyse the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding and how managers can contribute to the internal employer branding process. This will be done by interpreting managers' perceptions and experiences.

### ***Research Questions:***

- What significance does the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding have for the organisation?
- According to the managers, what are the main activities contributing to the internal employer branding process?
- What role does organisational culture have in the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding?

## ***1.3. Delimitations***

Many factors influence when it comes to attracting, developing and retaining employees with the help of employer branding. Hence, I have chosen to focus on internal employer branding and its relation to leadership. The focus is thus on how current employees can be developed and retained. External employer branding and how to attract employees will also be studied, but only as a side aspect. Furthermore, the literature in this study is delimited to internal employer branding from an HR cycle perspective. The study's third research question emerged after processing the results, as organisational culture in relation to leadership and internal employer branding was an emphasized subject.

This study is limited and based on individuals within a company in the insurance industry, aiming to explain, understand and describe the investigated phenomenon in a realistic environment and context (Backman, 2008; Bryman, 2018). The delimitation to one company was made due to an interest in gaining insight into the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding in a specific organisation.

## ***1.4. Description of the Company Studied***

The company studied was founded about 100 years ago and is one independent insurance company in a large corporate group. The group operates throughout the Nordic region and has approximately 3,400 employees. Today, the company has about 500 employees in Sweden, with the head office in Stockholm. They also have offices in other cities, for example, Gothenburg and Malmö. For almost two decades, the company has gradually created a strong position in the industry. The company offers non-life insurance to private customers and corporate insurance to corporate customers. The compa-

ny is divided into five business areas with associated products and brands; Private market, Business & Industry, Affinity, Guarantee and Niches. In the direct descending line from the business area managers, there are several group managers, who lead and delegate the work to their respective workgroups. In this survey, group managers within one business area are studied, which includes customer service, injuries settlement and a support unit. For a further description of the business area, see Appendix 1.

The corporate group also has a Talent Acquisition team divided within the various Nordic countries. Their work includes working strategically with employer branding. The manager of the corporate group team and one Talent Acquisition partner in Sweden are studied in this survey. The TA-employee works with recruitment at a strategic and operational level and have a close collaboration with the group managers. The TA-manager works with recruitment and employer branding at a strategic level and has employee responsibility for the TA-team.

## **2. Methodology**

This chapter explains the methodological approach of the study, with the aim of bringing transparency to the chosen research design and how implications are drawn. Initially a description of the research approach and philosophical groundings is presented. Further, I introduce and motivate the research design and process. This includes a description of the empirical data collection and analysis. Lastly, an exploration of the general quality and ethical considerations of the process is presented.

### **2.1. Research Approach**

Since the purpose of the study is to describe and analyse managers' perceptions and experiences of leadership and internal employer branding and how they can contribute to the internal employer branding process, the individual's reality is interpreted. A hermeneutic perspective has been chosen as it contributes to an understanding of human socially constructed reality, through recognition and interpretation by written and spoken language (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). The ontological point is idealistic with an emphasis on interpretations and social constructions. The epistemological position is empirical because knowledge about the subjective reality and its meaning is reached through interpretations of human language and action (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015).

The work with the collected material is implemented by thematization and by finding one common thread that unites these themes. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2008) explain that an important part of the hermeneutic interpretation is to understand the part and the whole of what is being studied. This means that the researcher begins to deepen into one part and then comprehend the part in connection with the whole, which leads to new insights about the studied part. Furthermore, by varying between the part and the whole, a deep understanding of both can be created (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). In this study, the managers can be considered as part and the organisation's environment can be considered as a whole. By varying between these, the managers' perceptions and experience of leadership and internal employer branding can be understood.

#### **2.1.1. Abductive Approach**

The hermeneutic research approach has clear features of abduction as it implies that the researcher varies between the part and the whole and between different points of view in the interpretation (Patel & Davidsson, 2011; Pernecky, 2016). In an inductive approach, the research is based on empiricism with the aim of generating a theory, while a deductive approach entails the formulation of a hypothesis which is then tested empirically (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). This study has an abductive approach, which is described as a combination of induction and deduction. The starting point is empirical data, at the same time as theoretical preconceptions is allowed in the work process (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). Accordingly, an abductive approach is considered to be the most reliable in this study, as it can lead to a deeper understanding by applying different approaches to the investigated phenomenon and not being limited to only deduction or induction. The advantage of an abductive method approach is that it prevents the researcher from being locked into a strict way of working (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The study started inductively through my pre-understanding of the subject as the interview

guides were created based on preconceptions. Furthermore, the study continued deductively by searching for previous research and theories to create a picture of the study's phenomenon of leadership and internal employer branding. The following step of the study included gathering the managers' perceptions and experiences, to then go back and connect this to how it is described in theory, through an inductive approach. The theoretical framework was then developed and thus became more focused and adapted based on empirical data. Furthermore, this was problematized by reconnecting to the empirics, which again could be supported in theory. In this way, there is shifting between being inductive and deductive, that is, abductive.

### **2.1.2. Pre-understanding**

Theoretical preconceptions are an important component in both abductive and hermeneutic processing, to discover patterns and themes in the analysis of empiricism (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). This hermeneutic process is described as an aletic circle where understanding emerges by combining the researcher's pre-understanding with new knowledge that generates new interpretive approaches which lead to new pre-understanding (Pernecky, 2016; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). I am considered to have a theoretical pre-understanding about leadership and internal employer branding because of the different courses in my education that include these topics. Also, I have experience of recruitment and Talent Acquisition, which contributes to a general practical pre-understanding. Furthermore, I have worked in the organisation that the study is based on which contributes to a pre-understanding of its culture and leadership. This experience and pre-understanding have aroused an interest in the subject of the study. However, I have no previous knowledge of the studied organisation's work with internal employer branding, nor any relation to the managers studied. Pre-understanding can be both an advantage and a disadvantage because it can lead to an increased observance of certain phenomena, but it can also lead to a limited interpretation work (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). In order not to limit myself, I strived to have a neutral attitude without valuation statements during the interviews and analysis. Throughout the work process, there has been a consciousness by constantly reflecting on the possible impact of this background knowledge. This is further explained in section 2.2.4. and 2.2.5. The interpretation process has been benefited by the broad pre-understanding of the research field and practical experience, as it created good conditions for reaching a deep understanding.

## **2.2. *Research Design and Process***

The choice of a qualitative method has been made as the aim is to create a depth knowledge of the phenomenon, studied through individuals' perceptions and experiences of leadership and internal employer branding. This can be achieved through qualitative research as it is about subjective perceptions and experiences. Qualitative research focuses on describing how social situations are made and on conscious and unconscious aspects of social phenomena (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015; Mason, 2018).

### **2.2.1. The Sample**

Initially, the first step in the selection process was to establish the theoretical population, which constitutes the entire group of units a researcher is interested in to investigate (Jacobsen, 2002). Based on the research problem, the population includes people who are categorized into the group of managers within an organisation working with employer branding. Since it is not possible to examine this entire group, managers within one company that fulfils the criteria based on the theoretical population were chosen in the second step. The company was chosen through a contact person whom himself works as a Talent Acquisition Partner at the company. Furthermore, the selection group was limited in the third step to consist of group managers in one of the company's offices. Based on the purpose of the study, it was decided in the fourth step that nine managers satiated the need to get a solid insight of the managers' experiences and perceptions and thus fulfil the purpose of the study. It is in line with the number considered as usual in qualitative interview studies (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). There is no need of including more interviewees as it could be repetitive and therefore ineffective (Bryman, 2018).

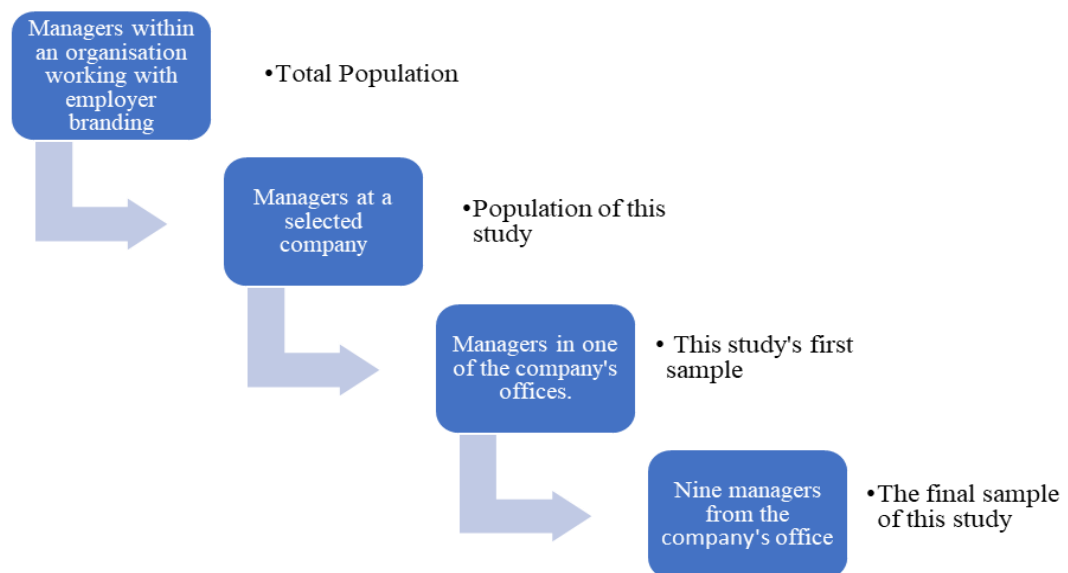


Figure 1: Flow chart of the study's selection process.

The interviewees were selected by purposive sampling which Bryman (2018) describes means that certain people are chosen to participate in a study for certain reasons. The purposive samples used in this study are a criteria-controlled sample and a sample with as much variation as possible (Bryman, 2018). This means that the selected individuals in this study meet the criteria that they work in a managerial role today, that they have worked in the role for at least one year and that the role includes an employee responsibility. Also, a selection to ensure maximum variation in terms of dimensions of interest, thus age, gender and managers within different work areas. Since it is a matter of non-probability sampling, it is not possible to generalize to a population, based on a purposive sample (Bryman, 2018). Thus, the data from the interviews cannot be said to be representative. However, it can be used to collect data from a variation of people (Weiss, 1998). This sample is chosen because of a variety of participants is relevant, in order to create as broad and diverse study as possible to develop a deeper dimension to the research.

Two employees within the HR-area who work with employer branding was also selected. In this company, the Talent Acquisition department has a central role in the management of various strategic employer branding processes and therefore the Talent Acquisition Manager, as well as one Talent Acquisition Partner, were chosen. These interviewees are used for validation and to get an overall picture of the work with employer branding. These people were selected based on availability through the contact person and with a desire to interview the TA- manager and one TA-partner.

### **2.2.2. Data Collection**

This research data collection method consists of qualitative, semi-structured interviews as the goal of this interview form is to interpret the meaning of the interviewees' descriptions of his or her reality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The interviews were conducted digitally because working from home is recommended due to the current Covid-19 pandemic (cf: Krisinformation, 2021). Bryman (2018) believes that an interview that takes place via video dialogue can be compared to a face-to-face interview as both parties can see each other. Interviews held digitally become more flexible for both parties and it can be as easy to create trusting relationships as in on-site interviews. Furthermore, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) point out the importance of interviewees being in a safe environment during the interview situation. Since the interviews took place in their home, it may have promoted a favourable and comfortable environment for the interviewees. Another advantage of digital interviews can be that participants may agree to participate in the interview thanks to the convenience, which was manifested in this study, as all respondents agreed to participate. A disadvantage can be risks of technical difficulties, however, this was not the case during these interviews as the technique and sound worked perfectly. Moreover, an interview is a social meeting which means that pauses, body language and tone of voice can affect the situation and the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Thus, the digital interviews may have been limited as it was not possible to regard the interviewee's body language in the same way, which can affect the interpretations of their answers. These interpretations might have been different if the interview were conducted in a real environment since for example other follow-up questions or perceptions could have appeared. Even if it might have been differences, this is not perceived to have affected the interviews to a greater extent.

Before the interviews, an information letter (Appendix 2) concerning the purpose of the study, was e-mailed to all participants. All interviews were collected electronically after the participants approval. This to promote a dynamic flow in the interviews and also to have the opportunity to transcribe the material verbatimly, to carry out the analysis work thoroughly and reliably (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). Initially, the interviews started professionally by describing the purpose of the study and the interview. The beginning of an interview acts as a warm-up for both parties, which is necessary to create a context of openness in the situation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014). Furthermore, based on Kvale and Brinkmann's (2014) description, the interviewees' voluntariness and confidentiality were emphasized, followed by a presentation of the time frame for the interview, which was amounted to one hour, as it is within the time span for what is common in qualitative interviews (Bryman, 2018). It was an appropriate time frame for gaining depth in the interview without it being tiring. The introduction was completed with the interviewee having the opportunity to ask questions before the interview was started.

The study's semi-structured interviews were flexible yet prepared with a guide including questions formulated by themes and theoretical concepts. One interview guide was used for the managers, which contains more open questions regarding the theoretical concepts (Appendix 3 and 5). A different interview guide was used for the TA- employees as they have a greater understanding of the theoretical concepts and the strategic processes of the company (Appendix 4 and 6). All interviews except one were held in Swedish since it is the participants' mother tongue. One interview was thus conducted in English, not to let the language barrier limit the conversation. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview is a mix of structured questions which are used to obtain factual information, and unstructured questions to explore individuals' experiences on a deeper level (Halperin & Heath, 2017). This allows the interviewee to talk quite freely around certain themes. In this way, the interview can become engaged and intense as the interviewee can choose to focus on the questions or areas that are most important for them (Denscombe, 2016; Fejer & Thornberg, 2017). Moreover, semi-structured interviews make it possible for the interviewer to adapt questions based on the interviewee's answers (Denscombe, 2016). Thus, on certain occasions, it was chosen not to ask certain questions as the interviewee already had integrated these questions into previous answers. On other occasions, it was chosen to ask several follow-up questions as the interviewee did not give a clear or deep answer. A natural flow of conversation was thus sought to evoke unplanned descriptions of perceptions and experiences of the interviewees, rather than speculative answers. This was enabled through the open questions including follow-up questions to deepen the interviewees' reasoning. The open questions create according to Cohen et al. (2011) a great opportunity for the interviewees to be free in their answers. At the end of the interview, the interviewees were asked if they wanted to add anything, which is important for discovering aspects that were not considered (Alvesson, 2011).

Furthermore, during the interviews, there was a pursue to actively listen, as the interviewer influences the situation and how comfortable the interviewee experiences the interview (Alvesson, 2011). This by showing a presence and an interest in the interviewees' answers by asking follow-up questions, reflecting, nodding, making "humming" sounds and other non-verbal probing. This is important because it can lead to deepening a conversation about a certain phenomenon and to get fruitful and interesting answers (Fejes and Thornberg, 2015; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014).

#### **2.2.2.1. Pilot Study**

A pilot version was implemented before the interviews were conducted. The purpose of this was to create an opportunity for reflection and learning, to make sure that the research process would work out as intended. Weiss (1998) describes that it can be beneficial to consult someone and, in this way, get a chance to inspect questions and concerns. Due to the limited time frame, a total of two respondents participated in the pilot study. The pilot interviews were performed with two managers working in an organisation similar to the one this study is conducted. It is beneficial that the participants are familiar with employer branding and leadership, meaning that they can represent the sample in a good way since they have good insights. Also, four acquaintances responded to the interview questions, to ensure that the questionnaire and the interview guide was comprehensible. Overall, by conducting a pilot study I was able to make sure that the design of the study was adequate. It helped to notice errors in the interview guide and to practise the necessary techniques required for the interviews (Bryman, 2018;



Clark & Dawson, 1999). The skills practised through the pilot study were very helpful during the actual interview situations, since well preparations lead to confidence with the interview guide. This security contributed to the courage to take valuable deviations from the interview guide to generate a wide range of the interviewees' perceptions and experiences regarding leadership and internal employer branding.

### **2.2.3. Processing and Analysis of Data**

The analysis process began with the interviews being transcribed shortly after each occasion, in order not to forget important parts. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) describe that the interpretation and analysis are affected by this as the context and coherency in the interview are forgotten the longer the time passes. Initially, the data were printed out and read several times. This large amount of data poses a challenge in creating meaning, which was handled through meaning categorization. Using this analysis method makes it possible to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data to gradually find insights (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008; Weiss, 1998). With this method, all parts can be considered in a larger whole, which is an advantage in a hermeneutic interpretation (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). Furthermore, with the hermeneutic approach, there was an opportunity to expose underlying structures, where pre-understanding also contributed to the interpretation.

To analyse the transcribing texts, coding was used in several systematic steps. While conducting coding the aim of the study was kept in mind; the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding and how managers can contribute to the internal employer branding process. Based on the purpose of the study and the research questions, the first step in the work process involved going through the entire material to pick out the most significant quotes. In each interviewee's coded quotes, some quotes were similar to each other, which by a second step in the process formed a subcategory. In the compilation of all interviewees' subcategories, patterns were then discovered as similarities were found in almost every interviewee's document. This allowed me to look for relationships between the codes that have already been identified, which then in the third step created wider categories (Denscombe, 2016).

