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Exploring how employer branding and employee engagement interact

A case study in two organizations with different employer brand success

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Abstract

Employee engagement and employer branding are highly relevant in today's labor market, where employers no longer hold all the cards, but the employees assert their demands as well. Furthermore, there is a scarcity in research exploring the interaction between employee engagement and employer branding. This study investigates through a case study how employee engagement and employer branding interact in two organizations, by utilizing both quantitative- and qualitative data. The organizations participating are Axis Communication with a strong employer brand, and a municipality with a weak employer brand.

The engagement levels and eNPS scores were measured based on 3079 survey responses of secondary data from both organizations, and 12 interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights behind the quantitative results. Data revealed that the organizations had a surprisingly small difference in the level of engagement compared to their big difference in the eNPS score. Data showed that employees in the organization with a weak brand were engaged due to the meaningful nature of their work in the public sector as a municipality, but not specifically to the organization as an employer, since their energy derived from the impact their job had on society. Furthermore, their low eNPS indicated weak loyalty toward the organization as an employer. Axis with a strong brand, clearly fostered engagement through various strategies which resulted in high engagement towards the organization, evidenced by a high eNPS score reflecting employee loyalty and positive word of mouth. A positive loop was identified, where the high engagement and eNPS further strengthened their employer brand since employees felt proud to be part of an attractive company, becoming even more engaged.

The examination of employer branding and employee engagement within the organizations reveals an interaction between the concepts. However, no linear relationship was found in the interaction. Even though similar levels of engagement were identified, one organization's brand is boosted by this, while the other organization is still facing branding and recruitment challenges.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Employer branding, Work-fit, Work-life balance, Meaningful work, Meaningfulness, Engagement

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1. Introduction

Imagine a recipe for organizational success. A recipe that increases profitability, decreases sick leave, results in higher shareholder returns, enhanced productivity, and results in greater customer satisfaction. A recipe that not only gives great organizational results but also makes sure employees love what they do and do it extremely well. It may sound too good to be true, but there is a concept delivering all these advantages, and it is called *employee engagement* (Derek, 2009; Brilliant Future AB, 2024; Crawford et al., 2010; Harter et al., 2002; Brilliant Future AB, 2024). Employee engagement can be defined as a combination of the individual's capability to work, including energy and power, and the willingness to work, including involvement and dedication. It further includes terms such as passion and commitment (Bakker et al., 2011; Imperatori & Springerlink, 2017). The concept can also be described as a state where employees are involved in their work in a physical, cognitive, and emotional way. (Kahn, 1990).

Employee engagement stands out as a critical determinant of organizational success and competitive advantage, thereby, working for employee engagement brings positive effects to the whole organization (Macey et al., 2009; Rich et al., 2010). If the organization on the other hand is passive and does not address the concept, it leads to negative consequences. Bored teams with low engagement show a profitability of only 0,77%, compared with engaged teams who have a profitability of 7,25% — an increase of 841,5% (Brilliant Future, 2024). Moreover, it is not just the organization that benefits positively from employee engagement. Research shows that individuals who feel engaged tend to stay longer in the workplace, feel happier, and more satisfied (Chakraborty & Ganguly, 2019). This means employee engagement is not just a recipe for organizational success, but also a recipe for the individual's well-being and commitment. These benefits clearly incentivize the importance of employee engagement for organizational- and individual success, and show that employee engagement leads to more good outcomes and fewer bad outcomes (Larsson et al., 2020).

For today's organizations, it is not just a choice to work for employee engagement, it is a necessity for success. However, fostering engagement amongst employees does not come without effort. An organization cannot passively wait for engaged individuals to start working for them, they must actively work to foster a workplace that provides the conditions for it to flourish. This could be done by for example offering meaningful work, room for employees

to connect with each other, professional- and personal development as well as facilitating the employee's life by work-life balance (Penna, 2007; Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011).

To foster engagement, the *internal* and *external employer brand* plays a pivotal role, as the brand is one of an organization's most valuable assets (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Attracting the best-fit employees has never been more pressing due to a transformation within the labor market, dominated by a highly educated generation and a fundamental shift in employee expectations (Hiltrop, 1999). Employers no longer hold all the cards — the employees assert their demands as well. Employees now seek more than just a paycheck, they crave roles that offer a self-fulfilling journey, marked by autonomy, flexibility, and a sense of purpose (Hiltrop, 1999).

For employers to find the right candidates who will be engaged in the organizational values and strategy, they cannot simply just exist as employers. They need to brand themselves externally with the right values and ensure these values are maintained internally in the organization. In this way, organizations can attract the best-fitted candidates who align with the values. Thereby they create the best conditions for employee engagement — a foundation for organizational- and individual success (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Chakraborty & Ganguly, 2019). The Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS) can be utilized to measure the employer brand's attractiveness, by indicating employee loyalty and attractiveness towards the company amongst its current employees (Brilliant Future, 2024).

Thus, the employer branding process influences employee engagement by ensuring that current employees are invested in the organizational culture and strategy. Through passion, commitment, and dedication, the employees' engagement fosters a positive culture and serves as powerful endorsements of the organization's values and mission. Their engagement also reinforces the brand by the employees being promoters, spreading words about the organization (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Brilliant Future, 2024). While employer branding highlights what the employer can offer the employee (Berthon et al., 2005), employee engagement focuses on what the employee can contribute to the organization (Larsson et al., 2020). This demonstrates the intersection of employee engagement and employer branding, which will be further elaborated on in this thesis.

1.1 Problem Statement

There is extensive research on both employee engagement and employer branding. However, there is a scarcity of research within the area regarding how the two concepts interact, which this thesis aims to explore. In a world where employee engagement is increasingly recognized as a vital component of organizational success, the challenge arises in how to effectively attract and retain engaged employees (Derek, 2009). While research demonstrates the benefits of employee engagement, a gap remains in understanding how employer branding strategies could impact the level of employee engagement, and vice versa.

This gap in knowledge presents an area for investigation, particularly in the evolving labor market where a shift in employee demand has occurred (Hiltrop, 1999). Furthermore, as organizations strive to build and maintain strong employer brands to remain competitive, understanding the interplay between the brand and employee engagement becomes crucial. Effective employer branding could be a strategic tool to not only attract top talent, but also to foster a more engaged and productive workforce. Conversely, high levels of employee engagement can possibly enhance an organization's brand, making it more attractive to potential employees.

By studying this, the two specific organizations in this case study will gain valuable insights into how their employer brand and employee engagement interact. This research could potentially provide inspiration for other organizations by highlighting this potential interaction.

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how employer brand and employee engagement interact in two specific organizations, one with a strong employer brand, and one with a weak one. The study will also provide insights into the understanding of employee engagement factors within the specific cases.

These insights will have the potential to directly benefit the participating organizations by providing valuable context-specific knowledge and practical implications. This can potentially bolster their employee engagement and employer branding efforts. By integrating

the concepts of employer brand and employee engagement, this study will shed light on the interconnections of these aspects and their importance for organizational success. This understanding can provide the organizations with insights on the strategic allocation of resources towards cultivating and nurturing both their brand and employee engagement initiatives. Moreover, the insights from this study will have the potential to serve as a source of inspiration for other organizations seeking to understand how their employee engagement and employer branding interact.

Furthermore, the thesis aims to bridge a gap in existing research on the interaction of employee engagement and employer branding by employing a mixed methods approach. The study seeks to go beyond the limitations of solely using either quantitative- or qualitative method, which would base the study on either numerical comparisons or subjective experiences alone. By instead combining numerical comparisons and subjective experiences, utilizing both quantitative data and qualitative insights, this research provides an exploration of how employer brand and employee engagement interact in the two organizations. This methodology aims to yield deeper insights, uncovering patterns and factors within this specific case study, which most likely would not have been achieved with only one method.

1.3 Research Questions

To facilitate the exploration of the purpose of the thesis, three research questions have been carefully selected. Since this thesis utilizes mixed methods, the research questions have been formulated to address both the quantitative data of 3079 secondary data survey responses, and the qualitative data of 12 interviews.

The main question is derived from using both the quantitative- and qualitative data to gain an understanding of how employee engagement and employer branding interact in the two organizations. The first sub-question addresses the quantitative data solely, while the second sub-question further qualitatively explores the reasons behind the numbers derived from the first sub-question.

The main question is thereby:

- *How do the employer brand and employee engagement interact?*

Followed by the sub-questions which lay the foundation for discovering the main question:

- *What are the Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS) and the level of employee engagement within each organization?*
- *Which factors contribute to these branding and engagement results?*

1.4 The participating organizations

In this section the two participating organizations in this case study will be presented. One of the organizations has chosen to be anonymous, and it is a municipality in Sweden. This organization will thereby be named as “The Municipality” throughout this thesis.

Axis Communications (Axis) is a Swedish company known for its network-based solutions in physical security and video surveillance. Axis has been part of the Canon Group since it was acquired in 2015. They develop and provide innovative network solutions that enhance both security- and business performance. Axis was founded in 1984 and has its headquarter in Lund, Sweden. They have a global presence of around 4,000 employees in over 50 countries. Their focus is on creating safer environments and improving operational efficiency through advanced security and surveillance technologies (Axis Communications, 2024).

The Municipality is a municipality in Sweden that offers a variety of services and activities for residents and entrepreneurs. With a focus on education, housing, business, culture and care, the aim is to create a sustainable and pleasant environment for everyone who lives and works in the municipality. Through commitment and participation, residents are invited to be an active part of social development in the municipality. There are around 1000 employees in The Municipality (Contact person, The Municipality, 2024).

1.5 Demarcations

In the expansive domain of talent management, this case study narrows its focus to employer branding and employee engagement, representing the attraction and retention phases of talent management. Employer branding encompasses attracting by setting the organization apart and making it appealing to potential employees, while also addressing the internal aspect of retaining current employees by ensuring their engagement with the organizational culture and

strategy (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The theoretical framework will thereby remain concentrated on these two aspects of talent management.

Moreover, the concepts of employer branding and employee engagement encompass broad scopes and intersect on various factors, such as compensation and benefits, organizational culture, and leadership practices (Crawford et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the concept also includes various sub-concepts. Due to time constraints, this study will not be able to focus on all of the sub-concepts, which means demarcations have had to be made as further described in this chapter.

The study will not focus on monetary rewards. This choice is made due to the fact that employees seek much more than the monetary rewards, namely a self-fulfilling journey with autonomy, flexibility, and a sense of purpose (Hiltp, 1999). While leadership is undeniably important in fostering engagement (Crawford et al., 2010), it is chosen to not focus on it in this study due to time constraints. Fully exploring leadership as a factor for engagement would become a comprehensive focus, and in this process, it could take focus from other important factors. Leadership is complex, and it would not be fair to only cover a small part of it. Thereby it is recognized that studying how leadership influences employee engagement could be interesting, but it is not within the scope of this research. To keep this study clear and focused, it is decided to stick to examining employee engagement and employer branding without delving into leadership.