Based on the categories created, the final step in the process involved creating relevant themes and sub-themes for the result chapter. Based on the identified sub-themes the result chapter was formed to present the three themes; *Leadership*, *Internal Employer Branding* and *Leadership and Internal Employer Branding*. The first two themes include descriptions of leadership and internal employer branding separately with sub-themes, as for instance, *To Lead with Values* and *Developing Employees*. Then, the last theme connects the first two themes, creating a whole. It is divided into two different sub-themes, aiming to get both an organisational and individual perspective of leadership and internal employer branding. Moreover, within the employer branding theme, *Attracting Employees* was initially one of the sub-themes. Because the material became too extensive, this part was excluded to only contain and *Developing Employees* and *Retaining Employees*. This part was nevertheless important to treat, to understand the whole. The most significant material in attract is instead included in other sub-themes. During the coding work process, a dialogue was thus held with the text, which means that there was an interaction between pre-understanding and understanding (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). Furthermore, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) believe that transcription can be an interpretation of the person who prints it, which affects reliability. Therefore,

the transcriptions include exactly what is said and how it is said. However, when the interviewees' quotes are printed in the essay, they are converted from the transcripts, thus from spoken language to written language. A translation from Swedish to English has also been carried out, with an effort to make as accurate a translation as possible. Interviewees' short breaks are printed by the characters "/" which Bryman (2018) describes as a small noticeable pause in the speech during a detailed printout in the conversation analysis. When parts of a quote are printed, this is indicated with "...". (Bryman, 2018). To maintain the interviewees' confidentiality, certain distinctive words have been censored in the essay. These are words that can be linked to a specific person such as names, organisations or certain specific internal proverbs.

To create the theoretical framework, the identified themes were used as a basis, to fit the empirical findings made to enable an in-depth study of the analysis. Through an abductive approach, a commute is thus carried out between both empirics and theory with a desire to create as a descriptive framework as possible regarding leadership and internal employer branding at the company. The themes that were formulated in the processing of the transcription, thus form the basis for the structure of the essay. The headings were designed to create a main thread in the theory, the results and the discussion. The different theories and parts within the headings and subheadings go into each other, which means that they also could fit under other headings. Therefore, a constant balance has been made to make what is perceived as most adapted and appropriate concerning the main thread.

#### **2.2.4. Quality Criteria**

There are quality criteria that should be reflected and discussed in a study. Guba and Lincoln's (1989) criteria; applicability, conformity, credibility and neutrality are useful in a qualitative method and therefore applied to evaluate the quality of this study. *Applicability* is described as a stamp of quality to ensure a correspondence between the reality described by the researcher and the interviewees' statements. This criterion has been considered as my perceptions of the social reality have to some extent been confirmed through a trial during the pilot interviews and in the actual study by asking follow-up questions to confirm the interviewee's responses. Moreover, the study's description of the organisation was sent to the contact person, to confirm that a representative image was captured of both the managerial role as well as the organisation. Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe that the second criterion *conformity* can be achieved through a full exposition of the context which makes it possible to assess the transferability. However, qualitative research is not concentrated on breadth but depth (Bryman, 2018). It is thus not possible to say that the result of this study is transferable to other individuals or groups. The results from the interviews are not standardized and the results cannot be quantified and retested, therefore it is not possible to draw generalizations from the interviews. The purpose of the interviews is not to develop a representative study but instead generate, as most qualitative interviews do, a contextual understanding and experiences of a specific case (Clarke & Dawson, 1999). However, I have tried to create a clear and detailed presentation of the organisation and the individuals, to provide the reader and include a comprehensive description of the context.

Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1989) explain *credibility* which affects the study's trustworthiness and how well the data lasts over time. Leadership and internal employer branding are phenomena that can change over time and therefore the result may look

otherwise at different times. However, the credibility of this essay has been strengthened through an effort to create a clear description of each part of the research process while continuously include a critical approach to the research and myself as a researcher. The last criterion, *neutrality*, concerns the certainty of whether the researcher is not coloured by the results of the study concerning the data material produced (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This criterion has been continuously taken into consideration in this study, from the very beginning to the end. To demonstrate neutrality and awareness, the work process and the processing of data has been described clearly, by printing out all work steps. Since the interviewer influences the interviewee, there is a possibility that other researchers would produce a different result. Accordingly, there are risks such as the biases and prejudices this research participants have before the interview and the risk of problems of recalling information accurately. However, since a pre-understanding in hermeneutic research can be an advantage, this criterion can be interpreted in different ways, as the pre-understanding is part of the research but at the same time can limit the focus of the work. Due to my professional background within the company, my interpretation is affected. Pre-understanding is thus important and I consider my preconception to be beneficial whilst there is an awareness of the importance of constantly withholding personal values. To strive for achieving the criterion of neutrality constantly reflexivity has permeated the work. It involves a reflection on the conditions for the activity, to investigate how personal and intellectual involvement affects the interaction with what is being researched (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). Regarding my professional experience in the company, it is considered important to, based on Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasize on reflexivity, process a critical reflection on myself as a researcher.

### **2.2.5. Ethical Considerations**

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) explain that when doing research, ethical tensions are a part of daily practice. The subject of the study is not generally considered sensitive, however, some ethical considerations can be made. Therefore, are the The Swedish Research Council's ethical criteria considered in this study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

The *information requirement* entails that all those involved in the survey must receive information about the study's purpose and implementation, which has been achieved in this study by describing the study's purpose and implementation when requesting for participation, in the information letters and at the beginning of the interviews (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The *consent requirement* implies that the participants have the right to decide if and for how long they are to participate in the interview, which has been considered through a request and by informing that the interview is voluntary and possible to cancel (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The *requirement of confidentiality* has also been considered in this study as neither the names of participants nor the organisation is presented (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The company name is not presented because there is no need for knowing which organisation the study is based on, as it is focused on the perceptions and experiences of individuals. However, there is no guarantee of participants' confidentiality as personal stories can be recognized by colleagues or acquaintances. To minimize that risk, the interviewees' names have been randomly coded to numbers between 1 and 11. Names and other information that could link the different quotes to a specific person are also hidden. This way of coding is not considered to have affected the essence of the content, as the context and the employees' perceptions and experience are yet described in detail. The *utilization requirement* is also considered, as

the information and data collected about individuals only are used for the research purpose (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). Neither the organisation as an employer nor anyone else except me was allowed to take part in the original data that can reveal the individual interviewee's statements. During the interviews, the participants received information about what their answers will be used for and about where, when and how the participants can take part in the results. However, since the participants are aware that I have worked at the company and therefore have a professional relationship with it, it can involve ethical risks. It can for example lead to participants not wanting to express dissatisfaction about their work role or the company. Therefore, I was clear with information that the study is external and part of a master's thesis, and that the data only will be used for this purpose. Weiss (1998) explains an issue of the possibility of bias that appears from the qualitative researcher and even though my background may have affected the interviews, I tried to minimize the risk of bias by keeping a professional relationship with the participants. With the initial distinct information and warm-up questions together with an attempt to show neutrality regarding the questions, I perceived that trust was created.

By using the ethical requirements, I have a reflective perspective on the ethical issues of the research, which Guillemin and Gillam (2004) describe as important for establishing a way of thinking that leads to ethical research practice.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study, which is reflected in the study's purpose and research questions. Initially, theories within leadership are presented followed by a description of internal employer branding. Then, theories that concern both leadership and internal employer branding are presented. Finally, reflective reasoning about the chosen theoretical interpretive framework is described.

#### ***3.1. Leadership***

The following section describes definitions of leadership and the relation to management and employeeship, meaning-creating leadership and leadership strategies.

##### **3.1.1. Definition of Leadership and the Relation to Management and Employeeship**

Leadership is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that benefits from a diversity of perspectives rather than just a defined framework (Andersson, Cervani, Eriksson-Zetterquist & Tengblad, 2020). Various trends have emphasized the view of leadership and the role of the leader. Today, leadership is often seen as a process of influencing a group's activities towards a certain goal (Andersson et al., 2020; Yukl, 2013). Ellström, Fogelber Eriksson, Kock and Wallo (2016), explain that this definition is interesting from a pedagogical point of view, as leadership can be seen as a process that focuses on learning, to develop employees' understanding of work tasks and the performance of the tasks. Leadership in the organisation is shown to be an important factor for employees' ability to learn and develop (Skule, 2004.). Moreover, Andersson et al. (2020) describe that there are several dimensions in leadership and recent research has questioned whether it is possible to talk about the leader as a person as there are many factors included in a practical leadership situation. Instead of the focus on identifying personal qualities that make a good leader, research points out that leadership is complex and dependent on the context. Knowledge of the preconditions for leadership is therefore important in today's knowledge society, where an organisation's success depends on the employees' competence and commitment, which means that a manager alone cannot know or solve everything (Andersson et al., 2020).

Furthermore, several researchers differentiate between leadership and management (e.g., Andersson et al., 2020; Ellström et al., 2016; Yukl, 1999). Andersson et al. (2020) explain that management is a professional and formal title with responsibility for many administrative obligations concerning finance and employee responsibilities. In addition to these formal requirements, there is also the informal part which means that the title can be followed by expectations that entail tasks for a leader. Furthermore, Andersson et al. (2020) explain that leadership and management are dependent on employees' efforts to be able to function. The concept of employeeship emphasizes that employees have their own drive and actively lead their own work and thus are not only dependent on orders from someone else. The employees' role is thus central because they often (in a Swedish context) perform the operational work independently and because the employees' and managers' efforts are mutually dependent (Andersson et al., 2020).

### **3.1.2. Meaning-Creating Leadership**

According to Yukl (1999), influencing in the direction of a specific goal is considered to be the core within the definition of leadership. Furthermore, Ellström et al. (2016) explain that meaning-creation is one of the most central parts of an organisation, where the leader has a role in creating meaning, clarity, structure and context for the employees. The job as a leader implies creating meaning among employees and to justify the activities of the organisation (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Meaning-creation is a cognitive process that helps individuals interpret events and experiences, which affects their actions. Through social interaction, meaning is created, which facilitates the relationships, work and interaction in an organisation (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). Furthermore, Ellström et al. (2016) also point out that this increases acceptance from employees, which contributes to increased respect, trust and confidence from employees. Creating participation, freedom with responsibility and being interested in the employees by motivating, supporting and engaging are then important factors (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005).

In the meaning-creating process, within the social interaction, language, is an important component because communication reflects what is considered important and through it, information is shared with others (Canning & Found, 2015). Communicating by informing and helping employees create meaning, is important and central tools that the leadership within an organisation needs. Good communication contributes to trust, which leads to openness and a positive attitude to changes among employees (Canning & Found, 2015). Similarly, Alvesson (2013) describes that good communication contributes to an open work climate and low prestige.

### **3.1.3. Leadership Styles**

There is extensive research on different leadership styles. Bass Full-Range Theory is based on two main leadership styles, transformational and transactional leadership, along with laissez-faire leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Ellström et al., 2016). However, only the transformational and transactional leadership styles are applied in this study and thus explained. Transformational leadership is characterized by activating and creating participation as well as commitment and performance among employees (Bass, 2000). From this perspective, leadership is a process in which the leader develops the employee through feelings, values, visions and create a relationship that lifts the individual's morals and motivation. This is achieved by a strong leader with high charisma, morals and visions (Andersson et al., 2020). Transactional leadership is instead characterized as a way to satisfy short-term needs among employees in the form of reward, punishment and instructions. The basic idea of the theory was that leaders should strive for a transformational leadership style to be effective as a manager and to build a learning organisation (Bass, 2000). However, Ellström et al. (2016) describe that it can be an advantage for a leader to have both transformational and transactional approaches.

Similar to transformational leadership, Alvesson (2013) describes symbolic leadership, which means that leadership is a process in which the leader exercises influence on a person's perception of reality. It can be explained by exerting influence on how perceptions of reality are built up, based on a certain worldview. According to this theory, leaders exert influence mainly through shaping or influencing people's heads, hearts and values. It contributes to the creation, reproduction and change of cultural patterns (Alvesson, 2013).

Furthermore, servant leadership is a style with a focus on serving the employees (Greenleaf, 2002). Andersson et al. (2020) explain that, from this perspective, leadership comes from the will to serve, which is what induces the leader's willingness to influence others. Influence occurs through strong empathy towards those who are affected. It serves as a philosophy about how ethical leadership to care for others can be formulated (Andersson et al., 2020). In servant leadership, leaders give priority to the people they lead. Servant leadership obtain organisational commitment and followers' trust in their leadership (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016). Leaders cannot achieve results themselves and need their employees to achieve goals and results. The servant leader focuses on the employees and follows their development. It creates a positive spiral with satisfied employees that leads to better performance which can lead to better results for the organisation (Greenleaf, 2002; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016). Transformational leadership distinguish from servant leadership, as the focus is on the leader as an exceptional individual which differs from the servant style where the focus instead is on leadership through actions (Andersson et al., 2020).

### ***3.2. Internal Employer Branding***

The following section explains internal employer branding from an HR cycle perspective, employer value proposition and job satisfaction connected to internal employer branding.

#### **3.2.1. Internal Employer Branding from an HR Cycle Perspective**

As described in section 1.1., employer branding is interdisciplinary, where this study is focused on the subject from an HR cycle perspective (Theurer et al., 2018). Also, it is focused on internal employer branding, thus, current employees for retention and productivity. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe that internal employer branding concerns the organisational work that is implemented to develop and retain existing competence within the organisation, through various activities and strategies. It also concerns marketing to current employees with the purpose to make the employees understand and commit to the organisation's goals and values (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Internal employer branding can, for example, be expressed in the form of a favourable work environment, benefits or development opportunities (Foster et al., 2010). Moreover, Ellström (1992) describes that competence development can be described as a summary term for the various actions that can be taken to influence the supply of competence in a company's internal market, it thus carries out to develop employees' competence in relation to current or future tasks. O'Donnell and Garavan (1997) believe that continuous and well-planned competence development work is crucial for organisations' future supply of competence, to meet the labour market innovation and change with a future necessity of competence. Reviewing and evaluating the competence within the organisation is thus an important strategic approach in knowledge companies (Bhattacharya et al., 2014). Also, career opportunities within the organisation are an important factor, as it can lead to employees becoming more motivated and performing better results in their work (Kraimer, Seibert, Wayne, Liden & Bravo, 2011).

Furthermore, internal employer branding works as a tool for retaining employees and for getting employees to identify with the organisation (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Foster et al., 2010). Employees' identification with the organisation arise when they experience that the organisation's and their own personal values and wishes agree with each other (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Thus, designing clear values and goals that permeate the

entire organisation is preferable in the work with internal employer branding, as it contributes to unity and a strong loyalty to the employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Schultz, Hatch and Holten Larsen (2000) describe that organisational identity is seen as closely linked to the concept of culture, which refers to employees' experiences of everyday organisational life. It is important for companies that the external image matches the employees' internal identity. Lievens et al. (2007) believe that the three different groups of individuals that an organisation should attract through its employer branding are potential job seekers, those who already have applied for work in the organisation and those who already are employed in the organisation. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), the key to internal employer branding is that employees convey a positive image of the employer to their customers, friends and acquaintances. Thus, it is the people in the organisation who constitutes marketing (Bergstrom, Blumenthal & Crothers, 2002). Similarly, Parment, Dyhre and Lutz (2017) explain that the best way to employer branding is when an employee on their own initiative shows to the outside world that they get on well in their workplace. Good external rumours are created if the organisation is an attractive employer and therefore internal employer branding has been given a greater role, as the employer wants to create a positive organisational identity that is communicated to external actors (Schultz et al., 2000). Also, employees appreciate and feel proud to work for an employer with a good reputation whose brand is well known and respected. It implies inspiring your employees and making them understand and behave in line with the organisation's employer brand promise, to make the message behind the brand visible and real (Foster et al., 2010). Thus, a prerequisite in creating a reputation is transparency, which means that the internal identity reflects external actors' expectations and perceptions of the organisation accurately (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Collins & Stevens, 2002). According to Mosley (2007), an attractive employer creates a committed and satisfied workforce, which in turn also gives a positive external image of the company. Hanin, Stinglhamber and Delobbe (2013) explain that this internal perspective aims at motivating and retaining employees who act as ambassadors for their organisation with both clients and prospective employees. By working with various HR processes, you can create a credible culture, which Raj & Jyothi (2011) explain is the most important factor for success with your internal employer branding.

### **3.2.2. Employer Value Proposition**

A well-known concept in the work with Employer Branding is the Employer Value Proposition (EVP), which describes the values and benefits an employee will be offered by working for a particular organisation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Identity, profile and image are three aspects through which it is possible to work with an EVP (Parment et al., 2017). Identity is described as employees' perceptions, feelings and thoughts about the organisation to which they belong and if there is a common perception of the identity and values at a company, it facilitates decision-making and cooperation in the organisation (Parment et al., 2017). Profile briefly means how an organisation wants to be perceived as an employer and image refers to how the organisation is perceived by the environment (Parment et al., 2017). EVP thus reflects what the employer offers or positive attributes an organisation wants to be associated with. Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) therefore believe that EVP is an important factor of creating attractiveness and that this offer should be marketed externally to potential labour and internally to promote it to the current workforce. Furthermore, an organisation's defined EVP is described by Heger (2007) as an important factor for employee engagement. A less competitive EVP



results in a weakened employer brand, which in turn leads to negative consequences for the organisation regarding difficulties in attracting and retaining employees (Heger, 2007). When designing an EVP, it is thus important that there is an understanding of the organisation, to be able to create an employer offer that is clear, true, concrete, distinctive and also conveys a feeling (Parment et al., 2017).

### **3.2.3. Job Satisfaction**

Bakotić (2016) describes that employees who have a high level of job satisfaction like their work and feel justice in the work environment. One of the main goals in internal employer branding is to create job satisfaction for the employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). It is relevant for an employer to work with symbols of *recognition and appreciation* to increase employee job satisfaction (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The need of feeling seen and appreciated is deeply rooted in most people and therefore can contribute to job satisfaction. Furthermore, Barrow and Mosley (2005) believe that employees know their value differently today compared to before and can thus place higher demands on the employer, which requires additional demands on the employer to show appreciation. To *include* employees in decision-making can also be relevant, as employees who are allowed to participate and influence their working conditions perform better at work (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Employees' job satisfaction and the relational ties between them and the employer can be negatively affected if employees believe that changes are made without their consent, as they have no opportunity to influence (Guzzo & Noonan, 1994). Furthermore, *motivation* among employees influences, as they feel a higher degree of job satisfaction compared to unmotivated employees. Lack of motivation can lead to worse work performance, less commitment, and in many cases even to employees leaving the organisation (Kressler, 2003). Also, to offer *development opportunities* is of importance as Tanwar and Prasad (2016) believe that development opportunities in the workplace are an aspect that can be of great importance to an employee when he or she is considering leaving an organisation.

Job satisfaction can lead to the employees more likely to stay in an organisation and dissatisfaction at work can be seen as one of the most common reason for employees to resign voluntarily (Holtom, Mitchell & Lee, 2006). On the other hand, Sparrow and Cooper (2003) explain that employees who have internalized a company's norms and values are more likely to stay with the employer, regardless of whether it is satisfactory or not. Similarly, Holtom et al. (2006) explain that employees' identification with the organisation is more crucial than their job satisfaction, in terms of propensity to stay in the organisation. The impact of the organisational culture is further explained in section 3.3.2.

## ***3.3. Leadership and Internal Employer Branding***

The following section presents a description of leadership and leadership styles in relation to internal employer branding and the influence of culture and values.

### **3.3.1. The Influence of Leadership and the Leadership Style**

Barrow and Mosley (2005) describe that several successful employer branding initiatives have shown that the leader plays an active role, in both development and communication. They believe that leadership is an important part of the communication work to strengthen credibility and to spread the corporate “spirit” further, which has a connec-

tion with employer branding. Similarly, Zeeshan et al. (2020) emphasize that organisations should focus on their leadership and their internal employer branding to retain and attract competence and to be able to create a long-term good reputation. Leadership has a significant part in creating a corporate climate and establishing an inner atmosphere, which impacts employees' attitudes and inspiration (Yukl, 1999). Leaders in the organisation through their commitment and involvement can thus influence how employees experience the employer brand (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Organisation competence and excellence of leadership are thus amongst the foremost corporate reputation drivers (Zeeshan et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Barrow and Mosley (2005) also explain that the nature of leadership is important for the implementation of a successful employer brand and for that reason it is relevant for a leader to be aware of the leadership style they use. Zeeshan et al. (2020) indicate that transformational leadership positively influences corporate reputation as it outlines employees' optimistic opinion of the corporate reputation. Transformational leaders involve employees in the decision-making process and thus increases their positive assessment of the organisation by feeling more comfortable at work. Furthermore, Zeeshan et al. (2020) also explain that employer branding and transformational leadership are united, as goals of both transformational leadership and employer branding concerns retaining loyal employees and creating a good reputation for the organisation. Similarly, Ghafoor et al. (2011) indicate a significant relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement practices and employee performance. Also, Sangeeta, Avinash and Anupam (2017) explain that transformational leadership contributes to employee engagement, employer branding and psychological attachment. Their results also indicate that training managers in transformational leadership style lead to more engaged employees (Sangeeta, Avinash & Anupam, 2017).

Furthermore, Kashyap and Rangnekar (2016) describe that the servant leadership style is emerging as an organisational phenomenon. It helps an organisation portray and communicate a positive organisational image as a unique employer brand among existing and potential employees. Also, that it helps to influence outcomes of employee behaviour such as turnover intentions and positive social exchange. Thus, their study indicates that the role of servant leadership helps in building and influencing a positive employer brand image (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016). Puni, Agyemang and Asamoah (2016) suggest that the democratic leadership style contributes to a low risk of employee turnover, because the style is related to employees experiencing a high degree of trust and that they can influence their work situation. Similarly, Tse, Huang and Lam (2013) also describe that a more inclusive leadership style contributes to a better work situation for employees where the risk of dismissal among employees is low.

### **3.3.2. The Influence of Culture and Values in the Organisation**

Organisational culture is a broad and controversial concept and therefore there are several different explanations to what the concept means. Dabirian, Kietzmann and Diba (2017) believe that organisational culture is characterized by the values and activities an organisation performs, which creates an organisational identity and an employer brand. Schein (2010) points out that organisational culture is shared and learned values that have emerged in work and adaptations at the workplace. To make it easier for employees to understand and apply the culture, organisations often have values that specify what the culture means. If the employee feels an identification with the organisation and

colleagues, it will help to acquire the common values more easily, which creates a strong culture in the organisation (Dabirian et al., 2017; Schein, 2010). Berthon et al. (2005) describe that good leadership and a supportive and encouraging culture are pointed out as important factors in a strong employer brand. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) also describe that the internal employer branding process means that values are internalized by employees and that these thus become an integrated part of the organisational culture. The purpose is to ensure that the employees agree with and work based on the values and goals that are determined by the organisation's leadership. The goal of the entire employer branding process is thus to create strong loyalty to the employer brand, which for employees will result in identification and involvement with the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Moreover, Alvesson (2013) describes that leadership is argued to be about influencing values, ideas and ways of thinking, thus, cultural impact. He further argues the opposite, that organisational culture affects leadership. All actions, including leadership, are influenced by cultural perceptions and at the same time leaders also affect by acting as cultural influencers/changers. Leadership is practised by focusing on what is important, by setting a good example (symbolic leadership), using a special language and stimulating interpretation in a special way. Alvesson (2013) further explains that the challenge of symbolic leadership is to achieve credibility and thereby influence the imagination, thinking and emotions of those affected.

Furthermore, Alvesson (2013) believes that it is important to use the concept of organisational culture restrictively as the idea that there is a united and unique culture at the company and organisational level is poorly substantiated. There are usually large internal differences around values and symbolism. Moreover, he believes that the concept of organisational leadership culture is preferable as it refers to the higher levels of an organisation and ignores the fact that the majority of employees may not share this culture. However, the leadership culture can influence the framework for the business and strategic direction. Alvesson (2013) further explains this and means that leadership as an interactive influence where personal contact is included can affect the closest employees to change values and ways of thinking, but speeches or reward systems do not have the same impact. Similarly, Kashyap and Rangnekar (2014) also explain that the leader has a great influence on how employees perceive the organisation's values and embrace them. Therefore, the leader can make the employees understand the true identity of the organisation through their actions (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2014). Furthermore, Mosely (2007) highlights leadership as an important part of organisational culture, as there is a clear link between leaders' behaviours and the organisation's stated values. For example, Miles and Mangold (2004) describe that leaders' internalization of the organisation's values has an impact on employees' motivation. Thus, this affects the shaping of the organisational culture and also the employee experience (Mosely, 2007).

### ***3.4. Reflection on the Choice of Theoretical Interpretive Framework***

The following section presents literature search and source criticism, also, a reflection on the connection of the chosen theory, together with criticism against them.

#### **3.4.1. Literature Search and Source Criticism**

To access interesting and relevant scientific articles, the LubSearch database and Google Scholar were used. To ensure a scientific review of the articles, a selection of

articles that have been "peer-reviewed" has been made. The keywords searched included for example "*leadership and internal employer branding*", "*leadership and job satisfaction*" and "*leadership and organisational culture*". Sources has also been found through previous essays that studied similar topics. Also, references based on the various articles found and based on literature that has been used during previous studies in working life pedagogy. Denscombe (2016) describes that credibility means the extent to which data can be proven to be accurate. To create increased credibility and a relevant basis, several researchers with similar theories and descriptions are provided. Also, a presentation of comparisons around leadership and employer branding, viewed from different perspectives. To increase credibility articles have been chosen based on when they are published which explains why sources from the late 2000s are mainly used. However, older sources also exist in order to present first-hand sources for various concepts and theories that have a close connection to the purpose of the research. Additionally, they are used in connection with similar reasoning from newer and more current sources. Bass & Avolio (1994) is one of these old sources and is used to present the first source of the theory of transformational leadership. This is then supplemented with new and more current articles (eg. Sagneeta et al., 2017 and Zeesahn et al., 2020) to strengthen credibility and the connection to the subject of the study; leadership and employer branding. As new sources are used, some scientific articles with studies focused on other countries and work contexts from this study are used. These articles, despite certain context differences, are still considered relevant to use because the phenomenon is described in similar ways as research in a Swedish context. They are thus useful because they are supported by other literature. The research subject is broad and hence different perspectives and contexts are found in the literature. In summary, the articles in general are judged to be of good quality.

### **3.4.2. Reflections and Criticism of the Theories**

When choosing the theoretical interpretive framework, the focus has been on leadership and employer branding. Since leadership and internal employer branding are the first main themes of the study, a theoretical presentation of them is relevant to present. As this study is based on an abductive approach, the titles within the main themes (e.g., *Leadership styles* and *Job satisfaction*) are formed by the outcome of the collected empirical data. They are also chosen since previous research indicates relationships between for example these leadership styles and employer branding. Also, in a connection between the concepts of leadership and employer branding, the subject of organisational culture is proved, both empirically and theoretically, to be significant. During the work process, it also became a third area of the study and a research question about organisational culture was added. Furthermore, the presented areas and theories are broad and can be used in several ways. For that reason, they are delimited and focused on the purpose of the study. To create a whole, the theoretical framework is developed by chosen theories from both an individual and organisational perspective. Thus, the presented theories are necessary for connection with each other, to create a theoretical understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

However, the presented concepts and theories can be criticized. For example, the leadership styles are treated critically, by examining the thoughts of different authors and researchers. There is thus an awareness that some researchers are less positive about the presented leadership styles. For example, Alvesson and Einola (2019) criticise the appealing and positive images and claims regarding leadership that is central today. The

research field has a positive focus with several similar theories, where for example, transformational and servant leadership are claimed to lead to an enormous number of good outcomes. According to Alvesson and Einola (2019), this positive leadership does not lead to a qualified understanding of organisational life and manager-subordinate relations. It may instead lead to losing consideration of leadership as situated acts of systematic influencing of subordinates to achieve concrete tasks and of missing the relational perspective of leadership. Similarly, Andersson et al. (2020) explain that even if servant leadership indicates turning the relationship around, to focus on the leader serving the follower, the leader is still the one in main focus. Furthermore, they describe that later research instead highlights collective leadership which is understood through a relational phenomenon that develops in social interactions (Andersson et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Alvesson (2013) describes that organisational culture also is criticized, even though it is mainly seen as important and positive. He mentions that culture can be used as a brainwashing mechanism that expresses power or that organisation's expressed values and ideas do not correspond to the company's practice, which leads to double standards. It can also be perceived as simplifying because the reality of an organisation is complex. There is a risk of beautifying, that one escapes from the complex of reality and becomes more interested in ideals to strive for. Much talk about culture is based on a distant and superficial view of the phenomena one seeks to allude to. It is therefore important to know the mindset on which those you are trying to influence are based (Alvesson, 2013). Moreover, criticism of employer branding is limited in the literature, as the majority of academic literature is generally positive about employer branding. However, Moroko and Uncles (2008) point out that what determines whether an employer brand is successful or not has not yet been determined despite the area's popularity in recent years. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), the most interesting, and perhaps even the most complicated question is whether employer branding helps the organisation achieve better results or not. This thus indicates that the effect of working with employer branding is still quite uncertain, despite its growing popularity. Another type of criticism that can be directed, is the risks an organisation is exposed to when they work with employer branding. Edwards (2009) explain that the increasing efforts in the quest to create a unique and attractive employer brand create risks, as organisations jeopardize building up expectations that they cannot fulfil when employees have been hired. This is a risk since these unfulfilled expectations can lead to the employee eventually leaving the organisation (Edwards, 2009). Similarly, Maxwell and Knox (2009) describe that it is one thing to express an opinion, but a completely different thing to then in practice live by them. It is therefore important that managers have the trust of employees so that they convey the actual image they have. Concludingly, the selected theories are thus used with an awareness of the critical perspectives directed at them.

## 4. Results of a Hermeneutic Analysis

This chapter presents the results of a hermeneutic analysis from the collected empirical data. It is based on themes and related sub-themes from the collected empirics. Each theme ends with a summary, aiming to reflect from the part to the whole. As the central concepts of the study tend to coincide and resemble each other, central themes will recur in several sections. The results are mainly based on descriptions from interviewees in managerial roles. To gain a larger perspective of the work with employer branding in the organisation, the results include descriptions from two interviewees in a TA- role. The result thus comes from individuals in the company and is not necessarily general to the organisation.

### 4.1. Leadership

The first theme, leadership, is focused on what leadership means to the managers, what expectations and conditions they perceive to have and how it is possible to lead through the organisation's values.

#### 4.1.1. The Meaning of Leadership

The managers united understanding is that leadership means guiding, supporting and driving a group forward. Also, that the leader is a spokesperson between the employee and the rest of the organisation. One manager explains it as follows:

“I see leadership as a way for someone to hold the baton. Someone who secures the team and ensures that we all work towards the same direction.” (Interviewee 4)

Furthermore, the managers emphasize the importance of a leader possessing the qualities of being caring, responsive and inclusive. One manager describes that these qualities make it possible to lift the employees from below, which can create a strong feeling of power for the employee. By showing the employees what an important link they are in the chain itself, the interviewees believe that the employees get a stronger motivation and capacity. One manager describes why this is important:

“... it is better to include the employees because if an idea that benefits us arises from the employees, I think they become more motivated // if the idea instead comes from me and I have to try to get the employee to understand and engage in the idea, it will be much harder to bring along my employees. Thus, it is better that I convey and describe the goal and ask my employees; ‘What do you think we should do to achieve this?’ Then it will be a win-win situation.” (Interviewee 7)

The managers united perception is also that it is important to get support from their employees, by being able to convey information and create an understanding for them. A manager explains:

“As a leader, I need to be able to see all my employees, their strengths and weaknesses and then make the absolute best of it to take the team forward // I have to make sure that I have support from my team because, in everything I do, I have to bring my team with me. I cannot do anything without them. What I can do is to make decisions and so on, but I have to bring the whole group with me all the time”. (Interviewee 3)

The managers also have a united focus on creating a familial culture with clear values and visions. One manager describes an effort to create a "gang culture" that can make

the team feel like a family. The manager believes that the employees should consider everyone, including the manager, as one member of the gang:

"I want us to have keywords and a vision in our team because striving for visions makes us feel that it is us against the world, which makes us feel that we can achieve almost anything."  
(Interviewee 9)

The ability to reflect was also recurring in the answers where the managers believe that a leader should constantly reflect on one's own leadership and how it can be improved. An interviewee explains that this means reflecting on what went right or wrong and why.

#### **4.1.2. Expectations of how Leaders Should Act in the Organisation**

About once a year all managers in the organisation participate in various lectures and training regarding leadership. They also have coaching, so-called one to one conversation with their own managers, which gives them guidance in their leadership. However, there was a difference between the managers' perceptions about whether there is a corporate image of how a leader should act at the company. Some of the managers considered that there is no picture at all, but most of them believe that even if there is no pronounced picture or perception of how a leader should act is the culture and the organisation's values guidelines for this. In this way, there is a united "language" that all managers are responsible to use which makes it possible to collaborate and jointly connect certain things. One manager describes:

"I think our company focuses a lot on the principles and its culture and then let the leadership go along with it while other companies I have worked at have had more leadership principles. Here, I perceive that there are more of the same principles throughout the company". (Interviewee 8)

To lead with the organisation's (name of the company) hat on is something that the managers repeatedly describe. To wear this hat is a term used by employees in the organisation. Leading with the hat on is explained with a focus on low prestige and high loyalty by applying a holistic perspective. It is described to mean that you need to think outside your own goals and focus on the ultimate goal for the company. It can sometimes lead to necessary choices that can be negative or a challenge for yourself but on the whole benefits the company. It is important as a manager to look beyond your area of responsibility, as the strength lies in the total and not in what each small department performs. One manager describes:

"... I think that this loyalty and that insight permeates all managers here. The leaders here have a very good and healthy view regarding the relationship with their team members. Everyone is, of course, different, but I think our employees see their managers here at the company as anyone, so you see them as a leader and not as a manager. There are strong solidarity and low prestige." (Interviewee 9)

Furthermore, the managers describe that a united perception of how leaders should act in the organisation is a focus on involving the employee. When the employee feels included, a sense of meaning is created, which leads to the employee also to put the hat on, thus being loyal and protecting the company's brand.