Moreover, while motivation is recognized as a critical factor in driving employee engagement (Thomas, 2020), the study does not delve into this concept. This choice arises from the time constraints and to prioritize exploration of less researched factors such as the interaction of employer branding on employee engagement. Motivation has been extensively studied over a longer period compared to engagement (Turner, 2020; Larrison et al., 2020), which is why engagement serves as a focal point for generating new insights in this particular case study

Lastly, the organizations this case study is based on, differ in the way that one organization is a privately owned company, while the other organization is a public sector entity. This means that the organizations differ in terms of their purpose and goals. Awareness has been given to this aspect, but due to time constraints, no theoretical framework has been used to delve

deeper into exactly how privately owned companies and public sector entities may differ in engagement and branding, and how they may interact.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis commences with a review of various and relevant literature focusing on employer branding and employee engagement, and how they interact. The concepts are defined, their value is explained and ways of measurement the concepts. Moreover, the theoretical framework highlights other factors influencing both employer branding and employee engagement.

Following the theoretical framework, the methodology section outlines the research approach, data collection methods, and data analysis methods within the both quantitative- and qualitative methods. In the final section, a critical approach is discussed and limitations are presented.

After the methodology, the results from both the quantitative and qualitative data are presented. The analysis and discussion are further presented together, with findings from the study. This involves connecting the results to existing literature and exploring as well as comparing the two cases. Finally, the conclusion is presented, including this study's contribution, possible practical implications, and suggestions on future research.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework lays the groundwork for the concepts used in this study. The concepts of employer branding and employee engagement will be defined and described first, followed by a presentation of the intersection of the two concepts. Figure 1 below illustrates how the concepts of employer branding and employee engagement interact, as well as other concepts related to either employer branding, employee engagement, or both.

The intersection of employer branding and employee engagement will be presented and further explained in chapter 2.3, presenting in a clear way how the two concepts intersect. This is crucial as the focus is on exploring how the employer brand and employer engagement interact with each other. Following this, other concepts that this study found to

be pivotal within the two specific organizations, namely; *work-fit*, *meaningful work*, *work-life balance* and *personal- and professional development*, will be presented, as illustrated in Figure 1.

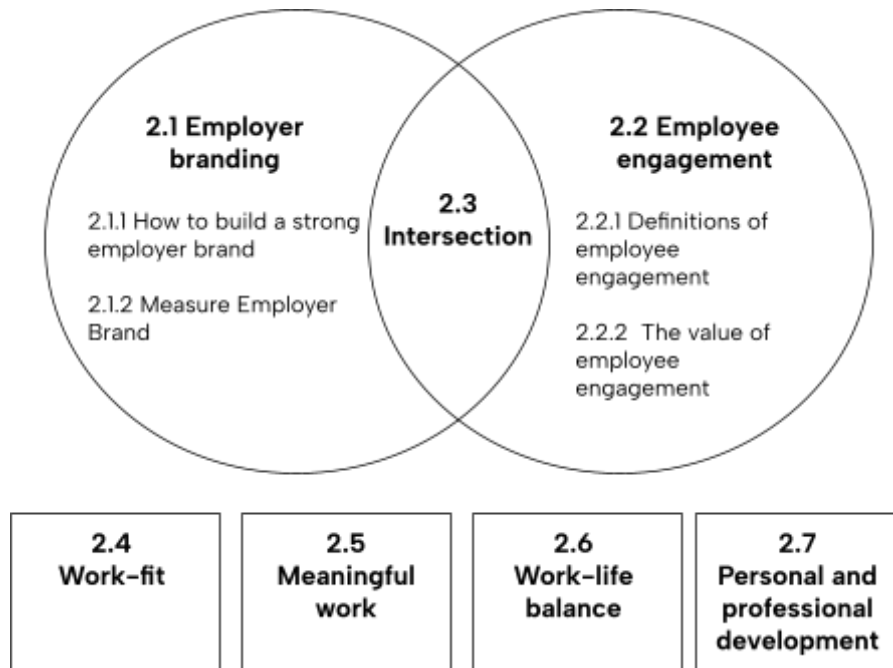


Figure 1. Overview of the theoretical framework.

2.1 Employer branding

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), brands are one of the organization's most valuable assets. A brand is meant to identify the products or services of a specific seller, aiming to differentiate them from competitors. However, it is not only tangible products that can be branded, but also people, places, and organizations (Peters, 1999). Employer branding is thereby a differentiation regarding an organization's attributes as an employer, in relation to the competitors, focusing on the organization's uniqueness when it comes to the employment offerings and/or the environment (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Moreover, the employer brand is not only about marketing the employer *externally*, it is about the *internal branding* as well. The alignment between the brand externally and internally is a crucial focal point for employee retention and engagement since what the

candidate is drawn to from the external perspective, must be lived up to internally (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2016).

External employer branding is about attracting the right people to an organization, which is the first step to creating a competitive edge within human capital. The concept has many definitions. Amber and Barrow (1996, p. 187) see the employer brand as a “*package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company*”. Moreover, Sullivan (2004) defines it as a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regard to a particular firm. Berthon et al., (2005) mean it is about whether an employer seems attractive to the potential applicant, which depends on the perceived benefits the potential employees see if they would be employed by the organization. Thereby, employer branding is about what the employer can offer to the employee, which can make them differentiate from competitors, and attract the best-fit candidates.

As mentioned, employer branding is not only about promoting what makes the organization different and desirable for its potential employees externally, it is also about *internal* employer branding to current employees. Proposed by the Conference Board (2001), the employer brand creates an identity of the organization as an employer, which encompasses its value system, policies, and behaviors toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and retaining both current and potential employees. Internal branding is about ensuring current employees’ engagement in the organizational culture and the organization's strategy (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

In the last decades, organizations have allocated a lot of resources to employer branding. This is not surprising considering the evidence that effective employer branding leads to competitive advantage, helps employees internalize company values, and assists in employee retention (Conference Board, 2001). Moreover, it is argued that employer branding has become a vital part of human resource management for several reasons. Firstly, the shift in employment whereas small firms can offer more involvement for the employee, than large firms can. Secondly, firms demand more multiskilled talents to tackle the complexity and fast-paced world and economy. Thirdly, employees switch jobs more often, due to increased

job mobility. Thereby, organizations compete in the market of employees, to attract the most appropriate and best-fitted candidates (Chambers et al., 1998).

Hiltrop (1999) argues that a new and highly educated generation has entered the labor market, who aim for development, autonomy, flexibility, and meaningful work. The author further means that employees today do not only see their careers as traditional jobs, but as a path of personal and self-fulfilling development. Ewing et al. (2002) sees the need for expansion in employer branding as a consequence of the increasingly knowledge-based economy, where employers have to compete for the best-skilled employees.

2.1.1 How to build a strong employer brand

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) propose that the employee branding process is established in three steps. The first step involves the organization developing a value proposition that will be manifested in the employer brand. The value proposition is created by gathering information about the organizational culture, management styles, characteristics of current employees and impressions of the quality of offerings. From this, a concept is developed of the particular value the specific organization can offer employees (Sullivan, 2002). It is important that this representation aligns with the actual reality of the organization and its offers. The value proposition that is developed, will then be served as a central message carried by the employer brand to attract best-fitted candidates (Eisenberg et al., 2001).

The second step involves marketing the value proposition developed by the organization. This includes reaching out to the targeted group of potential employees through external marketing efforts, showcasing the value the organization can offer them, and identifying the best-fitted candidates who also align with the organization's values. This marketing effort is not only designed to attract potential employees but also to enhance the overall image of the organization. Therefore, the marketing of the employer brand should be consistent with the organization's broader branding initiatives (Sullivan, 2002; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

While the second step in the branding process is to market the value proposition externally to attract talents, the third step focuses internally on retaining the current employees (Sullivan, 2002, Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The third step is thereby centered on internal marketing, which involves the organization branding itself to its current employees. This phase, as

emphasized by Froom (2001), is crucial as it should demonstrate the alignment of promises made during the attracting stage with the organizational culture, thereby fostering employee retention and avoiding disappointment. Hence, it is imperative that the value proposition established in stage one accurately reflects what the organization delivers. Internal branding also aims to cultivate commitment among the workforce toward the organizational values and goals. This can be achieved by systematically exposing employees to the value proposition, thereby shaping the organizational culture around its goals and strategies. Through this process, the organization cultivates a culture where employees naturally align with the organization's vision and objectives (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

In summary, building a strong employer brand involves crafting a compelling value proposition, marketing it externally to attract talent, and internally to retain employees. This approach aims to ensure alignment between organizational promises and culture, fostering commitment and engagement by attracting individuals whose values align with the organization's (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In understanding the effectiveness of these efforts for assessing and quantifying the impact of employer branding initiatives, measurements are required. In the next chapter, a way to measure the employer brand will be further explored.

2.1.2 Measure Employer Brand

In this study, where the purpose is to explore the interaction of the employee engagement and employer brand within the two organizations, having an understanding of how to measure the employer brand is valuable.

Brilliant Future is a company that elevates employee relationships by finding ways to measure concepts such as employee engagement and employer brand. Their measurement methods are based on statistical analysis, including factor analysis and regression analysis. Additionally, they base their methods on extensive literature and research on employee engagement and employer branding. Their measurements are regularly validated against their database, which contains over a million records from employee surveys across various organizations in different industries, making the results considered generalizable as they yield consistent results across different organizations (Brilliant Future, 2024).

Brilliant Future measures the employer brand by using the Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS). This score measures how attractive the company is amongst its current employees. The measurement tool was primarily developed to measure customer loyalty by a Net Promoter Score (NPS) but has further been developed to measure the employer brand by measuring the current employee's loyalty (Kaufman, 2016; Reichheld & Markey, 2011; Brilliant Future, 2024).

The eNPS is measured by Brilliant Future by asking one question to the employee group investigated: "*How likely are you to recommend the company as an employer to a friend?*". The question is answered on a scale from 0 (not likely at all) to 10 (very likely). Those who responded with 9 or 10 are called "promoters", which are loyal and enthusiastic employees who have a strong relationship with the company and actively recommend the employer to others. As an organization, it is the promoters you aim to have the most of. Those who respond with 7 or 8 on the question are "passive". These employees are satisfied but not particularly enthusiastic employees. They could be lured away to another employer, thereby not that loyal. Lastly, those who respond 0 to 6 are "detractors" who are dissatisfied employees and do not have a good relationship with the company. They often speak negatively about the company. As an organization, you want as few detractors as possible (Brilliant Future, 2024).

The number of "promoters" is then subtracted by the number of "detractors", giving a number between -100 to 100, resulting in the eNPS-score. What constitutes a good number varies across industries, countries, and cultures, but a benchmark is that 0 is a *good* score, above 20 is *very good*, and above 50 is *outstanding*. This means everything below 0 is considered a *bad* score. Study shows that organizations with higher eNPS and thereby higher employee loyalty and engagement, are organizations related to higher profitability (Brilliant Future, 2024).

Another way to measure employer brand is by Universum (Universum, 2024), a leading provider of talent research and employer branding expertise, annually releases its Most Attractive Employer Rankings across over 20 countries through their global talent survey, "CareerTest by Universum". This survey measures the employer brand, based on professionals and students outside the organization's perceptions of it. It is measured in

various talent demographics, including business, engineering, IT, natural sciences, law, and humanities. Universum's ranking methodology places paramount importance on statistical rigor, relevance, and impartiality. Their commitment to transparency establishes their rankings as a trusted reference point for both employers and professionals (Universum, 2024).

However, one should bear in mind that Universum is a private company conducting research and advisory specializing in employer branding. However, they are a member of ESOMAR, the global organization for market research and data analysis. This indicates that they are committed to upholding the highest ethical standards, industry guidelines, best practices, and adhering to the ICC/ESOMAR International Code of Conduct (Universum, 2024). The awareness of this, and that Brilliant Future is a private company as well, is further discussed in section 3.6, *Limitations*.

2.2 Employee engagement

The interest in researching employee engagement has surged over the past few decades due to its recognized value for organizations (Turner, 2020). Before employee engagement was explored as a concept, organizations mainly focused on areas such as employee satisfaction, motivation, and commitment, with a limitation on what individuals feel about their workplace and what they get from it. Engagement still focuses on this, but it also adds other important factors, such as what the individual contributes to the organization and how competent they are (Larsson et al., 2020). Thereby, engagement highlights not only what the employee gets out of being a part of the organization, as promoted in the employer brand, but also what the employee contributes to the organization. This means that engagement goes beyond the individual focus, adding the organizational aspect. Bakker et al. (2011) state that engagement can be seen as a combination of the individual's capability to work, including energy and power, and the willingness to work, including involvement and dedication.

2.2.1 Definitions of employee engagement

While the concept of employee engagement now has developed, terms such as passion, commitment, involvement, energy, and dedication are usually related to it (Imperator & Springerlink, 2017). An explanation of the concept originates from Kahn (1990) who

describes it as a state where employees are involved in their work in a physical, cognitive, and emotional way. Due to the lack of general agreement and consensus on how to define employee engagement and what the concept actually means, there are an extensive amount of different definitions in the literature. Moreover, researchers cannot agree on a name for the concept. Some argue that it should be called *employee engagement*, while others suggest it should be called *job engagement* or *work engagement* (Rich et al., 2010). Larsson et al. (2020) argue a reason for the nonagreement about a definition, is because an engagement driver for someone can decrease engagement for someone else. This complicates the task of achieving consistently strong engagement across all employees, as there is not a single path to success in this regard. However, it allows for the use of different approaches to address the diversity and differences among employees.

Another aspect that plays a role in the difficulty of a common definition, is that both individuals and organizations change all the time. This also affects and changes the solutions one uses for increasing engagement. What can be engaging drivers for an individual today, can change over time, and vice versa. Engagement is dynamic and always a work in progress that changes. No engagement solution is permanent. Engaging drivers differ from all employees, since engagement originates from the employee's subjective perception and preferences. This means there is not one way to achieve and create employee engagement for all employees (Larsson et al., 2020). Furthermore, numerous instruments have been developed to measure employee engagement, and there continue to be questions about how engagement is conceptualized and measured, which is another factor making it difficult to create a general definition for the concept (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Bailey et al, 2017).

2.2.2 The value of employee engagement

Employee engagement stands out as a critical determinant of organizational success and competitive advantage (Macey et al., 2009; Rich et al., 2010). Larsson et al (2020) demonstrate that it is hard to find something more valuable for organizations, groups, and individuals than employee engagement. Engaged employees are also often very open to new things, think more creatively, and come up with innovative ideas, showing an entrepreneurial spirit (Gawke et al., 2017). High employee engagement tends to achieve superior performance metrics, including higher shareholder returns, enhanced productivity, greater customer satisfaction, and increased profitability (Crawford et al., 2010; Harter et al., 2002).

Brilliant Future (2024) has found that employee engagement, which can be measured by a combination of clarity and energy, is closely connected to profitability. In work groups where employees are engaged, companies experience a 19% boost in operating income (Derek, 2009). Moreover, Larsson et al. (2020) state that organizations with high levels of employee engagement experience a remarkable surge of up to 217% in customer loyalty, sales growth, productivity, task performance, health, and profitability. On the other hand, bored teams with low engagement show a profitability of only 0,77%, compared with engaged teams who have a profitability of 7,25% — an increase of 841,5% (Brilliant Future, 2024).

Furthermore, employee engagement is shown to result in 24-72% lower turnover and absenteeism among employees (Larsson et al., 2020). Research on the topic has found that organizations not working with employee engagement are associated with negative effects. This is demonstrated by the finding that organizations with low employee engagement had an operating income fall of 33% (Derek, 2009).

Given the pronounced influence of employee engagement on organizational outcomes, it remains a focal point worthy of organizational attention for the cultivation of success. However, the first step in increasing employee engagement may be to understand how to measure it, which will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

2.2.3 Measure employee engagement by energy and clarity

In today's dynamic landscape, where employees increasingly prioritize factors beyond salary (Hiltrop, 1999), understanding and measuring employee engagement is more relevant than ever. By effectively assessing employee engagement, organizations can gain valuable insights to enhance not only the engagement itself but also overall profitability. This chapter explores the relevance of measuring employee engagement and delves into ways of how to do it.

As mentioned before, there is no common agreement when it comes to measuring employee engagement. However, Brilliant Future (Brilliant Future, 2024) is a company that succeeded in measuring and enhancing engagement for various organizations. They base their method of measuring engagement on extensive literature and research (Brilliant Future, 2024). Brilliant Future emphasizes employees' *energy* as a strong indicator of engagement. This is based on how Schaufeli et al., (2002), Bakker et al., (2011) and Imperatori & Springerlink (2017)

describe engagement as involving energy, dedication, commitment, and power. This indicates that individuals who are engaged have a high level of energy and are feeling enthusiastic about their work. Furthermore, this aligns with Bakker et al., (2011) model (Figure 2). The figure highlights energy as an important factor when measuring engagement.

According to Bakker et al.'s (2011) figure, engagement is positioned as the opposite of burnout. While burnt-out employees experience dejection and sadness, highly engaged employees exhibit high energy and enthusiasm. The author argues that to cultivate high levels of engagement and mitigate burnout among employees, organizations should strive to create an environment that energizes and motivates employees, offering work that is both active and pleasant.

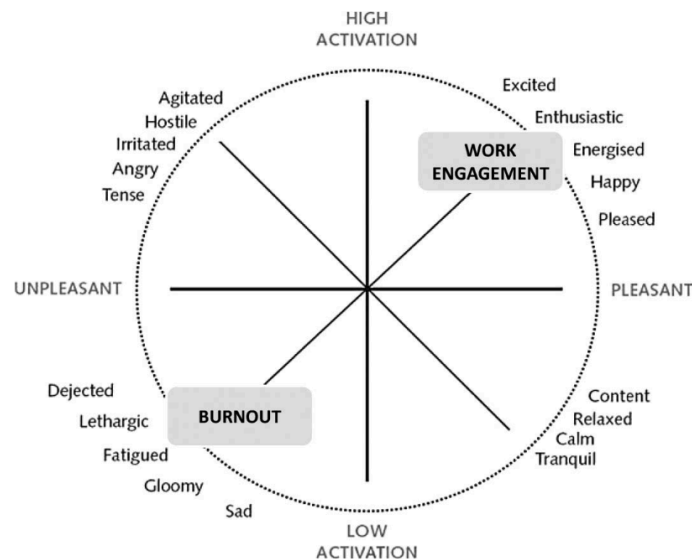


Figure 2. A figure of feelings integrated into employee engagement (Bakker et al., 2011).

Moreover, Brilliant Future adds *clarity* as a pivotal factor for engagement, meaning both organizational and individual goals must be clear. The reason emphasis is placed on clarity is that a high energy level itself does not necessarily lead to better results for the company. A high energy level can mean that employees lose focus on their work because they do not know where to put the energy. Therefore, balancing energy with clarity of what is expected of the employee is key to create engagement (Brilliant Future, 2024).

The importance of clarity stems from Caillier's (2016) empirical research showing that clear goals have a positive effect on employees' dedication. Caillier (2016) also states that employees without a clear understanding of expectations put less effort into their work and are less likely to do the extra work.

Furthermore, Brilliant Future (2024) connects the concept of clarity to both clear goals and a clear process. This involves whether the goals and the purpose of tasks are clearly explained and well-defined. It also involves if there is a clear process, addressing how confident the employees are in how to perform their work. The importance of clarity in processes, goals, and expectations aligns with other studies indicating that role ambiguity can impact engagement negatively, whereas clear roles can enhance it (Manas et al., 2018; Chenevert et al., 2013). This stems from Sawyer's (1992) research regarding role ambiguity, highlighting the importance of clarity in processes, goals, and expectations to bolster job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is closely intertwined with engagement, reflecting the degree of pleasure or happiness an individual experiences in their job, thereby fostering retention (Swofford, 2023).

Brilliant Future measures the engagement through a survey with the following questions:

Energy:

1. Are you motivated in your work?
2. Are you willing to put in the extra effort for the organization's success?
3. Do you find joy in going to work?
4. Are you proud of working in this organization?

Clarity:

1. Do you know what is expected of you in your daily work?
2. Are you and your team working towards goals?
3. Can you see how your team contributed to the organization's overall goals?
4. Do you know the company's overall goals?

The responses regarding energy and clarity are then compiled into a graph illustrating the engagement levels within an organization (Figure 3). This graph consists of two axes, one stating *energy* and the other stating *clarity*. The employees in the organization are put in one of the five different categories, which are described in Figure 3 below.

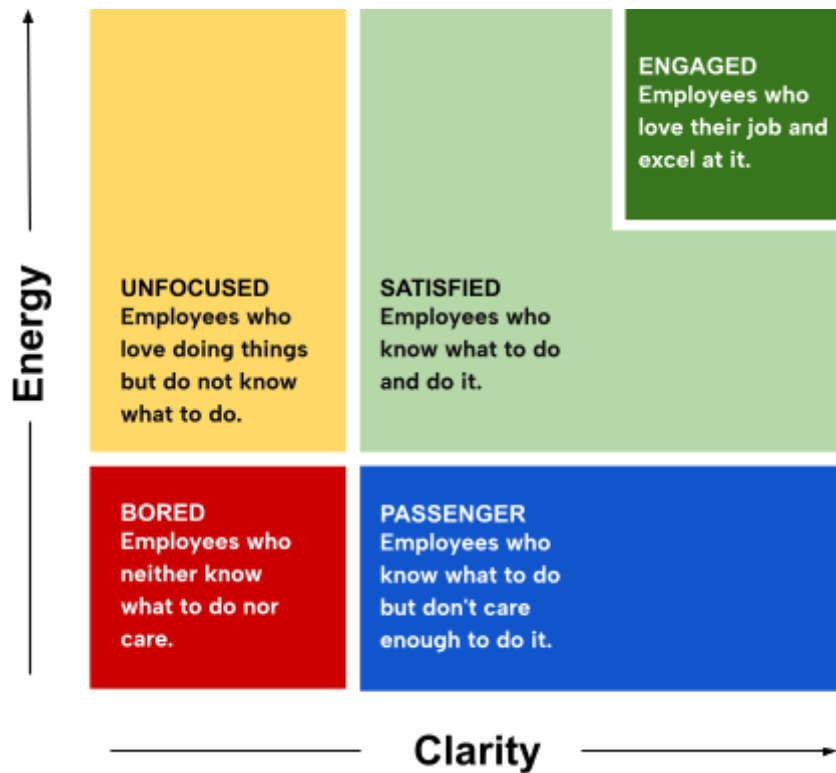


Figure 3. Graph for illustrating the engagement level (Based on Brilliant Future, 2024)

Brilliant Future (2024) has developed a benchmark for each category in the engagement graph, based on 800 000 survey responses from approximately 360 organizations in various industries from the last three years. 70% of the answers are from Sweden. The benchmark is stated in the Table 1 below.