#### **4.1.4. To Lead with Values**

The main values that the organisation have are *together*, *commitment* and *challenge*. A manager who has worked at the company for a long time describes that the culture and vision work has developed in recent years:

“... Only looking back a few years, we had no pronounced culture. The journey we have made now with the culture and vision work, I think, has contributed to acknowledge the strengths of the company but also to look ahead and to see the culture work has a business side as well. It is not just about how we work with each other or how we meet each other in the corridors or coffee room, but it is also how we act with each other in business. So, I think that we as a company have taken great steps, I must say.” (Interviewee 4)

*Together*, is a value which the managers explain by describing the company as familial, that you can express your desires to anyone and be treated nicely. According to the managers, there is solidarity in the organisation, where the employees feel that they are included and recognised to a large extent. Furthermore, the concept is explained by describing the organisation as unpretentious and flat. One manager explains that this shows by wearing the company's hat, to see the company as a whole and to look at which puzzle pieces are needed to be able to solve the puzzle in the fastest and most qualitative way. Another manager explains similarly:

“...I feel that the people who work here are unpretentious. It does not matter what position you have, but everyone is very helpful and open // I like the climate and here and the people really live up to the company's principles and values // In this way, it also works between the different departments which make the work effective. So, there is a collaboration that permeates the organisation in general, not just in my own department. ” (Interviewee 8)

Furthermore, the managers explain that the value *commitment* refers to that the company is ambitious and that its employees are dedicated and care for the company to do well and develop. Also, that everyone from the management level to the bottom of the organisation is concerned and cares about everyone's well-being. They also explain that freedom with responsibility permeates the company. One manager describes the importance of freedom with responsibility linked to commitment:

“... I believe commitment is created when a person feels freedom with responsibility. At least that is how it is for me and that is why I try to give it to my employees. A person needs to be confident to dare to take on new things, to be able to develop and to be able to believe in oneself.” (Interviewee 4)

The value *challenge* is described by the managers as the company permeates quick and challenging decisions. Also, that the company contains curious and brave people with a pioneering spirit, which is crucial for an organisation that is growing at this fast pace. The interviewees believe that the company is constantly developing and constantly strives to get better. One interviewee also describes that everything goes fast at the company and that its employees, therefore, are required to appreciate this speed:

“In this company, we run. We work very much as pilots, as challengers and what is fantastic here and what sets us apart from other companies is that you get the opportunity to do more than what you are hired for from the beginning. However, it is important to remember that there is another side of the coin. This quick pace with short decision paths can lead to a lot of things happening at the same time, and there you can have employees who think it is difficult and hard.” (Interviewee 7)

The managers describe that these three values permeate and guide their leadership.

#### **4.1.5. Summary**

The managers explain an agreed perception of the meaning of leadership, that it mainly concerns guiding and supporting a group forward. Also, the significance of lifting the employees and showing their importance, to create motivation and commitment. The managers' united perception is also that their leadership is dependent on the employee, as the manager needs their support to make the work function. Creating an understand-



ing for the employee is therefore important. The managers also have a united focus on creating a familial culture with clear values and visions, which becomes clear as they focus on the organisation's values together, commitment and challenge as well as leading with the organisation's hat on.

There is thus a focus on creating meaning and commitment by including and supporting employees as well as a focus on leading based on and following the organisational culture. They also show a reflective approach to how they act as leaders.

## ***4.2. Internal Employer Branding.***

The following theme concerns employer branding in the organisation. The material collected resulted in the TA-manager's descriptions of how the corporate group work with the strategy and the TA-employee's descriptions of how the company works with the strategy. Also, the managers' perceptions within the areas of developing and retaining employees.

### **4.2.1. Employer Branding at the Corporate Group and the Company**

The TA- manager describes that employer branding is important to show the internal and external environment what it is like to work at the company, what you offer as a company, not only salary or benefits but as a culture and what kind of workplace it is. They work with this to make sure that the talent pool is large enough and that they can attract the people needed for the future. Furthermore, the TA- employee describes that it starts with the requirements profile, what they can offer to reach the right target group but that it is also an HR-question, what it is like to work at the company and what culture and values that live in the organisation.

When it comes to the strategic work with employer branding, it differs between the corporate group and the company itself. The corporate group has a more elaborated strategic work. The TA-manger explains that a strong product brand does not necessarily mean that the workplace is attractive. The interviewee believes that the company probably had a perception about this before, that a strong insurance brand means a strong employer brand. The TA-manager explains that it instead can be a challenge when it comes to the financial industry:

“... the legacy of this industry, especially for young people, is not attractive itself. There have been scandals with frauds in the banks, which also harms insurance companies. A lot of young people think of these industries as grey, formal and boring.” (TA-manager)

In recent years, however, the corporate group has taken a major step in the work with employer branding. The work started with conducting about 60 case interviews, a bottom-up approach of interviewing, trying to find the essence of the corporate group as a workplace, to find out what their statements, promises and values are. After these months of discovering the employer value proposition, they shifted gear to work with a communication company on how to be verbal about it. For example, they launched a new strategy, a new career page and an employer efficiency program. It is a current work process and therefore the TA-manager explains that it is hard to analyze the effect even though there are signs of positive effects as the corporate group is ranked higher up on various surveys regarding good workplaces. However, these new strategic initiatives have not yet been applied in the Swedish company.

Furthermore, the TA-employee explains that this Swedish company works with the internal culture linked to the employer brand, even though there is not yet, in the same way, a strategic external marketing plan. The interviewee explains that they work to live the vision and to wear the company hat. This means keeping the values, colleagues and customers in focus. Working with internal employer branding in this way, according to the TA-employee, aims to create a strong community and to lead everyone in the same direction. Because the business area has different functions with different profiles, it is important to create a sense of belonging, so that everyone works towards the same goal. It is therefore important to have these common points of contact for the company as a brand and within the culture. It is explained by the following:

“We want to be a qualitative insurance brand, with an upstart profile. Also, to be and to build a workplace with a high level of commitment. I would describe our culture as both competitive and as a belonging community.” (TA-employee)

An active work the company carry out is that they have ambassadors who have a cultural responsibility with an extra responsibility to support, remind and engage the employees regarding the company culture. The TA-employee believes this leads to the work being permeated from the management level down to each level in the organisation. A strategic focus is a good starting point, but this provides a prerequisite for the work to be followed up on at a group level so it can live throughout the company. The ambassadors can both be leaders and employees and they are spread across different groups. For example, they have so-called "friend events" where the ambassadors are responsible. The interviewee believes that this is a good effort to actively reach out, instead of only letting the top managers give lectures regarding the values and visions. However, they also have activities such as lectures and workshops on vision and culture. They also work with internal tips, suggestions from current employees, which means that the employees can suggest friends and acquaintances for a vacant job and if the person is hired, the employee receives money as compensation. The TA-manager and the TA-employee also explain that all vacant services are outsourced internally and there is a rule to offer an interview to every internal applicant. When it comes to employer branding, the managers focus on developing and retaining current employees. This is further described below.

### **4.2.3. Developing Employees**

The managers describe a focus and a responsibility on working with employees' development opportunities, both for the current role and for a potential role. There is a united opinion that development opportunities are important, both for the individual and for the company. The described challenges with development opportunities are mainly the limitations and timing as well as the employees' endurance.

#### ***4.2.3.1. The Managers' Impact on the Employees' Development Opportunities***

The managers perceive that they have great opportunities to influence the employees' development opportunities. The managers with junior employees have a focus on developing the employees to grow into a more challenging service within the organisation and the managers with senior employees mainly focus on developing the employees' competence for the current role. All managers in the organisation have requirements from HR to conduct full-year and six-month employee appraisals. However, most managers explain that they take their own initiative during regularly one-to-one conversa-

tions. A one-to-one conversation means discussing the employee's performance and job satisfaction. A customer service manager says:

“... my employee conversations consist of two different parts and it is to go through the role they have now and the role they want to develop to in the future. We set up activities for both. The main task // there is a lot of focus on during the first six months because it is an entry-level process // and then we look further for activities, for example, if there is someone who wants to work with leadership then I often ask them what we should do so that in six months they will have better conditions than today. Then we put together a plan for the next six months and we strive for the ambition to be the best person for the assignment when the opportunity arises and it is very much about working proactively because when it arises you never know.” (Interviewee 2)

Moreover, the management team in the customer service department currently has a project called *potential leaders*. This means that they have a meeting every six months with a review of which employees who have the potential to become leaders. These chosen employees get a manager who becomes their mentor and carries out smaller assignments to increase their competence in leadership for a possible future position. The managers in the customer service department also describe that networking with contacts in other departments to suggest potential candidates in the team, is something that they actively can do to create opportunities for the employees.

The managers with senior employees, in the claims department and the business development department also create development plans with their employees but have a greater focus on training and development for the current role:

“... partly it is about encouraging them to always bring up what they want to develop with me of course, but then we also have these conversations twice a year which is a little more in-depth, where you can really empty out your expectations that you have going forward next year and what is needed to achieve this. You can be very happy in the role and the service but may not feel that you have all the tools to make the service one hundred percent. I have several project managers in my team and there are actually some who have not had the opportunity to attend the project management training yet but who actually run it as their main task. There may be a collision there // it is important that you know your employees so well that you know what they want, that you have a long-term perspective and then that you use your own contacts and your own mandate to try to make it a reality as far as possible.”(Interviewee 4)

The company offers both internal and external training for the employees and on the whole, the managers perceive that they satisfy wishes and are responsive to what the employees want, concerning development.

#### **4.2.3.2. Consequences of Development Opportunities**

Thus, continuous competence development such as training education and coaching in different areas are offered to the employees. It is also described that the company has a great focus on development projects, for example, that the employees have the opportunity to take internships at other departments, intending to offer competence development but also to show the employees the career opportunities within the company. Also, that employees get the opportunity to be involved in different projects at other departments, one manager describes an example when an employee in the customer service team became a claimant during a project the business developers had. Furthermore, the managers describe an agreed perception that the individual's development opportunities are important, both for the employee and the organisation. An interviewee describes that development opportunities are a requirement for an organisation and only if it does not exist it is negative. It affects the individual in such a way that one becomes motivated

and the organisation through the development and competitive advantages. One manager with senior employees describes the importance of meeting the individual's wishes:

“... you have to meet and satisfy the employee's wishes for development so that they do not stop in their development. // and sometimes it can be that you do not need education but may be inspiration. For those who are very, very good, to maintain their competence and motivation education may not be for them because they may already have that competence // we want to attract and retain the employees we have, we do not want everyone wanting to do something else and escape // we want a large part who are satisfied with their work.” (Interviewee 3)

Furthermore, the managers describe that development opportunities are important because if employees have a goal to strive for, it often leads to more commitment in the role they have today. If there are opportunities to develop into other roles within the company, it shows employees that it is possible to build a career at the company, which means that they do not constantly look for a new job at other companies. The managers believe it is important to go through what engage the employees, get them to reflect on development paths and then try to guide them to where they want. One customer services manager describes a so-called sunshine story:

“... I had an employee and when we had a six-month conversation it emerged that in the next step he would like to work as a building damage adjuster // then I encouraged him and we set a plan and we tried to focus on him learning as much as possible in this area // then the building damage department needed help with their telephony and I was quick to say that we have a person who wants to help. Then he was offered a job there. It was really a sunshine story for me as a leader, of course, sad that I lost an employee that I enjoyed working with but development always comes first and at the same time I also think it is a win for us as a company because // we keep great competence instead of losing it to a competitor. I can not serve anything to anyone but I still have the opportunity to influence. I dress my employee with competence, development and a little self-confidence to make the person more attractive and ready.” (Interviewee 5)

Seven of the nine managers in the interview study started working in a role as employees at the company and have since been developed and internally recruited to the management role. One of these managers says:

“... because we are not a huge company, it is not finished developing either // therefore, development is a part of everyday life and it is important to be aware that you come to something that is not perfect, which means that new suggestions and ideas are welcome // you get involved in a lot more and that in itself people think is developing. And I think quite honestly // I have been here for eleven years and have had the opportunity to try maybe five or six different, significant and fun roles // if you have a good attitude, work hard and perform well in your current role, you will have development opportunities here. It is a lot of people within this company who has done a similar career here like me.” (Interviewee 7)

These examples indicate how the company works with development opportunities and internal recruitment.

#### ***4.2.3.3. Challenges to Give Employees Development Opportunities***

The main challenges in giving employees development opportunities are, according to the managers, the limitation of opportunities, the endurance of the employees and the timing. The limitation concerns that the roles coveted are not always vacant or that the education budget is limited. With endurance, they mean that most people in today's society want it to go fast, which the managers believe is not always the case in the working life. It is also about balance because it is important to want to develop but also to not forget what you are employed for. The managers describe that there can be a challenge

in not living up to what is promised when attracting an employee, in the job advertisement or during the interview. Not because they or the company would lie deliberately, but that, for example, changes are constantly taking place that also can mean changes in the conditions of their work role:

“... it is a challenge when people who enter the customer service department expect to get a new role in three months. Somewhere you need the basic competence to be able to develop // it can therefore be a challenge to attract people by presenting development opportunities because the new employees may then get the wrong idea. It is important that the people who enter first and foremost focus on wanting to develop in the role you enter // the negative side of being a slightly smaller company compared to other companies is that it can take several years before a certain role becomes vacant.” (Interviewee 5)

Moreover, with timing, they mean that all employees want to develop at the same time. For example, if a new project starts and ten people in the team wants to take on the project, it will not work. This can also be perceived as unfair within the teams. Everyone should have the same opportunity for development opportunities, but the managers explain that it is not always practicable and also that employees have different conditions.

#### **4.2.4. Retaining Employees**

The managers describe a united perception of working with the employees' job satisfaction and identification with the company, to retain them. This by creating meaning through various courses of action. Also, that they try to achieve an open climate where the employee should be comfortable raising dissatisfaction. The challenges described are the competition with other companies and the difficulty to meet the employees' development ambitions.

##### **4.2.4.1. How Managers Work to Retain Employees**

The managers describe a united focus to retain employees by working with their job satisfaction. One manager describes it by following:

“... I try to retain my employees by making them feel job satisfaction, that they feel seen, that they understand their weight and that they are very important here. That they contribute. Then I entertain the employees by making sure that they feel a concrete development, either personally or work-related, but that they feel a certain development, it stimulates most people in my world.” (Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, the managers describe that they try to maintain and increase the employees' well-being and job satisfaction by creating meaning. To regularly talk and ask questions about their experience is therefore important. This is explained as crucial because communication is required to get the information needed to support the individual. For an employee to feel job satisfaction it is also described by a manager that it is important to constantly work with the balance that it should be super clear what is expected of the employee and at the same time, they should feel that they have an honest chance to achieve the expectations. This, together with being included in various problem-solving situations and concerns, the manager believes leads to an employee who feels as much job satisfaction as possible and thus chooses to stay in the workplace. Also, that it is important to try to make a role more attractive by finding development opportunities and increased responsibility within the role, to increase the feeling of contributing. Another customer service manager describes similar:

“Yes, so // how do you say this nicely // working in this department calling out to customers means that you have a rather monotonous job and it is difficult to do it for a long time. And that is why I have worked to ensure that my employees have an area of responsibility in addi-

tion to their regular task. For example, I have an employee who wanted to develop within the area of animal insurance and then the person became responsible for animal insurance and as soon as any question arises about this, then we all will go to him. Thus, animal insurance becomes his special area where he feels responsible and if he feels responsibility, he also feels that it is not possible to leave us, because what would then happen to the animal insurance. In the same way, I have stayed for a long time, now I have been given a lot of responsibility and I have a feeling that I am needed here and that I actually contribute. (Interviewee 6)

Also, it is described that it is important for a leader to constantly adapt the coaching to the individual. When it comes to development, for example, it is something that most people appreciate, but with that said, some employees are not mature or receptive to taking on several projects or side activities and that it instead can be perceived as stressful and negative. Therefore, it is important to have a balance in this and to stimulate the employee individually. The managers also describe the importance of feeling the "temp" and catching those who do not have job satisfaction. One manager explains that all people at some point experience tougher periods and then it is important to support that person. It is explained that these employees are easy to capture as it often goes hand in hand with a negative spiral in the work results. To retain these employees, you must invest the time and energy needed to find a needs-adapted solution to increase the employee's job satisfaction. The importance of not forgetting the high-performing employees is also described. There is a risk in forgetting to give feedback to them and the managers believe that it requires more of one as a leader to be able to maintain this feedback. It is essential to tell them what they do well and to be there as support, to somehow also be close, entertain and try to explain how important they are for the team and the organisation.