Category	Benchmark %
Engaged	34
Satisfied	39
Unfocused	9
Passengers	10
Bored	8

Table 1. Benchmark for engagement (Based on number from Brilliant Future, 2024)

The numbers in the table will be further used in this study when comparing the two organizations' engagement levels.

2.3 The intersection between employer branding and employee engagement

As Backhaus and Tikoo (2024) argue, employer branding is not only about promoting a clear view of what makes the organization different and desirable for potential employees externally. It is also about fostering commitment internally amongst the workforce. The term commitment is strongly related to employee engagement (Imperatori & Springerlink, 2017). The employer branding process permeates the work for engagement since it is about ensuring current employee's engagement in the organizational culture and strategy (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Moreover, in today's context where the highly educated generation values development, autonomy, flexibility, and meaningful work (Hiltrop, 1999), the employer branding process gains a lot of importance. By creating a value proposition offering attractive aspects, the employer can attract the best-fitted candidates who align with their value proposition, thereby fostering the best condition for engagement (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding is thereby an important factor for fostering strong employee engagement (Kahn, 1990).

Furthermore, engaged employees play a crucial role in shaping a stronger employer brand. This is related to the third step in creating an employer brand, by fostering commitment among the workforce to the organizational values and strategy (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The employee's passion, commitment, and dedication to the work not only contribute to a positive workplace atmosphere but also serve as a powerful endorsement of the organization's values and mission. As the employees share their positive experiences with others, both internally and externally, they become promoters for the employer brand and further enhance its reputation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

The concept of employer branding and employee engagement is interconnected in other ways as well. Employer branding focuses on what the employer can offer the employee (Berthon et

al., 2005). Engagement, on the other hand, pertains to what the employee can contribute to the organization (Larsson et al., 2020). Bakker et al. (2011) further emphasize that engagement can be viewed as a blend of an individual's capability to work, such as energy and power, along with their willingness to work. This encompasses involvement and dedication. Furthermore, this highlights the increased importance of employer branding in attracting best-fit candidates, so they can use their maximum capability of their willingness, dedication and energy to work. The best-fitted candidates will then in turn have the best conditions to retain and contribute to the organization through a strong engagement. In the next chapter, the benefits of finding the best-fit candidate for the organization will be further explained.

2.4 Work-fit

A positive factor related to employee engagement is the role of *work-fit* (Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011). Work-fit can be seen as how to drive out the best use of human resources. A good work-fit between the individual and the work leads to both personal- and organizational success, which can be seen and measured in several ways. It has been shown that a good work-fit leads to increased morale amongst employees and a higher level of employee satisfaction and happiness, relating to Figure 2 which is Bakker et al' (2011) model of feelings integrated into employee engagement. Research also shows that work-fit strengthens the attraction and retention of employees since it is shown employees will stay longer in the company if there is a good work-fit. It also results in lower absenteeism, less burnout and increased productivity ((Rajper et al., 2020; Michigan State University, 2024).

Work-fit can be divided into (1) *Person job fit* and (2) *Person organization fit*, and can together lead to employee job performance as illustrated in Figure 4. Person job fit refers to the connection between an individual's job performed at a workplace and their personal life. Person work-fit can be seen as how to use individual abilities, knowledge, and skills in the best way. The focus lies on the employee's desires and the job demands. Moreover, it is important that employees feel that they are challenged and that their abilities and skills are used. If this is not achieved, employees will feel bored and their motivation will decrease (Rajper et al., 2020).

In recent decades, researchers have found that work-fit is not only about the actual requirements the employees need to fulfill their work tasks. It is also about the fit between the individual's own values and the organizational values — this concept is called person organization fit. This can further be explained as if there is a fit or alignment between the individual's personal goals and attitudes, and the organizational culture and the overall mission of the company. When both the person job fit and the person organization fit is high, it results in maximum performance, which will benefit both the individual, team, and the organization as a whole. A good work-fit employee wants to grow within the organization and will thereby seek new opportunities and new positions internally (Rajper et al., 2020).

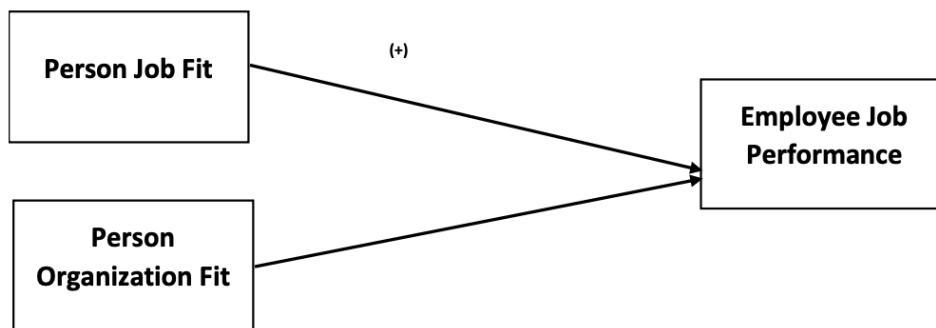


Figure 4: Addressing work-fit to achieve employee performance (Rajper, Ghumro & Mangi, 2020).

2.5 Meaningful work

Meaningfulness can be seen as a universal instinct (Lysova et al., 2019). Meaningful work is related to factors such as autonomy, supportive colleagues, and a positive workplace climate, which are related to high employee engagement (Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011). In general terms, meaningful work can be described as working with something that feels personally significant and worthwhile. It is closely connected to several outcomes, such as increased development and engagement, which in turn results in better chances to retain the employees within the organization (Lysova et al., 2019).

The importance of experiencing work as meaningful has increased in the last year and is one of the most important factors for the majority of employees in today's labor market. Meaningfulness can both be experienced *in work* and *at work*. *In work* is about what the employee does at work. Focusing on the purpose-oriented perspective. If you have a job

designed to create purpose and positive importance to others, it is easier to experience meaningful work (Lysova et al., 2019).

Furthermore, *at work*, is described as the feeling of being a part of something bigger, such as colleagues (Lysova et al., 2019). This is one of the factors enhancing employee engagement (Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011). Meaningfulness at work is closely connected to organizational culture, which can be described as a pattern of values, assumptions, and meanings about how things are done every day. A supportive culture enhances the chance for employees to experience belongingness and meaningfulness. Moreover, meaningfulness at work is also closely connected to “job design”, namely, how the job is created. High levels of autonomy and task variety affect meaningfulness positively (Lysova et al., 2019; Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011).

2.6 Work-life balance

Work-life balance is a concept facilitating an employee’s private- and professional life, giving room for recovery and other interests other than work (Kecklund et al., 2010). This is shown to be a factor to enhance engagement (Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011). The implementation of work-life balance initiatives helps organizations achieve better organizational outcomes because employees are more satisfied, motivated, and engaged in their work when work-life balance is offered (Kecklund et al., 2010).

Work-life balance encompasses the opportunities and constraints employees experience in allocating their time and energy between work and free time. While priorities should be set for private aspects such as family, friends, and personal development, individuals must also meet the expectations and demands of their work (Sana & Zohair, 2016). When employees have the opportunity to influence and choose their working hours, it promotes the prospects of work-life balance as they can more easily align their work schedules with their personal lives (Kecklund et al., 2010).

Work-life balance can be understood from various perspectives, two of them are the *organizational perspective* and the *individual perspective*. The organizational perspective involves organizations promoting work-life balance through policies and regulations. Offering flexible working hours and the option to work remotely are methods organizations

can take to help employees achieve a better balance between work and free time. The individual perspective emphasizes that individuals themselves must take responsibility and make efforts to perform well and efficiently at work (Sana & Zohair, 2016).

2.7 Personal- and professional development

Opportunities for both personal- and professional development are found to be positively related to both employee engagement and employer branding. It is also stated as a factor affecting candidate's choice in employers, stressing organization's to offer these opportunities (Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011; Hiltrop, 1999). Furthermore, personal- and professional development opportunities play a crucial role in engaging and retaining talents and are mutually beneficial for both individuals and the organization. Professional development empowers employees with new skills and knowledge. This helps them perform better and create a more engaging environment. Organizations benefit from a more skilled workforce, increased employee engagement, and less turnover (Wharton, 2023).

The work environment is crucial in fostering development. A culture of development is shaped by the workplace's history, cultural factors, and structural elements. If the workplace has a history and norms of learning and providing learning opportunities, the organizational culture becomes more conducive to development, and the availability of learning increases. There is an interaction between the availability of learning and the individual's own influence. When individuals have influence and power over their work situation, with room for initiative, they create an environment fostering development. This facilitates expansive learning opportunities resulting in engaged employees, leading to opportunities for competence development. In contrast, in work environments where the availability of learning is abundant and restrictive, the learning environments are found to be perceived as dull, repetitive, and non-challenging (Ekberg, 2006).

Individuals have their own predispositions and motivations for wanting to learn, whereas some authors suggest that there is an innate "will to learn" that is present from birth. This "will to learn" consists of three parts; (1) *The competence motive*, to demonstrate to oneself and others that one knows things. (2) *The reciprocity motive*, to strive towards a goal together with others, and (3) *The curiosity motive*, where the will to learn things is of curiosity. For the

curiosity motive to be satisfied, it is important that the desire to learn must be present (Granberg, 2009).

Time is a crucial factor to consider when it comes to development opportunities. Learning and time interact, as learning depends on the amount of time provided to learn. If there is a shortage of time, it can hinder creativity, reflection, and development-oriented learning (Ellström, 1996).

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the first section will present the research approach, followed by a description of the methods used, and after that the sampling. Furthermore, data collection and data analysis will be explained and described. To facilitate for the reader in this chapter, a distinction in the formalia has been made between the qualitative- and quantitative method under each headline. This follows by a section of the critical approach, where the quality aspects taken into account will be explained, and finally limitations will be discussed.

3.1 Research Approach

This research is a case study based on Axis and a municipality in Sweden, which has chosen to be anonymous. The municipality is therefore named as “The Municipality ” throughout this study.

The study aims to explore the interaction of employee engagement and employer branding within the two organizations, the focus is on providing both numeric data and in-depth exploration of the specific cases. Case studies often provide the opportunity to understand how relationships and social processes are interconnected and linked. It considers the case as a whole in its entirety and can thus uncover how the many parts influence each other (Denscombe, 2018).

By examining a case study, the generalizability is limited due to the unique nature of each case and the difficulty in drawing conclusions from the specific findings to broader contexts. Additionally, the access to case study environments is not entirely within the researchers control (Denscombe, 2018). The study is thereby somewhat stirred by the two chosen organizations. However, this will be further discussed in chapter 3.6, *limitations*.

Moreover, case studies allow mixed methods which often offer comprehensive understandings and insight, as well as a good overview and broadness into the specific subject (Denscombe 2018). The choice to utilize mixed methods in this research will be discussed further in section 3.2, *mixed methods*.

3.1.1 Deductive approach

A deductive approach was adopted in this thesis, as the researchers sought to understand the interaction and the factors involving employee engagement and employer branding by building upon existing research about it. Thereby, the theoretical framework serves as a foundation to enhance understanding of the topic and a frame of references (Bryman, 2018). To delve deeply into employee engagement and employer branding, and the use of its concepts in this particular study, an understanding from previous research was necessary. With prior knowledge, the subjects could be thoroughly investigated and explored deeper, fulfilling the purpose of the thesis.