Moreover, the managers explain that it is important to have the "right" values to be able to feel job satisfaction in the company from a long-term perspective and thus emphasize the importance of their cultural work. A manager exemplifies this by saying that a personality that needs security without changes indicates that the workplace is neither right for the person nor the company. When it comes to recruitment the managers thus explain that it is beneficial to recruit internal employees as they already are happy at the workplace and share the company's values. A manager who has employees in a role where the wanted competence is rare, focuses on attracting employees internally, to train talents from, for example, the customer service department who have the right attitude and the right ambition. The managers thus believe that already in the interview stage it is important to be clear with the tasks in the role as well as the culture at the company. Also, the managers describe that they try to attract new employees with these values by reconciling various issues during the interview:

“...Our values // are something that we want everyone to feel that we work with every day // a principle under commitment is that we are unpretentious and it is quite important to explain it to the employee who applies to us. Here you will not be comfortable if you are high on prestige, if you like status such as having a specific title. Here, we all are named administrators and if you happen to be a specialist, that's fine, but here it is very unpretentious, and if you are not, you will not like it here. When recruiting, it is important that you convey this so that you understand that if it does not feel good in the stomach with these principles, then you will not like it here. The last time I had the opportunity to recruit, the final candidates during the interview had to choose their favourite principle and justify their choice. It was no right or wrong here, but it is still fun to see what someone is more passionate about. That can say a lot about a person.” (Interviewee 7)

Furthermore, the managers have both succeeded and failed when they have tried to retain employees who are about to leave the company. If the managers feel that the employee chooses to quit on the wrong grounds, for example, misunderstanding or conflict between colleagues, they try to communicate with the employee and solve the situation. One manager explains two examples, one salary issue and one issue regarding the leadership:

“Yes, I have succeeded in getting people to stay by getting the person to tell me what the other workplace can offer that we cannot // If it is salary, it can be a matter of negotiation // but I rather focus on what we can do to make the person feel more job satisfaction. I have an example from my previous workplace where an employee wanted to quit because he said he did not like his job at all. I had just become his manager and we talked about the reason for his choice and then it turned out that his previous leader did not see him and only focused on his sales and nothing else // we then had a dialogue // and he agreed to stay for six months but was still set to quit. Then it turned out that he stayed and this is clear proof of the importance of seeing your employees and working close to them. ” (Interviewee 3)

The managers are also focused on creating joy among their employees. The managers believe that fellowship and joy with colleagues can lead to employees staying in a role even though the work role itself is not attractive. Depending on the situation, there are thus different ways in which the managers work to retain their employees.

#### ***4.2.4.2. How Employees Express Dissatisfaction***

The company has two employee surveys a year where it is possible to anonymously provide feedback on dissatisfaction. The employees also have the opportunity to express dissatisfaction during the annual employee conversations and the regular one-to-one conversation. The managers describe that it is important not to be defensive as a manager in feedback situations but instead thanking for the criticism as it otherwise may be a risk that the employee does not dare to express dissatisfaction and thus does not gain trust in the manager. The managers also describe that they try to achieve an open climate where the employee should be comfortable raising concerns about dissatisfaction directly, both in the group and to the manager privately. It is explained to be important to dare to do it in a group and that it is something that the team has worked on, as the manager believes that it leads to development, even if it can be difficult. A manager also describes:

“...It often regards frustrations around the daily work and that it is highly natural and something that is fully allowed to feel. It is important for the employee to understand that it is okay not to always give the impression that you are ‘high on life’ and if my employee dares to show that, I believe it proves that I have a close dialogue with my employee.” (Interviewee 4)

Unlike these managers, there are a few managers who describe that negativity openly in the office is not tolerated in their team. These managers have a policy meaning that negativity is not allowed to address in the group, but that everyone instead has the opportunity to take the manager aside into a separate room and address negative aspects and dissatisfaction. It is explained with a belief that there is a risk of other people in the team being negatively affected, even if it is only a matter of talking negatively about your lunch.

#### ***4.2.4.3. Challenges to Retain Employees***

The challenges addressed when it comes to retaining employees is if the employee gets a great offer at another workplace and the limitations for meeting the employee's pursuit of development. It may be that the employee wants it to go faster or that they want to

take other paths in their career. To follow up on the reasons why employees choose to resign, the TA-department conducts exit interviews. By collecting the former employees' experiences of the role and the company, it creates an opportunity for development, both for the company and the leadership. The managers describe this as important because an employee is not always willing to give feedback and criticism to their leader, but in an exit interview, it can be easier to address these aspects. Without any statistics or other evidence, is the employee turnover according to the TA- employee within the normal range compared to other companies in the industry. For natural reasons, employee turnover is highest in the customer service department and especially at the telephone sales department.

#### **4.2.5. Summary**

When it comes to the strategic work with employer branding, it differs between the corporate group and the company, as the corporate group has a more elaborated strategic work. They have done extensive work trying to build an EVP that corresponds to the essence of the corporate group, to then use a communication company for marketing. The company instead have a focus on the internal culture linked to the employer brand, even though there is not yet, a clear EVP. They have an implemented work at an operational level to remind and engage the employees of the values and visions, for example through cultural ambassadors and various events and workshops.

Furthermore, the managers united focus is on the employees' job satisfaction and identification with the company, to retain them. This by creating meaning through development opportunities, contribution and participation and creating an open climate. It is also explained that sharing the values in the company is important. Based on this there is a focus on attracting people that share these values and recruiting internally. However, the challenges described are the competition to other companies and the difficulty to meet the employees' development ambitions.

### ***4.3. Leadership and Internal Employer Branding.***

The last theme concerns the managers' perception of the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding followed by how they can contribute to the internal employer branding process.

#### **4.3.1. Managers Perception of the Relationship Between Leadership and Internal Employer Branding**

The TA-manager and the TA-employee have a united perception that there is a strong connection between leadership and internal employer branding. The TA-manager explains the importance of embracing the employee promise and for the leadership to be aligned with what the company tell their employees. In the strategic process of describing the corporates groups EVP, they used the wording and sort of copied that to the leadership principles. In this way, the corporate group thus have an alignment between the EVP and the leadership guidelines. What they require leaders to do is the same as what is promised to newcomers. The TA-manager describes that a significant element within this is employee efficacy, not only because the company benefiting but also the side effect of the employee feeling more engaged and reminded that they can be proud of the place they work. The TA-employee similarly describes that leadership has a great



impact on the employees' commitment but also their behaviour and action, which thus affects the internal employer branding process.

Furthermore, the managers also have a united perception that there is a strong relationship between leadership and internal employer branding. Two managers describe:

“Leadership is significant to include the employees. It is important because it is our employees who then talk about and decide whether the company is a good workplace or not.” (Interviewee 3)

“I think that leadership is not only important but crucial for the employer branding process. Leadership affects, positively or negatively, what a person spreads about the company to their colleagues and friends.” (Interviewee 6)

There are three prominent understandings to be found in managers' perceptions regarding the connection between leadership and internal employer branding. These are *culture and vision*, *communication* and *development opportunities*. The *culture and vision* work in connection with leadership and its impact on internal employer branding is explained by the expression of “it is raining from above”. They believe that if the leadership is clear and if the company leads through its vision and culture, it spreads to the employees, which affects how the employees act and talks about the company internally and externally. It is also described that popular activities, for example, sales competitions, after work and various happenings contribute to the culture work and thus internal employer branding. Furthermore, they describe that clear *communication* within the organisation affects the loyalty and commitment of employees, which influences the internal employer branding. One manager also describes the importance of clear communication in order not to create a bad experience for the employee. Furthermore, the manager explains that it is important that the employees understand the logical reasons for the less positive aspects of the work role and also negative parts or changes that take place at the company. This leads to the employee gaining a greater understanding which can lead to a more positive perception of the company. The manager describes this by the following:

“...we are sometimes forced to raise the price of various insurances and you as a customer service employee must then receive calls that can be very ungrateful // but for us to be able to remain as a company, we must raise prices, it is not with the aim of being mean towards the customers or you // if you give this information to the employee and spend time giving the employee understanding, it leads to more employees being behind it. So, these negative parts that can flourish around can be minimized if you just give your employees an understanding, because then you can connect this to a why, // instead of to something negative // I mean this has a connection to how colleagues internally talk about the company and also how it spreads to friends and acquaintances outside the organisation.” (Interviewee 2)

Moreover, the organisation's focus on *development opportunities* is also explained to be a leadership initiative that can influence the internal employer branding, which is described in section 4.2.4. These development opportunities at the company, the managers believe, leads to a greater commitment and therefore a positive experience that affects the internal employer branding.

Thus, the managers believe that focusing leadership activities for current employees will not only lead to retaining them but also for them to attract external people. It is also important in order to receive the internal tips. The managers explain that the employees will talk to their friends and acquaintances and spread a good reputation further, only if they have a positive experience:

“...If you have a good experience, you talk to others about them // This is the way a good reputation is spread because imagine if I hire a claims adjuster that recommends us to old colleagues, I think that is much more valuable than if you read an article about how good we are. It is more genuine; our employees are not paid to say that. So I think it is important to internally create a positive experience for the employees so that they can recommend us.” (Interviewee 7)

“.. Many of the tips that come to us are internal tips, friends of those who already work here. If they have a high level of job satisfaction and enjoy their workplace, they will talk about it // I want to spend my time with my employees here and now as I believe I can brand our company better by doing good for them...” (Interviewee 2)

How they work to influence the internal employer branding process can thus also influence the external.

### **4.3.2. Managers Opportunities to Contribute to the Internal Employer Branding Process**

Even though the managers are familiar with the employer branding strategy they do not receive training or guidance in the area from the company. They do not work explicitly with an employer branding strategy even if these activities are included in their daily work. The TA-manager explains the perception that the group managers have an obligation to contribute to the internal employer branding in the normal. At the corporate company, the new leaders also get training regarding the EVP and their three main values. The TA-manager also emphasizes the importance of the group managers to be qualified people who have a general interest in human beings alongside a stable financial situation and a strategic outlook. Similar, the TA-employee describes that the group managers are the most important component to maintain the internal employer branding in the daily, by engaging the employees. The managers have the opportunity to lead the employees in the right direction, in line with its culture and values. The manager has the opportunity to both encourage positive behaviours but also to take the discussion when employees do not act in a way that is consistent with the company's values. The TA-employee believes that in the company it is at least as important to help your colleagues as to make a good sale and therefore the culture can be created by the manager encouraging in the right way. If the manager only encourages results and sales, it entails a risk for other important things to be ignored, which the interviewee explains may not create economic value in the short term, but which is important from a cultural perspective and thus internal employer branding.

Furthermore, the managers also have a united perception that everyone in a managerial position has a great opportunity to influence and control internal employer branding. One manager describes it as following:

“... I am completely convinced that everyone is very important, understand me the right way, a strong CEO and strong management are needed, but I think the nearest manager, no matter where you are in the organisation, is super important. Because it is usually the person you are coached by, the person you get feedback from and the one who can influence the daily working life.” (Interviewee 7)

Furthermore, it is explained by the managers that all initiatives taken in a role with employee responsibility affect how the company is perceived by current employees. It is described that the role as a manager means being the company's extended arm. Furthermore, the managers explain that a larger perspective is applied when coaching an employee or when different decisions are made, to create a long-term effect. By this, the

managers imply to be constantly loyal to the company by reflecting on the whole picture, for example, what kind of consequences decisions will lead to. One example mentioned is whether an employee should be fired or not. Then it is important to reflect on which decision leads to the most positive consequences and how it will influence the company's reputation both internally and externally.

Furthermore, the managers explain that they can influence internal employer branding in various ways. However, there is a united perception that employees who experience job satisfaction and identification with the company culture leads to a positive experience which affects what they spread about the company, internally and externally, thus the employer branding process. For that reason, the managers have a focus on creating job satisfaction for the employee, as well as applying the company culture in their teams. There are three prominent understandings to be found in managers' perceptions of influencing this, which is similar to what is presented in 4.3.1., on how leadership from a larger perspective affects internal employer branding. These are *applying the culture and vision* in their teams, *creating meaning* in their employees' daily work and *creating development opportunities* for their employees.

Managers applying the *culture and vision* work in their team is explained as important, because the values mean that everyone should work together which creates a sense of community that the managers believe can contribute to job satisfaction and identification with the company culture. With these values, it becomes clear how the company wants all managers and employees to behave and treat colleagues. One manager explains this as follow:

“... we as group managers have the opportunity to carry on what the company, in general, strives for and get our teams to work in the same direction and behave in the way that is in line with our values. To create this culture and that it actually permeates all teams within the company. We have the opportunity to actually control daily that according to the keyword, for example, we actually work *together*, that it is not a word that we just throw with, but it is something we try to make a reality of, that we do things together. I think that is a big part of what we as managers can contribute when it comes to internal employer branding.” (Interviewee 3)

They also describe that it is important for a manager to constantly remind employees of the values. Furthermore, that the manager *creates meaning* for the employees in their daily work is described as important to increase motivation, commitment and professional pride which the managers believe can contribute to job satisfaction and identification with the company culture. To create meaning, they consider involving the employee, creating understanding and emphasizing the employee's contribution to the whole, is significant (for a more detailed description see section 4.2.4.1.). The managers believe that if the employee experiences a sense of meaning, for example in the form of professional pride, it will make a strong contribution to internal employer branding:

"... if you are proud of what you work for, you will almost automatically be proud of where you work and if you are proud of where you work, you will also genuinely spread positive aspects of the company further." (Interviewee 6)

Moreover, that the manager *creates development* opportunities (as described in section 4.2.4) for the employees is explained as stimulating and therefore impact their job satisfaction and identification with the company culture, thus the internal employer branding process. Thus, they believe job satisfaction and identification with the company culture has an impact on the internal employer branding as it leads to positively experiencing the company, which affects the company attraction and the retention of employees.

### **4.3.2. Summary**

The interviewees have an agreed view that there is a strong connection between leadership and internal employer branding. At a strategic level, it emerges that it is important that the stated and marketing image of the company both internally and externally is in line with reality. For this reason, the company's leadership must be characterized by the pronounced culture and its values and visions. It is explained that *culture and vision work, communication and development opportunities* are the main leadership initiatives which are perceived to contribute to the internal employer branding. It is thus strategic initiatives that are implemented at the operational level.

Furthermore, there is a clear perception that the managers have opportunities and responsibilities to contribute to the internal employer branding process. It indicates taking a holistic perspective also in the operational leadership. Furthermore, it appears that the managers believe *applying the culture and vision* in their teams, *creating meaning* in their employees' daily work and *creating development opportunities* for their employees leads to job satisfaction and identification with the company culture. This has an impact on the internal employer branding as it leads to a positive experience of the company, which affects the company's attraction and the retention of employees, also, how these employees spread their positive perception of the company, internally and externally.

### **4.4. A Compiled Interpretation of the Collected Empirical Data**

It appears from the collected empirical material that leadership has an impact on the internal employer branding process in the organisation, both from an organisational level and an individual level. From an organisational level, it is shown an emphasize on the company culture. From an individual level, it is shown an emphasize on the managers' activities. Although the managers' role does not actively involve strategic work with employer branding, the results show that they actively work to develop and retain current employees and are therefore involved in the internal employer branding process. Based on the results, the main factors that can contribute to the internal employer branding process, both from an organisational and individual level are the work with the company's values and visions, creating meaning in the employees' daily work with a focus on communication and also development opportunities. This is reflected in how the managers describe the leadership in the organisation and their own activities. It also appears an emphasize on the internal focus to spread outside the organisation, thus affecting the external employer branding process. Linked to the purpose of the study, this is, in summary, how the interviewees describe the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding, even though the results also present a nuanced picture with different approaches from the managers.

## 5. Theoretical Interpretation and Discussion

The previous chapter focused on the collected empirical data with a hermeneutic analysis. The following chapter discusses the results of the hermeneutic analysis in relation to the theoretical framework, based on the different themes of the study. The first two sections, *Leadership* and *Internal Employer Branding* present an interpretation and discussion of the themes separately which enables the last section, *Leadership and Internal Employer Branding*, to present the themes in connection to each other and thus process the study's three research questions: *What significance does the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding have for the organisation? According to the managers, what are the main activities contributing to the internal employer branding process? What role does organisational culture have in the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding?* Lastly, implications of the study are presented.

### 5.1. Leadership

It emerges that the managers in the study have a role that involves employee and budget responsibility, similar to what Andersson et al. (2020) connect to management. At the same time, they have a strong focus on the leadership component, which often is expected to be included in a managerial role (Andersson et al., 2020). The focus that the managers have on leadership becomes clear as they reflect on their leadership and how it can be improved. It is also influenced as an expectation by the organisation as the managers attend different lectures and training concerning leadership. The managers emphasize a view of leadership that entails supporting and driving a group forward, similar to Yukl (2013) describing leadership as a process of influencing a group's activities towards a certain goal. Based on the material collected, it appears that the managers strive for leadership that is similar to how favourable leadership is described in research. This will be analyzed and discussed below.

#### 5.1.1. Leadership by Lifting the Employee

It appears in the result that the managers are focused on getting support from their team members. They believe it is crucial to bring the employees along, as they alone cannot achieve anything. Similar, Andersson et al. (2020) emphasize that leadership and management are dependent on employees' efforts to able to function, that an organisation's success depends on the employees' competence and commitment, where a manager cannot alone know or solve everything. It becomes clear that the managers are focused on their employees as they are aspired to lift them and showing their importance to create motivation and commitment. It can be linked to the servant leadership style which Greenleaf (2002) explains infers to give priority and to serve the people they lead. Because the managers cannot achieve results themselves, they need their employees to achieve goals and results. According to this theory, the servant leader can thus enable this, as they are focused on the employees and their development (Greenleaf, 2002; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016). Furthermore, Andersson et al. (2020) explain that influence occurs through strong empathy towards the employee which also indicates similarities as the managers have a strong focus on increasing the employees' well-being. To maintain the employees' efforts that are crucial for the work to function, the servant leadership style can thus be interpreted as beneficial.