However, it is important to emphasize that despite the fact that the study was grounded in the deductive methodological approach, it was not strictly followed. For example, some open questions were included in the interview guide, and follow-up questions were added during the interview. The follow-up questions were not necessarily based on prior research, but aimed at accessing the respondents own experiences and interpretations, enhancing the conversation and understanding, thereby fulfilling the research purpose of the study. Moreover, concepts that came up in the interviews have served as affecting factors in this study, which are explained in depth in the theoretical framework. Thereby, the final research approach used in this study is more stirred towards an abductive approach (Bryman, 2018).

3.2 Mixed methods

As Cohen et al. (2018) argue, an advantage of case studies is that they allow mixed methods, which is advantageous since the methods provide a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or case. This maximizes the benefits of each method and minimizes their risks. In this study, a mixed method approach is employed in several ways. Empirical data will be obtained through both quantitative- and qualitative methods, and both primary data and secondary data is utilized in this research. The primary data has been collected through

interviews conducted in both organizations. Additionally, secondary data derived from previous surveys has been used.

Choosing mixed methods means using multiple different methods for data collection. However, this does not mean the results will be mixed. Only the method itself is mixed, which should not be confused with mixed results. This study will result in consistent findings, based on mixed methods to enhance the comprehensiveness of the topics explored. Cohen et al. (2018) describes mixed methods as the “third way”, as qualitative- and quantitative methods contribute more together than they do individually. In this way, one can mitigate the weaknesses of one method and maximize the strengths of another.

The study aims to utilize quantitative data to gain a broader understanding of employee engagement and employer branding within the organizations. Subsequently, the qualitative method will be used to delve deeper into how the two concepts interact and the reasons behind the quantitative results. Relying solely on qualitative methods would limit the number of participants in the study, as it would not be feasible due to the time limitation, to interview as many individuals as can be reached through quantitative methods. On the other hand, solely using quantitative methods would lack depth in truly understanding the interaction of the employee engagement and employer branding in the different organizations on a deeper level. Therefore, by integrating both quantitative- and qualitative methods, the study will aim to provide a more nuanced understanding (Bryman, 2018).

3.2.1 Quantitative method

The quantitative method will be utilized to measure and analyze employee engagement and employer brand by the eNPS-score within the two organizations. This will be done through 3079 secondary data of survey answers. Thereby, the quantitative method in the thesis is based solely on secondary data. This method provides an approach to gather numerical data, allowing for measurement and analysis of employee engagement and eNPS. It also enables to generate statistical insights and identify patterns or trends (Bryman, 2018). This provides objective insights and facilitates comparisons between the organizations, making the quantitative method well-suited for this study aiming to explore the interaction of the employer branding and employee engagement.

3.2.2 Qualitative method

The qualitative research method will be used to delve into individuals' personal experiences, focusing on their own interpretations and perceptions, which is conducive to gaining a deeper understanding of the subject (Denscombe, 2018). To facilitate in-depth exploration and detailed descriptions, qualitative research often involves a smaller number of participants. Since the purpose of this study is to investigate the interaction of employee engagement and employer branding in two different organizations, one with a strong employer brand and one with a weak one, a qualitative method of 12 interviews is suitable to further understand the reasons behind the quantitative results.

3.3. Sampling

3.3.1 The participating organizations

To identify one organization with a strong employer brand, Universum Awards (Universum, 2024) was utilized to select an employer from their top 100 lists. Universum Awards is a company specialized on employer branding and is world-leading in the area. The company is providing help to companies to work on their employer brand to attract and maintain the right employees. Universum Awards have also been creating top 100 employer branding lists in different categories for the last 35 years (Universum, 2024). The list for this year's top employer branding companies was carefully reviewed to find a company which we had a connection to, thereby increasing the likelihood of their participation. Volvo Cars appeared in the top five of almost every list in all categories, making it our initial choice due to our existing contact there. However, they were unable to participate. Consequently, Axis was selected due to its strong reputation as an employer, evidenced by its high rankings — 50th in IT and 91st in MSc Engineering (Universum, 2024). These rankings indicate a robust employer brand, reinforcing its suitability for this thesis. Additionally, one of the authors has a connection to an HR professional at Axis from a HR-network. This person agreed to facilitate as a contact person throughout the study and help us with the data collection. As a result, Axis agreed to participate as the organization with a strong employer brand in this research.

For the organization with a weaker employer brand, an HR professional seeking a student to write a thesis on employer branding was identified in an HR-group on Facebook. She

expressed interest in this prospective study. She stated that the organization she worked at, had recently initiated a project to strengthen their employer brand since their employer brand was very weak. Upon explanation, the person from the HR-group at Facebook became our contact person and The Municipality agreed to participate. They also confirmed their challenges in attracting and retaining employees, and the current weakness of their employer brand.

3.3.2 The participating employees

Both contact persons facilitated the gathering of employees to participate in the interviews of this study. The participants' employees were chosen by purposive sampling. Bryman (2018) explains this type of sampling can be used when the researcher aims to target a specific demographic, and is commonly used when aiming to facilitate comparisons focusing on specific cases, as in this case study. Purposive sampling belongs to non-probability sampling, which means selecting a group of individuals from a larger population with the understanding that they do not represent the entire population but only themselves (Bryman, 2018). This aligns with what is discussed in chapter 3.6 regarding case studies and their limitations in generalizability, making the purposive sampling a good fit for this study.

The targeted specific demographic in this study was to find six individuals from each organization, in different departments for. Alvesson (2011) explains that it can be advantageous to involve individuals from different departments when conducting interviews, to gain a broad understanding. Thereby, this study aimed to diversify responses by including participants from various departments rather than solely from one. This resulted in respondents from the departments as shown in Table 2.

Participant:	Department:
The Municipality 1	IT
The Municipality 2	IT
The Municipality 3	Communication
The Municipality 4	Finance
The Municipality 5	Finance

The Municipality 6	Human Resources
Axis 1	Support
Axis 2	Accounting Management
Axis 3	Brand Management
Axis 4	Human Resources
Axis 5	IT
Axis 6	Finance

Table 2. Summary of the interview participants in the study

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection method for this study involved gathering secondary data from surveys and conducting interviews. A distinction in the formalia has been made between the quantitative- and qualitative method to facilitate for the reader.

3.4.1 Data collection in the quantitative method — Brilliant Future

Axis and The Municipality investigates employee engagement through a survey every year, conducted by the company Brilliant Future. Both organizations were able to share their latest survey answers with us, from September 2023. Secondary data was thereby received from our contact persons at Axis and The Municipality, which gave us the opportunity of getting access to all secondary data from the organizations. Through a digital meeting, the contact persons explained the data for us and provided it per email. The survey conducted from Axis provided 2391 secondary data survey responses and the survey conducted from The Municipality provided 688 secondary data survey responses. This results in a total number of 3079 secondary data survey answers.

As mentioned before, Brilliant Future measures engagement with the two components *energy* and *clarity*, and the employer brand by Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS). They have based the questions on extensive research literature regarding engagement and employer branding, which is consistent with the literature that have been found on the subject for this thesis as well. The questionnaire consists of nine questions, four to measure energy, four to

measure clarity and one to measure the employer brand. The questions are presented in chapter 2.2.3, *Measure employee engagement by energy and clarity*, and in chapter 2.1.2 *Measure employer brand*. The answer options are a scale of one to five and the last question regarding employee branding was on a scale one to ten.

3.4.2 Data collection in the qualitative method

Interviews were used as the data collection method for gathering qualitative data. Interviews can be either structured or unstructured. In structured interviews participants are asked a set of predetermined questions in the same order. However, this limits exploration beyond the prepared questions. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, allows respondents to freely answer and discuss to explore the subject by not having predetermined questions, but instead a general topic is highlighted to discuss (Bougie & Serkan, 2016).

This study employed a combination of structured and unstructured formats by utilizing semi-structured interviews. This allows for exploration of the chosen topic while also providing opportunity to delve into areas that respondents wish to discuss (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). This makes the interviews more in-depth, encouraging respondents to answer in an open and insightful manner (Alvehus, 2019). Bryman (2018) highlights that despite variations across interviews in semi-structured interviews, efforts should be made to ensure that each respondent is presented with all the primary questions. This was ensured during the interviews. By utilizing this approach, a deeper exploration into the reasons behind the respondents' answers could be successfully collected.

The interviews were guided by an interview guide (Appendix 2) to ensure consistency in the questions asked. However, there was still room for follow-up questions and topics the participants wanted to highlight. This aimed to understand individual experiences regarding energy, clarity, and engagement in their work at each organization, as well as their feelings about their employer and its brand. The questions were open-ended, which allowed respondents to deviate from the initial question and discuss other relevant aspects.

Aligned with the semi-structured approach, numerous follow-up questions were incorporated to ensure a thorough understanding of the respondents' perspectives (Appendix 2). This approach ensured that the qualitative element added value to this thesis by complementing

the quantitative secondary data. This method addresses the limitations of solely quantitative studies, fully utilizing mixed methods to provide a comprehensive understanding.

The interviews consisted of 35-50 minutes each, took place on the Microsoft Teams platform and were recorded to facilitate transcription later on. All interview participants were asked if it was okay to record the interviews. According to Cohen et al., (2018) there are several advantages to conducting digital interviews. For instance, there is a greater likelihood that respondents will participate due to the convenience factor. Additionally, neither the respondents nor the interviewers need to be in the same geographic location, which facilitates the planning and execution of the interviews. The latter reason is particularly advantageous for this study, as the respondents and the authors of the thesis are located in different parts of Sweden. During the interviews, effort was spent on not influencing the participants (Bryman, 2018).

3.5 Data Analysis Method

This segment outlines the procedures involved in analyzing the data. It encompasses the 3070 secondary data from the surveys and the primary data from the 12 interviews. The data were analyzed separately at first, making sure each data method was utilized fully and to avoid mixing and drawing misbegotten conclusions. Following this, the data were compared in order to identify trends and insights. However, due to the research design as a case study, the trends and insight cannot be generalized.

3.5.1 Data analysis in the quantitative method

The analysis of the quantitative secondary data relies on Brilliant Future's dataset. They leverage statistical methods such as factor analysis and regression analysis, delivering numerical data. The dataset comprises over a million entries from employee surveys conducted across a wide array of organizations and industries (Brilliant Future, 2024).

The quantitative data result regarding engagement will be presented in a graph. This figure is inspired by Brilliant Future (2024) but remade by us and translated from swedish to english. As described in the theoretical *chapter 2.2.3, measure employee engagement by energy and clarity*, the graph consists of five different colors, including the five categories; unfocused, bored, passengers, satisfied and engaged. *Unfocused* are employees who love doing things

but do not know what to do. *Bored* are employees who neither know what to do or care. Employees in the category of *passengers* are individuals who know what to do but do not care enough to do it. Satisfied employees are employees who know what to do and do it. The category to aim for is *engaged*, which are employees who love their job and excel at it. (Brilliant Future, 2024).

In the results of the thesis, the graph will be utilized where the colored parts will include a percentage, showing each organization's percentage in each category. The organization's scores within each category will be presented in a bar chart, facilitating a visible comparison for the reader regarding their distinct results for each category.