### **5.1.2. Meaning-Creating through Trust and Inclusion**

Research shows that meaning is created through social interaction which facilitates the relationships, work and interaction in an organisation (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). Similarly, the managers describe that they try to create meaning by lifting their employees. An interpretation of the managers' descriptions regarding lifting your employees, is that loyalty and trust between employees and managers are a prerequisite. It emerges when the managers explain that they show confidence in their employees, encourage them and apply freedom with responsibility. It can be explained by Andersson et al. (2020) emphasizing the concept of employeeship, that the employees' role is central and independent, meaning that they actively lead their own work. Similarly, the managers explain the importance of daring to trust your employees. The importance of creating meaning for the employee can be supported in research as it is explained to be one of the most central parts of an organisation as it can increase acceptance from employees, which contributes to increased respect, trust and confidence (Ellström et al., 2016; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

### **5.1.3. Leading through Values**

Based on the results, it appears that the managers do not agree on whether there is a picture of how a leader should act in the organisation. On the other hand, they use culture and values as tools. Dabirian et al. (2017) explain that organisational culture is characterized by the values and activities an organisation performs. Schein (2010) points out that organisational culture is shared and learned values that have emerged in work and adaptations at the workplace. These shared and learned values are evident in this company, for instance as the managers describe a familial and united spirit, both in their teams and in the company at large. One manager exemplifies this by describing an effort to create a "gang culture" in the team, by the values and visions. This because the managers believe striving for visions leads to the team feeling a strong unity and belief in themselves. This example of leadership can be connected to the transformational leadership style which is characterized by a leader with charisma, developing the employee through feelings, values and visions (Andersson et al., 2020; Bass., 2000). It can thus be interpreted that the managers' leadership is shaped by the organisational culture and that they at the same time work to create this culture in their teams.

### **5.1.4. The Complexity of Leadership**

The fact that there are several connections between the managers' perception of leadership and how it is described in research, can strengthen Alvesson and Einola's (2019) remarks on the appealing and positive images and claims regarding leadership that is central today. To use these positive leadership theories (e.g. the transformational leadership style and the servant leadership style) and talking about the leader as a person are also criticized because it do not lead to a qualified understanding of organisational life and manager-subordinate relations and because there are many factors included in a practical leadership situation (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Andersson et al., 2020). However, in this study, the use of leadership theories aims to understand how the leader's actions can affect internal employer branding and not on personal qualities of the leader. Andersson et al. (2020) explain that the servant leadership style is focused on leadership through actions, which makes it interesting to use in this study. On the other hand, the transformational leadership style is also applied which has a greater focus on the leader as an exceptional individual. In this study, however, it is rather used to explain different

focus areas that the managers have. Although the servant leadership style turns the relationship between the leader and the follower around, it still implies having the leader in focus (Andersson et al., 2020). Accordingly, these theories can be perceived as simplifying. Later research instead highlights collective leadership which is understood through a relational phenomenon that develops in social interactions (Andersson et al., 2020). There is thus an understanding that different prerequisites are required for the managers to be able to lead in a certain way. Criticism can therefore be directed at this study's focus on how the managers and how a leadership style can influence the process. However, this is one part of the study's focus and therefore used in a combination with other insights regarding leadership from an organisational perspective. Besides, no direct assumptions are made, only implications to create an understanding. Therefore, they are reviewed to be useful.

## ***5.2. Internal Employer Branding***

The corporate group has a more elaborated strategy for the entire employer branding process, compared to the company. This becomes clear as the group has a developed EVP, which the company does not have. The corporate group started with conducting a bottom-up approach of interviewing, to find out what their statements, promises and values are. In research, this step is considered to be crucial in the process of developing an EVP, as an understanding of the organisation is important, to be able to create an employer offer that is clear, true and conveys a feeling (Parment et al., 2017). First after this bottom-up approach of interviewing, they launched the marketing initiatives which can be interpreted to be significant as they increased the chances of the image corresponding to the true identity of the company. This can be explained as important by Barrow and Mosley (2005) and Collins and Stevens (2002) since they imply that a prerequisite in creating a reputation is transparency, which means that the internal identity reflects external actors' expectations and perceptions of the organisation accurately. If employees do not recognize the identity, the company risks losing valuable employees (Backhaus, 2016). Furthermore, Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) explain that an EVP is an important factor in creating attractiveness and that this offer should be marketed both externally and internally. This is also pointed out by the TA- manager, who believes that in addition to increasing the attraction of external people, it also creates positive effects on the internal employees' commitment, especially since it reminds the employees of what a good workplace it is. Similar, an organisation's defined EVP is described by Heger (2007) as an important factor for employee engagement and that less competitive EVP results in a weakened employer brand.

However, even if these EVP initiatives have not yet been applied in the Swedish company, they are shown to have a focus on internal employer branding, specifically by working with the company culture. The TA-employee explains that they work to live the company's values and vision and to wear the company hat. Similar Hanin et al. (2013) explain that internal employer branding aims to get employees to act as ambassadors for their organisations. Furthermore, the TA-employee explains working with the culture in this way aims to lead everyone in the same direction as the business area has different and wide functions. It can be supported by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) explaining the importance of working with the culture and the designed values to permeate the entire organisation, as it contributes to unity and a strong loyalty to the employer. In addition to working with their values, the company also have different activities such as culture ambassador initiatives, events, and workshops to constantly remind and engage

the employees in the company culture. It can be seen as beneficial, as Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) explain the importance of working with various activities and strategies to strengthen internal employer branding. It can thus be interpreted as if the company have worked with the identity aspect, however, could develop this by working with the profile and image aspect, to create an EVP (Parment et al., 2017).

Moreover, working with employer branding does not come without risks and therefore it is important to work with it in a favourable way (Edwards, 2009). The corporate group's work with the EVP shows that they minimize the risks of marketing a superficial image of the company that does not correspond to reality. However, as described by Maxwell and Knox (2009) it is one thing to express an opinion and a different thing to then in practice live by them which can indicate that the participants in the EVP-case interviews do not necessarily act what they expressed. Also, an interpretation is that big organisations cannot control and coordinate everything and thereby influence how the organisation is perceived as an employer. The Swedish company that has not yet a developed EVP can be interpreted to risk marketing a wide and unestablished perception of the company. However, internally, the company is perceived to work with the internal culture from a strategic level to an operational level. Thus, it can be interpreted to minimize the risk of the company internally marketing the culture in a way that does not correspond to reality.

Furthermore, the managers believe it is the employees who decide if the workplace is good or bad and thus affect how the company is perceived internally and externally. Similarly, Parment et al. (2017) explain that the best way to employer branding is when an employee on their own initiative shows that they get on well in their workplace. The results indicate that the organisation and the managers have a strong focus on working with their current employees to create a strong employer brand, which is further described below.

### **5.2.2. Developing Employees**

It appears that the company and the managers have a focus on working with employees' development opportunities, both in the current role and for a potential new role. Internal employer branding partly concerns developing existing competence within the organisation, through various activities and strategies (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Foster et al., 2010; Theurer et al., 2018). Furthermore, the managers perceive that they have great possibilities to influence the employees' development opportunities, through various activities and strategies. This is shown, for example, through the annual employee appraisals, one-on-one conversations, coaching and different projects such as "potential leaders" and internships. Furthermore, the managers also describe that development opportunities affect the individual's motivation and commitment because there is a goal to strive for. It also indicates possibilities to build a career at the company. For example, managers at the claims settlement department recruit employees internally, by training talents from the customer service department. This can be supported as favourable for both the organisation and the individual as Kraimer et al. (2011) explain that career opportunities within the organisation can lead to employees becoming more motivated and performing better results in their work. Since most of the managers have made a career at the company, it indicates that opportunities exist. It is mainly because of the development opportunities they have been offered that they have stayed at the company, which can be explained by Tanwar and Prasad (2016) who describe that development



opportunities in the workplace are an aspect that can be of great importance to an employee when he or she is considering leaving an organisation. Recruiting employees internally can thus lead to the workplace becoming more attractive as development opportunities are offered.

The managers also point out that development opportunities are important for the company regarding competitive advantage which can be referred to O'Donnell and Garavan (1997) and Bhattacharaya et al. (2014) who explain that strategic and well-planned competence development work is crucial for organisations' future supply of competence. Furthermore, Ellström (1992) describes that competence development means various actions that can be taken to influence the supply of competence in a company's internal market and carries out to develop employees' competence in relation to current or future tasks. It appears that the company does this, by developing the employees into other roles at the company. For example, their need of developing talents for roles where competence is rare shows the importance of competence development also for the organisation. This interpretation can be supported by Bhattacharya et al. (2014) who explain that reviewing and evaluating the competence within the organisation is an important strategic approach in knowledge companies. Based on this, the work with developing employees is important for both the individual and the organisation. The described challenges in giving employees development opportunities are the limitation, the timing and the endurance of the employees. It can be related to unfulfilled expectations risking employees to leave the company (Edwards, 2009). However, these challenges are factors that the managers themselves often cannot influence, which explain the complexity of leadership and its dependence on the context. It is thus important to understand the managers, as well as the organisation's prerequisites.

### **5.2.3. Retaining Employees**

The results indicate that the managers have a strong focus on employees' job satisfaction, which can be seen as a contribution to internal employer branding, since Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe that one of the main goals in internal employer branding is to create job satisfaction for the employees.

Thus, the managers emphasize creating meaning for the employee as important. As previously explained, development opportunities are an influential part that the managers describe. In addition to this, contribution and participation for the employee are explained. It can be achieved by, for example, increased responsibility and being included in various problem-solving situations and concerns. According to the managers, this thus contributes to a sense of meaning for the employee, which contributes to job satisfaction. It can be supported by Barrow & Mosley (2005) and Guzzo and Noonan (1994) who explain that employees who are allowed to participate and influence their working conditions perform better at work and that employees' job satisfaction can be negatively affected if changes are made without them having the opportunity to influence. Furthermore, communication is in the research described as important for meaning-creating, to help individuals interpret events and experiences, which affects their actions (Canning & Found, 2015; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Similarly, the managers describe that they try to maintain and increase the employees' well-being and job satisfaction by regularly talking and asking questions about it. This is significant to catch the employees who do not experience job satisfaction, as well as to not forget to support the high-performing employees. To retain employees, the managers believe you must invest the

time and energy needed to find a needs-adapted solution and support, to increase the employee's job satisfaction. It can be explained by Barrow & Mosley (2005) who emphasize the relevance for an employer to work with symbols of recognition and appreciation, as the need of feeling seen and appreciated is deeply rooted in most people and therefore can contribute to job satisfaction. Also, the managers explain motivating the employee is important, similar to Kressler (2003) explaining that motivated employees feel a higher degree of job satisfaction and that lack of motivation can risk employees leaving the organisation. However, even if most employees for example appreciate and get motivated by side projects and development, there are still employees who can perceive it as stressful and negative. Accordingly, job satisfaction can be different for different people. An interpretation is thus that this further emphasizes the importance of good communication between manager and employee.

Furthermore, the managers believe fellowship and joy with colleagues have an impact in retaining employees, at the same time as it should be okay not always to be "high on life". Holtom et al. (2006) explain that dissatisfaction at work can be seen as the most common reason for employees to resign voluntarily, which emphasizes the importance of the studied managers' work with an open climate so that the employees dare to address their dissatisfaction. This can be considered as beneficial as research suggest that democratic and inclusive leadership is related to employees experiencing a high degree of trust and contributes to a better work situation with a low risk of employee turnover (Puni et al., 2016; Tse et al., 2013). However, some managers do not allow negativity in the group. An interpretation is that a possible negative side effect of this can be that necessary criticism to develop the workplace does not emerge. On the other hand, they describe that everyone has the opportunity to raise concerns to the manager individually, which can minimize the risk of dissatisfactions or important criticism being covered.

Moreover, the managers explain that it is important to have the "right" values to be able to feel job satisfaction with the company from a long-term perspective. The significance of this can be explained by Barrow and Mosley (2005) who describe that employees' identification with the organisation arises when they experience that the organisation's and their own values and wishes agree with each other. This can explain the managers perceiving internal recruitment as beneficial. In external recruitment, the managers also explain that they during interviews discuss the values with candidates. It can thus be interpreted that the managers through the stated values can more easily make candidates and employees understand the culture of the company which can be supported in research as it is explained that values can more easily make the employees understand and apply the culture (Dabirian et al., 2017; Schein, 2010). Thus, as the managers perceive, it can be seen as important to discuss the values already in the interview stage to see if the candidates can identify with them. However, a reflection can be made on how much it affects as people during an interview focus on getting the job and may adapt accordingly. Also, what they say may not agree with how they would act in a real situation. On the other hand, it can lead to more insights than if it is not discussed during the interview. It can also be the other way around, as the managers describe a challenge with not living up to what is promised, as, changes at the company are constantly taking place. Again, this can be risky for an organisation as unfulfilled expectations often lead to the employee eventually leaving the organisation (Edwards, 2009). However, the importance for employees to share the company's values can be emphasized by Dabirian et al. (2017) and Schein (2010) who explain that employees who feel an identification

with the organisation and their colleagues contribute to creating a strong culture in the organisation.

The challenges described with retaining employees in the company are the competition with other organisations and the difficulty to meet the employees' development ambitions. It can be explained by Sievetzen et al. (2013) who indicate that it is a challenge for organisations to retain employees, as it becomes more common for people to change jobs as a step forward in their careers. Furthermore, the TA-department conduct exit interviews, which can be interpreted as important for an organisation as Bhattacharya et al. (2014) consider it as a requirement for organisations to be in constant readiness for development to meet the demands of society and individuals.

### ***5.3. Leadership and Internal Employer Branding***

It is shown that leadership both at an organisational level and an individual level can affect the internal employer branding process. It will further be described below, divided into two different sections.

#### **5.3.1. The Relationship Between Leadership and Internal Employer Branding**

The TA-interviewees describe that there is a strong connection between leadership and employer branding. They also emphasize that leadership has a great impact on employees' commitment and actions which affects the internal employer branding process. In research, the connection is described similarly as Barrow and Mosley (2005) explain that many successful employer branding initiatives have shown leadership to be important. The TA-manager explain the importance of the strategic work to embrace the employee promise and for the leadership to be aligned with what the company tell their employees. The corporate group thus have an alignment between the EVP and the leadership guidelines, thus what they require leaders to do is the same as what is promised to newcomers. It can thus be interpreted as the organisation's leadership contribute to the image and message of the organisation to be real, which is important when working with employer branding (Foster et al., 2010). It appears that the managers also perceive leadership as significant for the employer branding process, as it affects, positively or negatively, what a person spreads about the company, internally and externally. Similar, it is explained in research that leadership is an important part of the communication work to strengthen credibility and to spread the corporate "spirit" further, thus organisation competence and excellence of leadership are amongst the foremost corporate reputation drivers (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Zeeshan et al., 2020).

Based on the result, the managers emphasize different parts of the organisation's leadership that affect employer branding, where the main parts are interpreted to be *culture and vision work, communication and development opportunities*. It can be supported by Foster et al. (2010) who explain that internal employer branding for instance can be expressed in the form of a good work environment and good development opportunities. It is explained that the *culture and vision work* is connected with the leadership's effect on internal employer branding because if the company leads through its vision and culture, it spreads to the employees. This can be related to Yukl (1999) who explains that leadership has a significant part in creating a corporate climate, which impact employees' attitudes and inspiration. Also, the importance of the organisation to work with this can be supported by Raj and Jyothi (2011) and Berthon et al. (2005) who explain that a

credible and supportive culture with good leadership is the most important factor to succeed with internal employer branding. However, even though it emerges from the interviewees that the company has a strong corporate culture with common values, Alvesson (2013) explain that a united and unique culture at a company is poorly substantiated. Thus, it is important to be aware that the described strong culture is based on the interviewees perceptions and other employees in the organisation do not necessarily share this opinion. Therefore, Alvesson (2013) emphasizes that the concept of organisational leadership culture is preferable as it refers to the higher level of an organisation and ignores the fact that the majority of employees may not share this culture. However, he also explains that this leadership culture can still influence the framework for the business and strategic direction. Based on these managers perceptions, there is a clear and strong leadership culture as they use the common values and visions as tools. This can thus have an impact on the organisation in general. Similarly, Mosely (2007) explain that there is a clear link between the leadership and the organisation's stated values, which affects the shaping of the organisational culture and the employee experience. For example, leaders' internalization of the organisation's values has an impact on employees motivation (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Also, it emerges from the result that united perceptions of values can contribute to a stronger collaborative work in the organisation and between departments, which can be supported by Parment et al. (2017) who explain that if there is a common perception of the identity and values at a company, it facilitates decision-making and cooperation in the organisation. This demonstrates the advantage of the studied company's focus on the culture and vision work, both for the individual and the company.