The eNPS data, indicating employee loyalty and employer brand, will be presented by three figures, in chapter 4.1.2, *The Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS)*. Figure 7 and Figure 8 are developed to illustrate each organization's number of promoters, passives and detractors in each organization. Figure 9 is developed to facilitate the reader's ability to see both the organization's scores on one scale, to see how they differ. This figure illustrates a scale ranging from -100 to 100. All the three models are developed for this thesis, but inspired from Brilliant Future (2024).

To demonstrate the organization differences and similarity regarding the organizations' employer brand and employee engagement, Diagram 2 is developed in chapter 5.3, *The Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS) and the level of employee engagement within the two organizations*. This diagram was in the online graphic design platform Canva (2024), by using a template for y/x graphs. However, it is worth noting that this is not a statistical tool, but rather used to visualize the quantitative results for the reader. This diagram is based on the eNPS score, and on an engagement index which was developed for this thesis.

The engagement index formula used in this study is used to provide a quantitative measure of overall employee engagement within an organization. It is based on a weighted scoring system that assigns specific values to different engagement categories, which follows below:

- Engaged: 3 points
- Satisfied: 2 points
- Unfocused: 1 point

- Passenger: 1 point
- Bored: 0 points

Worth mentioning is that the index is created upon what the authors thought were reasonable numbers for each category. The categories of employee engagement (Engaged, Satisfied, Unfocused, Passenger, and Bored) represent varying degrees of employee motivation and commitment. By assigning different points (3, 2, 1, and 0 points), the formula captures the relative importance of each category. Employees who are “Engaged” contribute more positively to organizational outcomes compared to those who are “Satisfied”, “Unfocused”, “Passengers”, or “Bored”, which is why they are having a higher number.

The engagement index is determined by multiplying the percentage of employees in each category by the corresponding points, then summing these values. This can be expressed with the following formula: $\text{Engagement Index} = (3 \times \text{Engaged } \%) + (2 \times \text{Satisfied } \%) + (1 \times \text{Unfocused } \%) + (1 \times \text{Passengers } \%) + (0 \times \text{Bored } \%)$

3.5.2 Data analysis in the qualitative method

The analysis of the qualitative data was done by transcribing the audio files by using Klang.ai, which is a safe transcription tool that ensures GDPR security (Klang AI, 2024). The transcription allowed for retaining original quotes from the interview participants. In this way, the participants’ own words are included in the study and not just the paraphrases made by the authors. This reduces risk for interpretation and steering directions. After transcribing, the data were analyzed by coding, which is done by breaking down data into categories, allowing for comparison of similarities and differences in findings within these categories (Bryman, 2019).

By utilizing this approach, it was clear to see where the content belonged, what was relevant in relation to the purpose and the research question of the thesis, and to identify trends and patterns. The coding was done by categorization, which is one of the main methods in qualitative analysis according to Fejes and Thornberg (2019). The coding was structured with colors according to the specific categories: *energy*, *clarity*, *employer brand*, *work-fit* and *affecting factors*. Affecting factors was chosen as a category to open an opportunity to explore reasons behind the answers. The affecting factors that could be seen as trending in the

interviews became concepts in this thesis theoretical framework. These concepts was; *meaningfulness, work-life balance* and *personal- and professional development*.

Moreover, the qualitative data is based on individuals' experiences and thoughts, meaning researchers interpret the data from the participant, who has already interpreted it based on their own worldview. Cohen et al. (2018) refer to this as a double hermeneutic process. The researcher relates the data to their own audience in their own words, which is a challenge in qualitative analysis. Therefore, transcription and extensive use of original quotes has been used to mitigate too many unnecessary interpretations from the authors.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish, aligning with the primary language spoken by both participants and interviewers. As a result, all transcription and coding processes were also conducted in Swedish. This linguistic consistency is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the data. However, it is recognized that translating from one language to another can introduce nuances and potential alterations in meaning, as noted by Denscombe (2018).

3.6 Critical Approach

In order to maintain high quality in this study, careful consideration has been adopted. This will be presented in this chapter, where the chosen methodology will be present in relation to reliability, validity, reflexivity, ethical consideration and the limitations within the chosen methodology. Since the secondary data in the thesis is derived from the collected data of Brilliant Future, considerable emphasis has been placed on critically evaluating the reliability and validity of their research. This evaluation is integrated within the sections below.

3.6.1 Reliability

Reliability measures the consistency and stability of the study result, which is one of the key components of achieving research quality and credibility (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). When employing qualitative research, ensuring reliability can be challenging. A reason for this challenge is the inability to recreate the exact social context that influenced the initial study. Moreover, qualitative researchers play a crucial role in the research process through participant selection and analysis, often serving as the primary instrument. This level of involvement introduces subjectivity, which can potentially impact both data collection and

the accuracy of the findings (Denscombe, 2018). However, efforts have been made to ensure reliability to the best extent possible.

Standardized procedures have been adopted for both interviews and surveys, ensuring consistency by providing all participants with the same set of questions and information. For the qualitative data, the same set of questions was used in the interview guide, ensuring the same thing was explored in all interviews. For the secondary data, a standardization of how to measure engagement and employer brand (eNPS) was possible due to the same survey-questions in both organizations from Brilliant Future. This enables the opportunity to explore the exact same things with the same questions, quantifying the level of both concepts enhancing the reliability of the findings.

Brilliant Future's measurement index exhibits strong psychometric properties in terms of reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of approximately 0.9 (Brilliant Future, 2024). Cronbach's alpha is a widely-used measure of internal consistency reliability in psychology- and social sciences. It gauges how closely related the items in a scale or test are to each other. Scores range from 0 to 1, closer to 1 indicates strong correlation among items, signifying high internal consistency, while closer to 0 implies weaker correlation. Typically, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 or higher is deemed acceptable for research, though this threshold may vary depending on the field and context (Goforth, 2015). Brilliant Future's score demonstrates high internal consistency, ensuring precision in measurement.

3.6.2 Validity

Validity is seen as another key component for achieving research quality and credibility, and refers to how accurately a study explores what it is supposed to (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). To ensure this, several strategies have been implemented. Before creating an interview guide, an extensive theoretical framework on employee engagement and employer branding was developed. This contributes to strengthening the validity of a study by grounding the interview guide in existing literature and theoretical perspectives, ensuring the study is built upon a solid foundation of established theoretical knowledge and concepts. Additionally, it ensures that the research addresses relevant aspects of the topic and provides meaningful insights that contribute to the existing research stream. Moreover, effort was invested to

develop and secure the interview guide to be well-structured and use relevant questions based on literature in line with the purpose.

To ensure the understanding of Brilliant Future and their measurement methods for engagement and employer brand (eNPS), there have been active contact with the company as an opportunity to delve into their working methods for deeper understanding. This approach has provided a solid foundation for the research in whole. The validity is enhanced due to the demonstration of high internal consistency and precision in Brilliant Future's measurement method.

To ensure the research quality of Brilliant Future (2024), emphasis has been placed on investigating Brilliant Future's research methods and all the research behind their approach and measurements. Brilliant Future provided articles, where they shared their methods and the research they base their studies on. Their measurement methods are based on statistical analysis, including factor analysis and regression analysis. The method reveals that the company's measurements are regularly validated against Brilliant's database. Their database contains over a million records from employee surveys across various organizations in different industries. The measurements demonstrate high construct validity, both convergent and divergent, and immediate validity. The results from Brilliant Future's studies can also be considered generalizable as they yield consistent results across different organizations. This denotes good external validity (Brilliant Future, 2024). The research regarding engagement and employer brand given from Brilliant Future, is consistent with the literature regarding the concepts employee engagement and employer branding, strengthening the validity.

Furthermore, the analysis made in this study is advantageous due to the use of mixed methods and the integration of complementary data, combining qualitative insights from interviews with quantitative secondary data from surveys. This enhances the chance for this study to answer the specific research questions, improving validity. This approach also aims to allow for a deeper understanding of the insights gleaned from both the qualitative- and the quantitative analysis.

3.6.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is particularly important in qualitative research methods, where the researcher plays a crucial role in data interpretation. The centrality of the researcher's involvement underscores the importance of reflexivity in the research process as mentioned about the double hermeneutic under chapter 3.4.2, *Data analysis in the qualitative method*. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) highlight that the researcher's interpretations can profoundly impact the study's outcomes, making reflexivity a vital component. Alvesson & Thorell (2011) emphasize that reflexivity involves the researcher's continuous self-awareness and critical examination of their assumptions, methodologies, results, and assertions. This critical stance can enhance the validity and credibility of the qualitative study.

In practice, reflexivity has been aimed to permeate every stage of this research process. An open mind has been maintained and acknowledging personal biases that may influence interpretations. By continually questioning and challenging interpretations during the process, the study is more guarded against unconscious biases and ensures a more rigorous analysis. Moreover, transparently documenting and justifying each decision has been done during the research process. This provides readers and authors with transparency, insights into the actual thought process, and enables them to follow the reasoning, enhancing the trustworthiness of the study.

3.5.4 Ethical considerations

Denscombe (2018) emphasizes the importance of reflecting on ethical considerations when collecting data through methods involving humans. Initially, an informed consent process (Appendix 1) for the interviews were established, which Cohen et al. (2018) argue should be done for maintaining good research ethics. The informed consent includes that individuals' participation is voluntary throughout the process.

Cohen et al. (2018) also assert that researchers have an ethical responsibility in the process, given the sensitive nature of qualitative research which often explores individuals' own experiences, perspectives, and personal opinions. Since this study partly is based on individuals' personal experiences, the principle of "*Primum non nocere*" has been upheld throughout the process. This principle entails ensuring that no physical or psychological harm

results from the research conducted. One precaution taken to address this is anonymizing all the participants and the participating municipality, as they also asked to be anonymous. Anonymity, as defined by Cohen et al. (2018), entails withholding any information that could reveal participants' identities. Therefore, all details about the participants have been omitted to prevent identification. For instance, the qualitative data does not indicate the gender of the participants. Neither were the departments presented in the result, to minimize the risk of identifying the participant. The description of The Municipality in chapter 1.4 *The participating organizations*, was written by the contact person to further strengthen the anonymity of the municipality.

3.6.5 Limitations

As presented previously, employee engagement and employer brand are measured based on Brilliant Future's (2024) study. This means Brilliant Future determines what is included in the concepts of engagement and employer brand, and serves as the foundation for all secondary data collection in the thesis. This can be seen as a limitation since someone else has gathered the information, and it has influenced what has been investigated in this study. However, all their data and materials are supported by empirical research and literature, which enhances the credibility of using them as a source. Additionally, to measure engagement in a way that ensures credibility, reliability, and validity, their tool is highly valuable for this study. Moreover, gaining access to the secondary data from Brilliant Future in both organizations provides an advantage, allowing the use of 3079 responses in the study. Therefore, the benefits of basing the study on Brilliant Future's methods outweigh the limitations.

Another limitation in this regard is that the external employer brand is based on Universum's research, influencing the selection of an organization with a strong employer brand for this study. However, Axis's robust employer brand is additionally validated by the measurement of the high eNPS-score, which will be demonstrated in the result. This indicates Axis strong employer brand in other channels than Universum. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge this limitation in the study.

Despite numerous assurances outlined in the methodology chapter to enhance the quality of the research, awareness of limitations exists that may negatively impact the quality of the results. Firstly, since the contact persons in each organization facilitated access to employees

for the interviews, there is a risk that they purposely selected employees who are positive towards the organization and perceived as engaged. This can be a consequence since it was communicated during the startup meeting that this study aimed to investigate engagement and employer branding. If an employee is not engaged, there is a greater likelihood that they would not be inclined to participate in a master's thesis about their work. On the other hand, there may be employees who are disengaged and dissatisfied with their work, viewing this as an opportunity to speak out. Regardless of the reason, it is important to consider that interviewees may have a motive for their answers.

The participants may feel pressure to respond in a certain way since they knew about the purpose of this study. Another limitation to consider is thereby that both companies are aware of their participation in this study due to their strong or weak employer brand, which could potentially influence the responses. For instance, there is a risk that employees at Axis may feel pressured to respond positively to maintain their good reputation and a strong brand. This is something one should take into consideration, as it is a common risk when respondents know what is being researched (Alvesson & Thorell, 2011). Alvesson (2011) suggests that interviewees may want to romanticize or distort reality due to pressures from various factors, such as wanting to please their manager or the interviewers. To mitigate this, open interview questions were created to facilitate responses that could not be perceived as having "right" or "wrong" answers. However, this is still something to take into account in the results of all studies involving qualitative research.

Two of the interviewees at Axis were managers, while those at The Municipality were solely employees. The variance in employment status among the interview participants could yield differing experiences of engagement and organizational perceptions of the employer branding. There may be a correlation between higher positions within the company and certain responses. This, because individuals may have different experiences based on their employment role. Moreover, the presence of managers in the interviews may not affect the quality of this study, given that there were still interviewees from non-managerial positions at Axis. It was also clarified that when managers participated in interviews, their input was sought from their perspective as employees, not managers. Moreover, the weight of secondary data from Axis, with 2391 secondary data responses, outweighs the fact that two out of six interviewees from Axis were managers. This mitigates potential risks.

The choice of interviewing employees from different departments, which Alvesson (2011) argues is advantageous for gaining a broad understanding, may also be seen as a limitation. This is because the results might have been more comparable if employees from the same departments in both organizations had been interviewed. Despite this limitation, the current approach was proceed because it allows us to capture a more diverse range of perspectives. Furthermore, given that the thesis incorporates mixed methods, including 3079 secondary data of survey responses, there is still extensive data for comparison between the organizations.

Moreover, a limitation arises from the fact that some of the theory on engagement and employer brand comes from research conducted in countries other than Sweden. Given that this study focuses on two companies located in Sweden, there is a risk of applying foreign research and theories to a Swedish context. However, this is not considered a major risk in this research for several reasons. Firstly, human behavior and organizational dynamics often exhibit universal patterns that can be applicable across different cultural contexts. Secondly, the principles and concepts underlying engagement and employer branding are often fundamental and can transcend national boundaries (Denscombe, 2018).

Lastly, it is essential to acknowledge that this study adopts a case study approach, focusing on the interaction of employee engagement and employer branding within two specific organizational settings. This means the findings from this study cannot be generalized (Cohen et al., 2018). However, this thesis serves as a source of knowledge that can inspire further research and exploration in the realm of the interaction of employer branding and employee engagement.

4. Results

In this chapter, the results from the empirical data will be presented. First, the quantitative data based on 3079 secondary survey responses within the two participating organizations will be presented. Following this, the qualitative data, derived from 12 interviews, six interviews from each organization, will be presented.

4.1 Result from the quantitative data

Firstly, the engagement levels in each organization will be presented. This will be done by first focusing on Axis, by presenting the engagement graph and their score, in relation to Brilliant Future's benchmark. Following this, the same procedure will be done, by first presenting the engagement graph for The Municipality, and then comparing it to the benchmark. Furthermore, the eNPS score will be introduced for each organization. After this, a summary of all the quantitative data will be presented.

4.1.1 The engagement levels in both organization

The quantitative secondary data, consisting of a total of 3079 survey responses, will be presented in this chapter. The five different colored parts show the relationship between energy and clarity which results in the engagement model. The graph shows percentages of the amount of employees within each category. The results of the engagement level will thereby be illustrated with two graphs, Figure 5 for Axis and Figure 6 for The Municipality.

Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the engagement levels at Axis, which is based on 2391 secondary data survey responses.

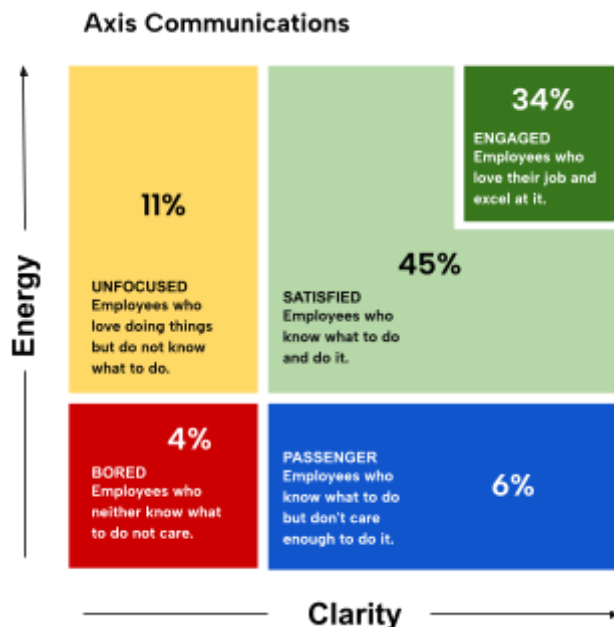


Figure 5. Axis' engagement.

As seen in the graph, 34% of Axis employees are categorized as *engaged*, indicating

employees who love their job and excel at it. Additionally, 45% of the employees fall into the *satisfied* category, which are employees who know what to do and do it. The graph reveals that 11% of employees are *unfocused*, which are employees who love doing things but do not know what to do. Furthermore, 6% of the employees are classified as *passengers*, indicating employees who do not care enough to do things, even if they know what to do. Lastly, 4% of the employees are categorized as *bored*, which can be explained as employees who do not know what to do, and do not care about it either.

In Table 3 below, Axis results in the different engagement categories are set in relation to the benchmark developed from Brilliant Future (2024).

Category	Benchmark %	Axis %
Engaged	34	34
Satisfied	39	45
Unfocused	9	10
Passengers	10	6
Bored	8	4

Table 3. Axis' engagement results in relation to Brilliant Future's benchmark (2024).

It can be seen that Axis scores exactly on the number of 34% engaged employees. Moreover they are over the benchmark regarding satisfied and unfocused employees, and under the benchmark regarding bored and passengers.

Regarding The Municipality's engagement level, it is illustrated in Figure 6 below, based on the quantitative data from 688 secondary data survey responses.

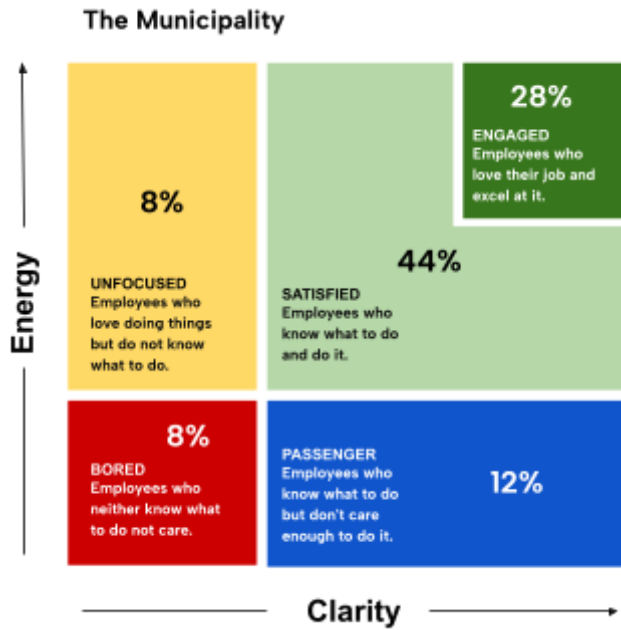


Figure 6. The Municipality's engagement.

The graph demonstrates that 28% of the employees in The Municipality are *engaged*, indicating a strong commitment and enthusiasm for their job. In addition, they have 44% classified as *satisfied*, who know how to do their job and do it. The data shows that 8% of the employees are identified as *unfocused*, which indicates that they do not know what to do, but love doing things. Furthermore, 12% of the workforce is categorized as *passengers*, described as employees who know what to do but do not care about it. Finally, 8% of the employees are classified as *bored*, which is employees who neither know what to do nor care about it.

The Municipality's results are further compared to Brilliant Future's benchmark (2024) in Table 4.

Category	Benchmark %	The Municipality %
Engaged	34	28
Satisfied	39	44
Unfocused	9	8
Passengers	10	12

Bored	8	8
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Table 4. The Municipality's engagement results in relation to Brilliant Future's benchmark (2024).

The comparison shows that The Municipality has not yet reached the benchmark for engagement with its 28%, but is relatively close to it. They meet the benchmark regarding both the level of bored- and unfocused employees. However, they are over the benchmark for employees as passengers and the level of satisfied employees.

4.1.2 Comparison of the engagement levels in both organization

When comparing the results of the engagement levels in Axis and The Municipality, it only reveals smaller differences, as can be seen in Diagram 1 below.

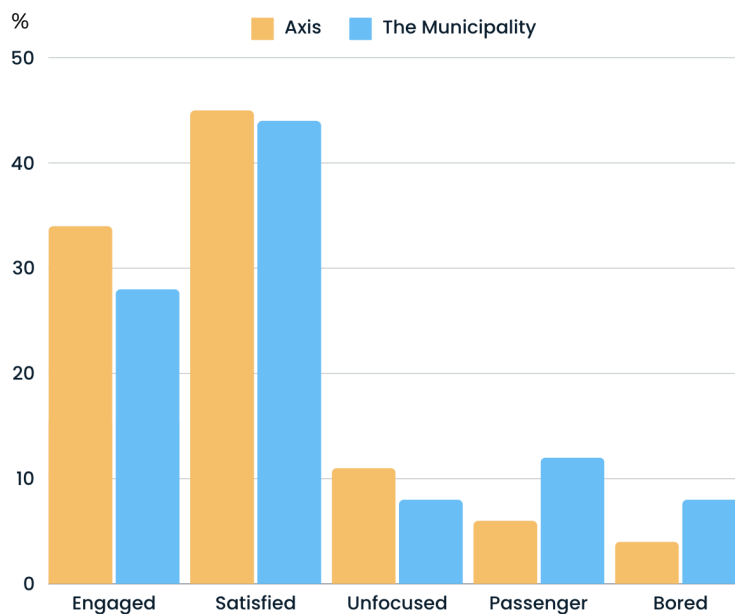


Diagram 1. Comparison of engagement in Axis and The Municipality.

Firstly, Axis demonstrates a higher proportion of engaged employees, with 34% compared to The Municipality's 28%. In terms of employees who are satisfied, Axis scores only one percentage unit higher than The Municipality, with 45% versus 44%. Both organizations

score relatively similarly even in unfocused employees, where Axis scores 11% and The Municipality's scores 8%, indicating a small difference. Regarding passengers, The Municipality has a higher proportion of employees classified, scoring 12% compared to Axis' 6%. Indicating that more employees at The Municipality do not care enough to do things, even if they know what to do. Lastly, The Municipality has 8% bored employees, compared to 4% at Axis.