Furthermore, based on the result, it is explained that the organisation's *communication* in leadership affects the internal employer branding process. This because clear communication influences the loyalty and commitment of employees. It can be supported by Barrow and Mosley (2005) who mean that leadership is an important part of the communication work to strengthen credibility and the employer brand. For instance, it is important to be clear and explain the culture at the company already during the interviews and the employees must understand the logical reasons for the less positive aspects of the work role. If this information is communicated, they believe it leads to more employees being behind these less positive parts. This can be supported in research as communication is described to be a central tool to inform and help the employees create meaning for different events in the organisation (Canning & Found, 2015). Also, that this contributes to employees gaining a greater understanding which can lead to a more positive perception of the company (Alvesson, 2013). The company's focus on the values can be interpreted to be an advantage in the communication work, as it specifies what the culture means. Similarly, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) explain that values can be used to market the organisational culture internally.

Moreover, based on the result, it is explained that the *development opportunities* are connected with the leadership's effect on internal employer branding as it leads to greater commitment and to the company being more attractive. This can be supported by research, as it is explained that good development and career opportunities are significant for an organisation and the internal branding process (Foster et al., 2010; Kraimer et al., 2011).

Furthermore, both current and potential employees are to consider when working with employer branding (Lievens et al., 2007). It appears in the result that it is important to

work with these leadership initiatives not only for the employees to be retained but also for them to attract employees. This because employees within the organisation have genuine and strong voices and if they have a good experience, they will talk to friends and acquaintances about it, which is seen as more valuable than advertising articles. It can be explained by Schultz et al. (2000) who describe that good external rumours are created if the organisation is an attractive employer, which is why internal employer branding has been given a greater role. Thus, the managers mean that it is important to internally create a positive experience for the employees so that they can recommend the company to others. This perception can be supported in research as it is described that the key to internal employer branding is that employees convey a positive image of the employer and constitute marketing (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Bergstrom et al., 2002). A strategy the company applies within this is for example that they work with internal suggestions for recruitment.

Concludingly, it is indicated that there is a relationship between leadership and internal employer branding. Also, that culture and vision work, communication and development opportunities are the main parts of the organisation's leadership that affect the internal employer branding. The influence of leadership can be strengthened by Zeeshan et al. (2020) who emphasize that organisations should focus on their leadership and their internal employer branding to retain and attract competence and to be able to create a long-term good reputation. Thus, the relationship between the leadership and internal employer branding is also important for the internal and external marketing of the organisation to be permeated in the company.

### **5.3.2. Managers Opportunities to Contribute to the Internal Employer Branding**

The results show that managers have great opportunities to contribute to the internal employer branding process. The TA-manager explain that their group managers must be qualified people who have a general interest in human beings alongside a stable financial situation and a strategic outlook. Based on this, it can be interpreted that a balance between leadership and management is expected of the group managers (Andersson et al., 2020). The TA-interviewees also emphasize that the group managers are an important component to maintain the internal employer branding in the daily, by engaging the employees. Similar, Barrow and Mosley (2005) explain that leaders in the organisation through their commitment and involvement can influence how employees experience the employer brand. Furthermore, the managers describe that everyone in a managerial position has a great opportunity to influence and control internal employer branding, as initiatives taken in a role with employee responsibility affect how the company is perceived by current employees. In the result it appears that the role as a manager means being the company's extended arm by leading with the organisation's hat. To lead with the hat is thus explained with a focus on low prestige and loyalty by applying a holistic perspective which can be linked to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) who explain that the goal of the entire employer branding process is to create strong loyalty to the employer brand, which for employees will result in identification and involvement with the company. Moreover, Barrow and Mosley (2005) explain that the nature of leadership is important for the implementation of a successful employer brand. Even though the results do not show clear orientations on different leadership styles, there are indications. This emerges by the managers focusing on different activities within internal employer branding that can be linked to the different styles.

The result shows that managers can influence internal employer branding in various ways but that their main focus is on the employees' job satisfaction and identification with the company, mainly by applying the *culture and vision, creating meaning and development opportunities*. According to this view, it leads to employees being developed and retained. Thus, the managers can influence by *applying the culture and vision* through implementing and living the company's values and visions in their teams. This leads to the team making the culture reality in the company, working in the same direction and a sense of belonging. That managers can influence this, can be supported by Kashyap & Rangnekar (2014) who explain that the leader has a great influence on how employees take on the organisation's values and perceive them, thus how they understand the true identity of the organisation through the leaders' actions. An example that is taken up by the managers is how the value together is not only a word that they throw with, but try to make a reality of, by actually doing things together. This is evident both in the daily work but also through various popular activities that are carried out together. The importance of the nearest manager using the values in this way can be linked to Alvesson (2013) who explains that leadership as an interactive influence where personal contact is included can affect the closest employees to change values and ways of thinking, more than for example speeches or reward systems.

Furthermore, that the managers work with values and visions in this way can be connected to the symbolic leadership style as Alvesson (2013) means indicate influencing values, ideas and ways of thinking, thus, cultural impact. It is practised by focusing on what is important, by setting a good example using a special language and stimulating interpretation in a special way, which can be linked to how the managers lead by the values and vision. It contributes to the creation, reproduction and change of cultural patterns. If these are in line with the company's stated culture and visions, it can be linked to internal employer branding as it implies inspiring your employees and making them understand and behave in line with the organisation's employer brand promise, to make the message behind the brand visible and real (Foster et al., 2010). It can thus be interpreted as the purpose of leadership and internal employer branding is the same, as Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) also describe that the internal employer branding process means that values are internalized by employees and that these thus become an integrated part of the organisational culture. Furthermore, the results present that their company culture means balancing between creating good sales and helping your colleagues, which emphasizes the importance of the managers encouraging in the right way. This because only encouraging sales entails risks for other important things, from for example an organisational culture perspective, to be ignored. An interpretation is that this balance can be difficult for both the employee and the manager to achieve. Similarly, Alvesson (2013) explain that organisational culture can be perceived as simplifying or beautifying because the reality of an organisation is complex and therefore it becomes more connected to communicated ideals to strive for. Also, that a challenge with symbolic leadership to achieve credibility and thereby influence the imagination, thinking and emotions of those affected. However, based on what the managers describe, the culture and specifically the values are not anything that they only talk about but apply in the daily work and interactions. It can also be interpreted to be strengthened by a close relationship between the employee and manager, as Alvesson, (2013) explain the importance of knowing the mindset on which those you are trying to influence are based, not to create a culture based on a distant and superficial view of the phenomena one seeks to allude to.

Moreover, the result indicates that the managers can influence by *creating meaning* in the employees' daily work, to increase motivation, commitment and professional pride. That managers can influence this, can be supported by Ellström et al. (2016) who explain the leader has a central role in creating meaning. To create meaning (as more described in section 5.2.3.) the managers consider involving the employee, creating understanding and emphasizing the employee's contribution to the whole, is significant. Similarly, Weick et al. (2005) explain that creating participation, freedom with responsibility and being interested in the employees by motivating, supporting and engaging are important factors. The managers' way of creating meaning can be linked to the transformational leadership style as these leaders focus on creating participation and involving employees in the decision-making process and thus enhance their positive assessment of the organisation by feeling more comfortable at work (Bass, 2000). Also, the servant leadership style where the focus is on the employees and their will (Andersson et al., 2020). The importance of these leadership styles can be strengthened by the example described by an interviewer, where an employee wanted to resign because of a previous manager who did not include the employee and therefore did not recognize his needs. Based on the servant leadership theory, the manager would have benefited by focusing more on prioritizing the employee. It can also be connected to the managers strive for creating an open climate to gain trust from the employee to quickly capture dissatisfaction, as the servant leadership style is focused on prioritizing the employees (Andersson et al., 2020). Furthermore, Zeeshan et al. (2020) explain that transformational leadership positively influences corporate reputation as it outlines employees' optimistic opinion of the corporate reputation, which can thus support the managers' perceptions of this leadership initiative impact on the internal employer branding. Sangeeta et al. (2017) also indicate that training managers in transformational leadership style lead to more engaged employees. However, working with clear expectations and possibilities to achieve these, are also described as important for creating meaning. These clear expectations can be linked to a transactional leadership style that is characterized as a way to satisfy short-term needs among employees in the form of instructions (Bass & Avolio, 1994). For that reason, it can be interpreted as advantageous to be adaptable as a leader. In some situations, clear instructions may be crucial while other situations allow greater freedom. Therefore, applying different leadership styles can be necessary. As Ellström et al. (2016) describe it can thus be an advantage for a leader to have both transformational and transactional approaches.

Furthermore, it appears that the managers can influence the process by *creating development opportunities* which can be achieved through their contacts and mandate within the company. These opportunities can lead to commitment and motivation. That managers can influence this, can be supported by Ellström et al. (2016) and Skule (2004) who explain that leadership can be reflected as an important factor for employees ability to learn and develop. Also, by Yukl (1999) who explain that the goal for the leader is to support the employee and develop his or her competence and the organisation as a whole. The managers focus on development and that they strive for encouraging the employees to bring up what they want to develop can be linked to the transformational leadership which refers to activating commitment to perform (Bass, 2002). Furthermore, their focus on creating opportunities for the employees can be linked to the servant leadership style. It becomes clear by the described sunshine story, as it involved the manager influencing the employee's opportunities by dressing the person with competence. Also, by using the contacts and mandate to get the person in to the desirable de-

partment. This example demonstrates similarities with how a servant leader act, as they focus on employees and their development which comes from a will to serve and care for others (Andersson et al., 2020). Kashyap and Rangnekar (2016) indicate that the role of servant leadership helps in building and influencing a positive employer brand image, which can thus support managers' perceptions of the impact of this leadership initiative on the internal employer branding.

Concludingly the managers' activities can contribute to the internal employer branding process by increasing the employees' job satisfaction and identification with the company. The main activities contributing are connected with applying the culture and vision, meaning-creating and development opportunities. This suggests practising several leadership styles such as a symbolic leadership style, a transformational leadership style and a servant leadership style. It is also indicated that employees' experience of job satisfaction and identification with the company will lead to a genuinely spread of positive aspects of the company. However, in research, it is also explained that an attractive employer creates a proud, committed and satisfied workforce (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Thus, it can be perceived as it goes both ways, that employees' job satisfaction affects internal employer branding, while an attractive employer brand leads to satisfied employees. Also, at the same time as it is indicated that dissatisfaction at work can be seen as one of the most common reason for employees to resign voluntarily, it is also indicated that employees' identification with the organisation through internalized norms and values, are more crucial than their job satisfaction, in terms of propensity to stay in the organisation (Holtom et al., 2006; Sparrow & Cooper, 2003). Thus, this demonstrates the importance of the company to work with both employees' job satisfaction and identification with the company.

#### ***5.4. Implications***

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyse the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding and how managers can contribute to the internal employer branding process. This study demonstrates that leadership affects the internal employer branding process, which is significant for an organisation to develop and retain employees. It also suggests that it affects through two different levels, strategically and operationally, which emphasizes the significance of the leadership at the operational level to reflect the leadership at the strategic level. This can be facilitated by clear company values and visions. Thus, at the *organisational level*, cultural work in the form of communication and well-founded values and visions are important for the leadership to affect the internal employer branding process. At the *individual level*, an employee-focused leadership from, for instance, a transformational, symbolic and servant leadership style, meaning-creating leadership as well as value-focused leadership is important for the internal employer branding process. Also, within both levels, development opportunities are significant. This thus affects the employees' job satisfaction and identification with the company, which contributes to the internal employer branding. Based on a pre-understanding I indicated that leadership affects the internal employer branding process, however, this study shows that within leadership there is an interplay between the organisational culture and managers' activities.





*Figure 2: Implications of the process*

This shows the importance of leadership that focuses on human beings and their needs. As it is indicated that beneficial leadership can positively affect internal employer branding, it means that leadership also can have a negative impact. For example, a leadership that does not consider the presented significant factors or that does not reflect the company's marketing of the identity internally and externally. In conclusion, this study presents the importance of the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding to market internally and externally, an image of the workplace that actually permeates the organisation. Also, that a beneficial leadership through the organisational culture and managers' activities, contributes to the internal branding process, which is important for the organisation's supply of competence. This is an ongoing process meaning that the different parts constantly influence each other.

## **6. Final Reflections and Suggestions for Further Research**

The last chapter of the study begins with a final reflection connected to overall methods and the content of the study, followed by suggestions for further research.

### ***6.1. Final Reflections***

It can be discussed to what extent it is relevant to interview managers about their leadership and how it can affect the internal employer branding process, as it is only viewed from one perspective. Perceptions from the employees' perspective had also been valuable to examine. Therefore, other methods such as an observation of the company and the managers or questionnaires with employees, other results and other conclusions could have emerged. This is based on the appearance of many positive aspects of the company, their leadership and culture. It can be interpreted as the managers act as ambassadors and consider this interview as an opportunity to highlight the company's positive aspects. However, since the interviews are the material collected, there is no basis for analyzing or deepening this perception. Even if criticism can be directed at the credibility of the study's method and the leadership reasonings, they are thus relevant based on the purpose of the study, aiming to interpret managers perspective. This could have been more difficult through, for example, observations, and therefore semi-structured interviews are considered to be a suitable qualitative method for this study.

Moreover, there are important aspects which are not considered in this study. For example, it is important to emphasize that even if this study indicates beneficial leadership styles, it is not possible to apply only one leadership style in an organisation. This because it is complex and includes many areas which are not presented in this study. In other areas, different leadership styles can be significant. As Andersson et al. (2020) describe, leadership is multifaceted and benefits from a diversity of perspectives. Also, salaries and benefits that can have an impact on internal employer branding are not examined, as it is limited to how leadership can influence the process. Furthermore, in research, the effect of working with employer branding is still quite uncertain (Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Moroko and Uncles, 2008). For that reason, it is possible to criticize the relevance of the study's implications, as it can be perceived as superficially grounded. On the other hand, the main purpose is not to analyze the results of employer branding, but primarily to regard relationships and to create an understanding of the process. Moreover, even though the concept of organisational culture mainly is considered positive, Alvesson (2013) describes that there can be risks with using the culture as a brainwashing mechanism that expresses power or that organisation's expressed values and ideas do not correspond to the company's practice, which leads to double standards. Although the interviewees describe positive aspects of the company's culture, it does not represent a common perception for the company's employees. This is not possible to investigate through this study and conclusions are formed based on the interviewees' perceptions and experiences.

There is thus an awareness that the implications only emerge from the results of this study and do not consider all aspects that may affect the internal employer branding process. However, it can still provide valuable knowledge for other insurance compa-

nies or similar organisations as well as for future research. As previously described in section 1.1., there are previous research showing the relationship between leadership and internal employer branding. However, there is less previous empirical research focused on the internal context and current employees than on the recruitment context and potential employees (Theurer et al., 2018). This research, focused on current employees for retention and development, has thus contributed to empirical research concerning the internal context. In leadership, it has also contributed by a focus on managers' activities, which has not shown to be prominent in previous research.

## ***6.2. Suggestions for Further Research***

To strengthen the study's implications, it would be interesting to investigate the employees' perceptions of whether the internal and external marketing of the organisation corresponds to what it is like to work at the company, concerning leadership and organisational culture. The results of this study are interesting but can be more nuanced and developed by also studying employees' perspectives on the phenomenon. For example, it would be interesting to explore how the employees in the teams where negativity in the group is not tolerated, experience the culture. Are they equally positive about this or do they perceive that necessary criticism does not emerge? Further research on leadership and internal employer branding that includes both the managers 'and employees' perspectives in the empirical data is thus considered as interesting. This could be done based on the results of this essay with a combination of a quantitative and qualitative study. For example, by questionnaires with employees to gather their general perceptions about leadership and employer branding. Based on the results from the questionnaires, interviews with some of the employees can then be conducted, to get a deeper picture of their perceptions. Results from this type of study can provide an overall picture of how the company's leadership and internal employer branding is perceived. Further research could also be to examine managers' perceptions of leadership and internal employer branding in other organisations. It would provide a broader picture of the phenomenon and also inspire organisations and managers how to contribute to the internal employer branding process. Furthermore, it would be interesting to carry out a comparison of leadership and internal employer branding in different types of organisations, to see what significance the context has. As a suggestion, by comparing the phenomenon in different industries or comparison between private and public organisations. It would also be interesting for further research to explore the relationship from a larger organisational perspective, how managers can be trained to beneficially effect the internal employer branding.

Moreover, internal employer branding is a relatively new concept with less previous research and thus it would be interesting if further research could examine how organisations and managers can work more concretely with internal employer branding. This by, for example, activities linked to development, as it, based on this study, is essential for organisations. This study is based on an HR cycle perspective, however, several scientific perspectives are relevant to investigate the area of the study. Based on this, a suggestion for further research can be to investigate the purpose from a different scientific point of view, with this essay as an example of previous research, to investigate a more complimentary picture of the area.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1

Customer Services	Claims Settlement	The Support Unit
<p><u>2 Departments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Outbound</i> is a part time employment which involves selling insurance through outgoing calls.</li> <li>• <i>Inbound</i> is a full-time employment which involves customer service and selling insurance through incoming calls.</li> </ul> <p>Each department includes approximately 50 employees.</p>	<p><u>4 Departments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Animal</i></li> <li>• <i>Personal Injuries</i></li> <li>• <i>Home and Villa</i></li> <li>• <i>Sickness and accidents</i></li> </ul> <p>The claims adjuster's task is to ensure that the insured receives the correct compensation for the reported damage or is denied compensation if the insurance does not cover the reported damage.</p> <p>Each department includes approximately 5- 15 employees.</p>	<p><u>4 Departments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Operations Excellence</i></li> <li>• <i>Talent Acquisition</i></li> <li>• <i>Education and Support</i></li> <li>• <i>Business and Quality Development:</i></li> </ul> <p>The employees have different working areas and work as project leaders. For example, they work on how to develop the customer experience regarding digital systems.</p> <p>They are approximately 5 employees within the Business and Quality Development team.</p>
<p>6 interviewees are managers within these departments.</p>	<p>2 interviewees are managers within these departments.</p>	<p>2 interviewees are managers/employees within these departments.</p>

## ***Appendix 2***

### **Informationsbrev**

Hej!

Jag läser masterprogrammet i personal- och arbetslivsfrågor vid Lunds universitet. Nu skriver jag min masteruppsats i arbetslivspedagogik och har valt att inrikta mig på förhållandet mellan intern Employer Branding och ledarskap samt hur chefer kan bidra till den interna Employer Branding-processen. För att kunna analysera detta har jag valt att intervjua er chefer. Jag beräknar att intervjun tar cirka 60 minuter och jag uppskattar att ni tar er denna tid. Jag föredrar om intervjun kan spelas in (endast ljudinspelning) för att underlätta bearbetningen av data. Inspelningen kommer att transkriberas så fort som möjligt och sedan raderas. Det insamlade materialet kommer enbart användas för studiens ändamål och lämnas inte vidare till obehöriga parter. Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan avbryta intervjun när som helst. Din medverkan kommer inte att kunna kopplas till dig personligen då varken företagets namn eller ditt namn kommer att skrivas ut. Dina svar kommer således behandlas konfidentiellt och du kommer kunna ta del av undersökningen i juni 2021.

Tack på förhand!

Med vänliga hälsningar,

Daniella Möller Almasiodu

## ***Appendix 3***

### **Interview Guide 1 - Manager**

“Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. As you received information about in the information letter, this is part of my master's thesis in HR and the purpose is to investigate managers' perceptions of internal employer branding and leadership. This interview will take about 60 minutes, your participation is voluntary, and you can cancel the interview at any time. Your participation will not be linked to you personally. Is it okay that I record the interview with the purpose of being able to analyse the data more easily? It is only for my own use and as soon as the essay is approved and submitted, the recording will be deleted. Do you have any questions before we start?”

### **Introductory questions**

- Describe yourself and what you do here.
  - *What is your education background?*
  - *How long have you had this position?*
  - *What are your responsibilities?*
  - *What made you want to work here? Were your expectations fulfilled?*

- Describe your organisation.
  - *What would you say characterizes your organisation and your brand? What do you think that the organisation is associated with?*
  - *What are the benefits of working at your company?*

## **Leadership**

- Describe what leadership means to you.
  - *What qualities do you think a leader should have?*
  - *Which quality do you think is most important?*
  - *How do you work to achieve this qualification?*
- Do you perceive that there is a pronounced image of how leaders should be or act in your company? If so, how?
  - *Is it an image that you think is favourable or do you believe that the leadership should be different?*
  - *Do you have any guidelines? If not, do you wish there were any guidelines?*
  - *Do you perceive that you live up to the guidelines?*
- How do you think your employees see you as a manager?
  - *Does that image agree with how you would like to be as a leader?*
- How do you perceive the relationship between leadership and employer branding?
  - *Do you think that leadership is important for the internal employer branding? If yes, how?*
- How do you perceive that leadership can affect the organisation's employer branding?
  - *Any specific activities?*
  - *How do you perceive that you, in a role as a manager, can contribute?*

## **Employer Branding**

“Employer branding is a strategy including both external and internal activities aiming to communicate and promote what makes the company different and desirable to current and potential employees”.

- Do you know if and how your company works with employer branding? Are you aware of any specific activities?
  - *Do you get any guidance or training in the employer branding area from your company? If yes, how?*
- Does your company have any values or attitudes that you want your employees to have?
  - *How can you ensure that applicants have these values or qualities before they are hired?*

- *Are you promoting your company as part of your job? If yes, how?*
- How do you work to attract new employees?
  - *Do you believe that you as a manager have a responsibility to actively engage in attracting potential employees? If yes, are you personally actively doing something?*
  - *Did you ever get an employee through networking? If yes, how, and what was the outcome? If no, why not?*
  - *As manager and as a company, do you think you attract the right people? If yes, how? If not, why?*
- What are the challenges of attracting new employees?
- How can you yourself influence development opportunities for your employees?
  - *Do you have guidelines for this?*
  - *Why is it important to work with this?*
- What are the challenges of providing development opportunities for your employees?
- How do you work to retain your employees?
  - *Have you ever managed to retain an employee that wanted to leave? If yes, what did you do? If not, what do you think you would do in that situation?*
  - *How do you follow up on those who choose to quit? (E.g., Employee surveys or exit interviews)*
- What are the challenges of retaining employees?
  - *How can your employees voice their dissatisfaction?*

### **Concluding information**

“That was my last question, is there something you want to add? Thank you for participating! What is happening now is that I will analyse the results from the interviews. In June I will submit the thesis and if it is approved, it will be published at Lund University website. If you have any questions, please contact me.”

## ***Appendix 4***

### **Interview Guide – Talent Acquisition**

“Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. As you received information about in the information letter, this is part of my master's thesis in HR and the purpose is to investigate managers' perceptions of internal employer branding and leadership. The purpose of this interview with you as an TA-employee, is to examine the company's work with employer branding from a

larger perspective. This interview will take about 60 minutes, your participation is voluntary, and you can cancel the interview at any time. Your participation will not be linked to you personally. Is it okay that I record the interview with the purpose of being able to analyse the data more easily? It is only for my own use and as soon as the essay is approved and submitted, the recording will be deleted. Do you have any questions before we start?"

### **Introductory questions**

- Describe yourself and what you do here.
  - *What is your education background?*
  - *How long have you had this position?*
  - *What are your responsibilities?*
  - *What made you want to work here? Were your expectations fulfilled?*
- Describe your organisation.
  - *What would you say characterizes your organisation and your brand? What do you think that the organisation is associated with?*
  - *What are the benefits of working at your company?*

### **Employer Branding**

- What does employer branding mean to you?
  - *What does employer branding mean for your organisation?*
  - *Why do you work with employer branding?*
- What is the strategy for strengthening your brand? What do you think this leads to?
  - *How does your processes look like in employer branding?*
- Do you give any guidance or training regarding employer branding to your managers?
- Do you offer any guidelines or training regarding leadership for your managers? If yes, how?
- How do you perceive the relationship between leadership and employer branding?
  - *Do you think that leadership is important for the internal employer branding? If yes, how?*
  - *How do you perceive that leadership can affect the organisation's employer branding?*
  - *Any specific activities?*
  - *How do you perceive that managers can contribute?*

### **Attracting talents**

- How do you work to attract talent?
  - *How does the process and strategies look like?*

- How do you see that your work with this has affected your recruitment process? (E.g. more applications).
  - *Do you seek out or rely on candidates to find you?*
- Does your company have any values or attitudes that you want your employees or applicants to have?
  - *How do you ensure that you hire the employees that share those values?*
  - *How do you work to reach different target groups?*
- What are the challenges of attracting new talents?

### ***Developing employees***

- Do you offer development opportunities for your employees?
  - *For all levels in the organisation?*
  - *In what ways are development opportunities offered? Do you offer or should the employee take initiative for this?*
  - *Why is it important to work with this?*
- What are the challenges of employee development?
  - *How do you see that providing development opportunities influences the employees individually and the organisation at large?*

### ***Retaining employees***

- What do you think makes employees want to stay in your organisation?
- How do you work to make employees want to stay in your organisation?
  - *Do your employees choose to stay for a long time, or do they resign quickly?*
  - *What do you think is the reason for this? Are there any special "patterns"? If so, how do you work with this?*
  - *How do you follow up on those who choose to quit? (E.g. Employee surveys or exit interviews)*
- What are the challenges of retaining employees?

### **Concluding information**

“That was my last question, is there something you want to add? Thank you for participating! What is happening now is that I will analyse the results from the interviews. In June I will submit the thesis and if it is approved, it will be published at Lund University website. If you have any questions, please contact me.”

## Appendix 5

### Intervjuguide – Chefer

”Tack för att du tar dig tiden att delta i min studie. Som du fick information om i informationsbrevet är detta en del av min masteruppsats i HR och syftet är att undersöka cheferns uppfattningar om intern employer branding och ledarskap. Denna intervju tar cirka 60 minuter, ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan avbryta intervjun när som helst. Ditt deltagande är konfidentiellt. Är det okej att jag spelar in intervjun i syfte att enklare kunna analysera datan? Det är endast för mitt eget bruk och när uppsatsen är godkänd och skickad kommer inspelningen att raderas. Har du några frågor innan vi börjar?”

### Inledande frågor

- Beskriv dig själv och dina uppgifter här.
  - *Vad är din utbildningsbakgrund?*
  - *Hur länge har du haft den här positionen?*
  - *Vad är ditt ansvar?*
  - *Vad fick dig att börja arbeta här? Har dina förväntningar uppfyllts?*
- Beskriv din organisation.
  - *Vad skulle du säga kännetecknar organisation och varumärket? Vad tror du att organisationen är associerad med?*
  - *Vilka är fördelarna med att arbeta på detta företag?*

### Ledarskap

- Beskriv vad ledarskap betyder för dig.
  - *Vilka egenskaper tycker du att en ledare borde ha?*
  - *Vilken egenskap tycker du är viktigast?*
  - *Hur arbetar du för att uppnå denna kvalifikation?*
- Uppfattar du att det finns en uttalad bild av hur ledare ska vara eller agera inom ditt företag? Om så är fallet, hur?
  - *Är det en bild som du tycker är gynnsam eller tycker du att ledarskapet bör vara annorlunda?*
  - *Har du några riktlinjer att utgå från? Om inte, önskar du att det fanns några riktlinjer?*
  - *Uppfattar du att du lever upp till riktlinjerna?*
- Hur tror du att dina anställda ser dig som ledare?
  - *Stämmer den bilden med hur du vill vara som ledare?*
- Hur uppfattar du förhållandet mellan ledarskap och employer branding?
  - *Tror du att ledarskap inom organisationen är viktigt för den interna employer branding process? Om ja, hur?*



- På vilket sätt tror du att ledarskap kan påverka organisationens employer branding? (Motivation, meningsbyggande, trivsel, stöttning, belöningssystem, provision, bonus-kultur etc etc)

- *Några specifika aktiviteter?*
- *Hur uppfattar du att du i rollen som chef kan bidra? Hur tror du att du kan påverka genom Relationsbyggande? Meningsskapande? Kommunikation?*

## **Employer Branding**

”Employer branding är en strategi som inkluderar både externa och interna aktiviteter som syftar till att kommunicera och främja det som gör företaget annorlunda och önskvärt för nuvarande och potentiella medarbetare”.

- Vet du om och isåfall hur ditt företag arbetar med employer branding? Känner du till några specifika aktiviteter?

- *Får du någon vägledning eller utbildning inom employer branding från din arbetsgivare? Om ja, hur?*

- Har ditt företag några värderingar eller attityder som du vill att dina anställda ska ha?

- *Hur kan du se till att sökande har dessa värderingar eller kvaliteter innan de anställs?*
- *Marknadsför du ditt företag som en del av ditt jobb? Om ja, hur?*

- Hur arbetar du för att attrahera ny personal?

*Tycker du att du som chef har ett ansvar i att aktivt engagera dig när det kommer till att attrahera ny personal? Om ja, gör du personligen aktivt något?*

- *Har du lyckats anställa någon via nätverkande? Om ja, hur och vad blev resultatet? Om nej, varför inte?*
- *Tycker du att du som chef och som företag attraherar rätt personer? Om ja, hur? Om inte, varför inte?*

- Vilka är utmaningarna med att attrahera ny personal?

- Hur kan du själv påverka utvecklingsmöjligheterna för dina anställda?

- *Har du riktlinjer för detta?*
- *Varför är det viktigt att arbeta med detta?*

- Vilka är utmaningarna med att ge dina anställda utvecklingsmöjligheter?

- Hur arbetar du för att behålla din personal?

- *Har du någonsin lyckats behålla en anställd som ville sluta? Om ja, vad gjorde du? Om inte, vad tror du att du skulle göra i den situationen?*
- *Hur följer du upp de som väljer att sluta? (Till exempel medarbetarundersökningar eller exitintervjuer)*

- Vilka är utmaningarna med att få anställda att stanna?

- *Hur kan dina anställda uttrycka sitt missnöje?*

## **Avslutande information**

”Det var min sista fråga, är det något tilläga? Tack för din medverkan! Det som händer nu är att jag kommer att analysera resultaten från intervjuerna. I juni skickar jag in arbetet och om den godkänns kommer den att publiceras. Kontakta mig om du har några frågor.”

## **Appendix 6**

### **Intervjuguide – Talent Acquisition**

”Tack för att du tar dig tiden att delta i min studie. Som du fick information om i informationsbrevet är detta en del av min masteruppsats i HR och syftet är att undersöka cheferns uppfattning om intern employer branding och ledarskap. Syftet med denna intervju med dig som TA-anställd är att undersöka företagets arbete med employer branding ur ett större perspektiv. Denna intervju tar cirka 60 minuter, ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan avbryta intervjun när som helst. Ditt deltagande är konfidentiellt. Är det okej att jag spelar in intervjun i syfte att enklare kunna analysera datan? Det är endast för mitt eget bruk och när uppsatsen är godkänd och skickad kommer inspelningen att raderas. Har du några frågor innan vi börjar?”

### **Inledande frågor**

- Beskriv dig själv och dina uppgifter här.
  - *Vad är din utbildningsbakgrund?*
  - *Hur länge har du haft den här positionen?*
  - *Vad är ditt ansvar?*
  - *Vad fick dig att vilja arbeta här? Uppfylldes dina förväntningar?*
- Beskriv din organisation.
  - *Vad skulle du säga kännetecknar din organisation och ditt varumärke? Vad tror du att organisationen är associerad med?*
  - *Vilka är fördelarna med att arbeta på detta företag?*

### **Employer Branding**

- Vad betyder employer branding för dig?
  - *Vad betyder employer branding för din organisation?*
  - *Varför jobbar ni med employer branding?*
- Vad är strategin för att stärka ditt varumärke? Vad tror du detta leder till?

- *Hur ser dina processer ut inom employer branding?*
- Ger ni någon vägledning eller utbildning kring employer branding till era chefer?
- Har ni någon vägledning/riktlinjer eller utbildning kring ledarskap till era chefer? Om ja, hur?
- Hur uppfattar du förhållandet mellan ledarskap och employer branding?
  - *Tror du att ledarskap inom organisationen är viktigt för employer branding? Om ja, hur?*
- På vilket sätt tror du att ledarskap kan påverka organisationens employer branding?
  - *Några specifika aktiviteter?*
  - *Hur uppfattar du att chefer kan bidra?*

### **Attrahera talanger**

- Hur arbetar ni för att locka talanger?
  - *Hur ser processen och strategierna ut?*
- Hur ser du att ert arbete med detta har påverkat rekryteringsprocessen? (Exempelvis fler ansökningar).
  - *Searchar ni eller litar ni på att kandidater hittar er?*
- Har ditt företag några värderingar eller attityder som ni vill att de anställda eller sökande ska ha?
  - *Hur ser ni till att du anställer de anställda som delar dessa värderingar?*
  - *Hur arbetar ni för att nå olika målgrupper?*
- Vilka är utmaningarna med att locka till sig nya talanger?

### **Utveckla medarbetare**

- Erbjuder ni utvecklingsmöjligheter för era anställda?
  - *Inom alla nivåer i organisationen?*
  - *På vilket sätt erbjuds utvecklingsmöjligheter? Erbjuder ni eller ska medarbetaren ta initiativ till detta?*
  - *Varför är det viktigt att arbeta med detta?*
- Vilka är utmaningarna med utveckla medarbetare?
  - *Hur ser du att tillhandahållande av utvecklingsmöjligheter påverkar medarbetarna individuellt och organisationen i stort?*

### **Behålla medarbetare**

- Vad tror du får anställda att stanna kvar i din organisation?
- Hur arbetar ni för att få medarbetare att stanna kvar i organisation?

- *Väljer dina anställda att stanna länge eller säger de upp sig snabbt?*
  - *Vad tror du är orsaken till detta? Finns det några speciella "mönster"? Om så är fallet, hur arbetar du med detta?*
  - *Hur följer du upp de som väljer att sluta? (T.ex. medarbetarundersökningar eller avslutningsintervjuer)*
- Vilka är utmaningarna med att få medarbetare att stanna?

#### **Avslutande information**

”Det var min sista fråga, är det något du vill tilläga? Tack för din medverkan! Det som händer nu är att jag kommer att analysera resultaten från intervjuerna. I juni skickar jag in arbetet och om den godkänns kommer den att publiceras. Kontakta mig om du har någrafrågor.”



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