Even though the results vary between the organizations to some extent, one can see, as illustrated in Diagram 1, that both organizations score relatively similar in their engagement levels.

4.1.3 The Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS)

According to Brilliant Future (2024), the eNPS score indicates as follows: a score below 0 is considered *bad*, a score between 0 and 20 is *good*, a score from 20 to 50 is *very good*, and a score between 50 and 100 is *outstanding*. As described in the theoretical framework (chapter 2.1.2), the eNPS score is measured by asking the question "How likely are you to recommend the company as an employer to a friend?". The question is answered on a scale from 0 (not likely at all) to 10 (very likely). Those who responded with 9 or 10 are called "promoters", which are loyal and enthusiastic employees who have a strong relationship with the company and actively recommend the employer to others. Those who respond with 7 or 8 on the question are "passive". These employees are satisfied but not particularly enthusiastic employees. They could be lured away to another employer, thereby not that loyal. Lastly, those who respond 0 to 6 are "detractors" who are dissatisfied employees and do not have a good relationship with the company and often speak negatively about it. To count the eNPS, the number of "promoters" is subtracted by the number of "detractors", resulting in an eNPS score between -100 to 100.

The organization's eNPS is presented below. The data from Axis is illustrated in Figure 7, and demonstrate that Axis have 67% promoters, 6% detractors and 27% passengers. This gives an eNPS score of 61, which is perceived as an "outstanding" score. This indicate a majority of the employees being highly positive towards Axis as an employer and to recommend them as a great place to work (Brilliant Future, 2024).

Employer Net Promoter (eNPS) - Axis

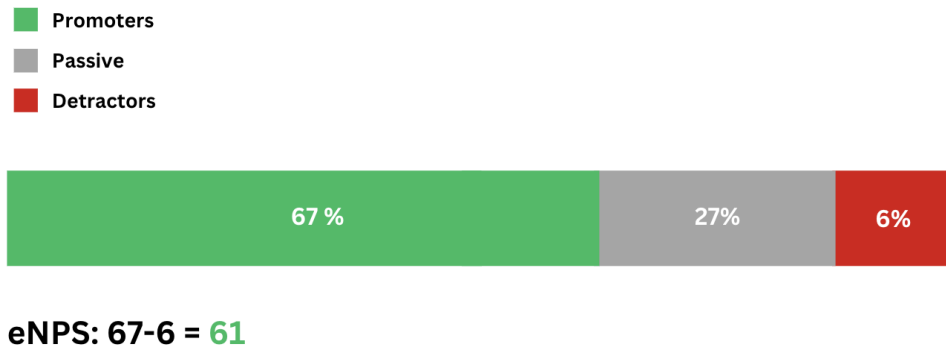


Figure 7. Axis' eNPS data.

The data from The Municipality is presented in Figure 8 and reveal their number of 24% promoters, 41% detractors and 36% passengers. This gives an eNPS of -17, which is classified as a "bad" score. This negative score indicates that a majority of employees are dissatisfied with The Municipality as an employer and would not recommend it. (Brilliant Future, 2024)

Employer Net Promoter (eNPS) - The Municipality

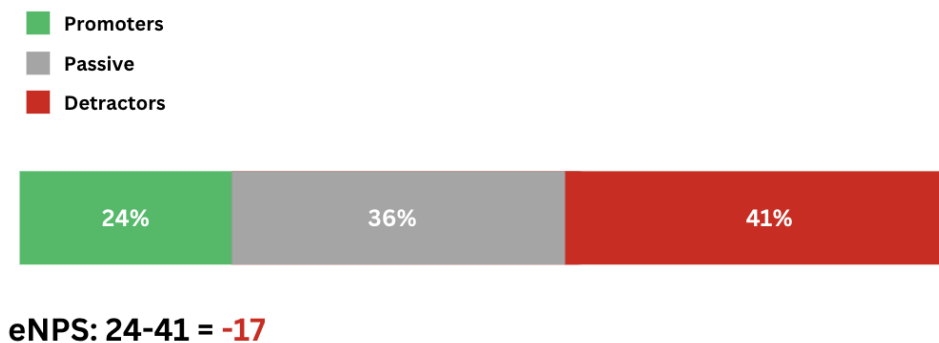


Figure 8. The Municipality's eNPS data.

When analyzing the eNPS in both organizations, the data reveal a notable contrast. The disparity revealed by the empirical data is visually illustrated in Figure 9 below, clearly showing the gap between the two organizations in terms of the eNPS.

Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS)

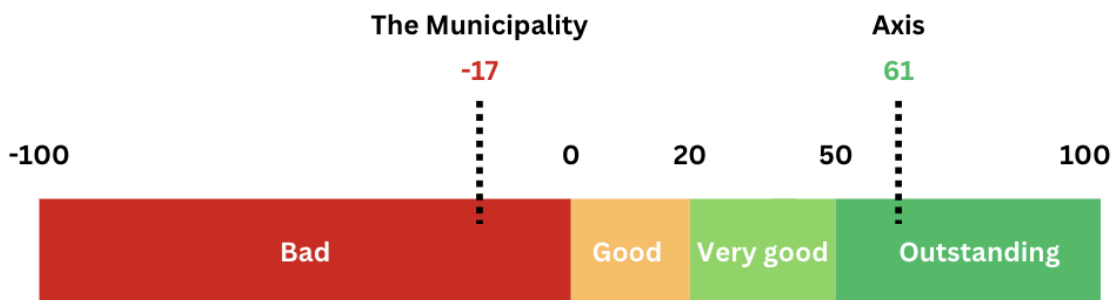


Figure 9. Result of eNPS for the organizations.

4.1.4 Summary of the secondary quantitative data

The quantitative data from both Axis and The Municipality, derived from a total of 3079 secondary data of survey responses, provide an overview of the organizations' levels of employee engagement and eNPS. The data show how the organizations have small differences in engagement levels, but major differences in the eNPS.

These quantitative insights serve as a crucial foundation for delving deeper into the interaction of employer branding and employee engagement by utilizing the qualitative data derived from interviews. The following chapter will go beyond numerical metrics to explore more nuanced perspectives that may further explain the quantitative data. The aim is to uncover the underlying factors that influence the eNPS and engagement levels in both organizations, providing a richer, more in-depth understanding.

4.2 Result from the qualitative data — Axis

In this chapter, the qualitative data for Axis will be presented. It was clear that the employees experience engagement, feeling satisfied and engaged with their work. There was consensus regarding factors playing a positive role for both employee engagement and the employer brand. From the interviews, there was nothing specific that emerged as negatively impacting the employee engagement and employer brand at Axis, thereby no pattern could be found. This indicates that the engagement drivers for the employees were similar to some extent (Larsson et al., 2020). In the following sections, the result from the qualitative data will be presented.

4.2.1 Colleagues and the social environment's positive affect

A pivotal factor causing engagement for all employees interviewed at Axis, was the colleagues and the social environment of the company. This contributes to the feeling that you know everyone. One employee describes it as:

“Besides feeling that the tasks flow smoothly, which makes it comfortable for me in a good way, another thing is that there are few workplaces that have this social atmosphere like we do. There's a reason we call this place a 'campus' — you walk around and feel like you know everyone. I have been to many companies, and few of them, in my opinion, have had this social aspect. And that's something I personally find important. It's a fun workplace.”

The experienced atmosphere at Axis thereby indicates that employees are engaged, as the quantitative data also shows. Furthermore, there are forty employees in the department where one of the interview person's belong, which increases the chances for one to find people you are like minded with and can have fun with, according to him. This was further confirmed by another employee, bringing up colleagues as a big part of the feeling you have towards work:

“It almost feels cliché to say it, but the colleagues make such a huge difference. I believe it wouldn't have worked out quite the same if you didn't like the people you work with. I mean, sure, one would have survived. But you notice it when you work

from home, for example, that things become quite a bit heavier and more difficult when you can't just talk directly and solve things together.”

Moreover, the social culture at Axis is very present in the workplace. One employee described it as the Swedish fika culture, but in a work setting. The employees described how Axis provides breakfast every morning. This daily routine brings together hundreds of employees in the cafeteria, fostering opportunities for small talk and relationship-building.

The social environment and colleagues are two pivotal factors affecting the meaningfulness at work in Axis. The social environment is also very present after work. Resources are allocated in a way that employees can do things after the working hours, facilitating for the employees to get to know each other as more than just colleagues. As one stated, you can find your private community through your employment at Axis, which is further described in the citation below:

“There are both gyms and exercise rooms and all that several times over. There are also schedules associated with these so that you can book for example a padel court for yourself and your colleagues. And for example, you can start an after-hours meditation group, and then you book it once a week, and then those who want to come, come. There are a lot of resources for meeting and enjoying each other's company even outside of work.”

Facilitating these activities to spend time together after work, creates a space for employees to get to know each other. However, some employees find it more or less intriguing to join these activities. One person mentions that she does not attend to happenings that often due to lack of time and other interests. Despite this, she has many close and meaningful work relationships. This indicates that there is room at Axis to create close relations, even though you do not want to spend time after work with your colleagues.

Another interview person mentioned how impressed he was by the opportunities Axis provides for employees to spend time together after work. He expressed his belief that Axis offers more opportunities for this compared to other companies, since the organization understands that employees have moved from other cities and countries to work at Axis:

“It's noticeable that Axis is a company that hires many people who aren't originally from here, both outside this city and outside Sweden. The company is aware that many relocate here for work. The organization strives to ensure there are activities beyond work for people to engage in, fostering opportunities for employees who move here, so they have more than just the job here”.

Moreover, Axis facilitates both socialization and work-life balance by for example offering various training rooms and gym. One employee find his life puzzle to be solved by Axis:

“I enjoy exercising so we have a group that works out together twice a week at lunchtime and stuff like that. It's really nice. It helps with the life puzzle and everything to be able to solve such things right here on site, at work. So, it's like killing two birds with one stone.”

One can say that Axis is providing work-life balance to their employees by offering a gym in the same house and allowing their employees to exercise during lunch.

4.2.2 The extra effort

The employees interviewed were all open to spend some extra time and put in the extra work to make a good job for Axis as an organization. All the employees mention that there is not much overtime at Axis, since the organization prioritizes work-life balance and the employee well-being very high. However, when overtime happens or other additional extra things should be done, none of the interviewed employees have a hard time doing it.

One employee stated that overtime happens so seldom, it does not affect the private life. This is an important factor for the ease and willingness to actually stay over when it is needed. Another employee means that when he has to work overtime, it is because of a good and relevant reason, which makes it feel meaningful. It is often also known in advance, minimizing its possible effect in private life.

Moreover, another employee mentioned that it is no problem staying over sometimes to work extra, since Axis facilitates in very good buildings and always offers fresh fruit and good coffee. This gives him energy to put in the extra effort when it is needed. He describes it:

"It's easy to stay and work extra here. The offices are very bright and good, so it's not like you feel terrible sitting in some small, dingy room. Here, I have the opportunity to stay a bit longer at work without feeling like it's a problem because we have access to water, fresh fruit, and good coffee, which help me stay energized."

This indicates that the “bright and good” office at Axis creates energy for the employees which they utilize when it is needed to do some extra work. One could also argue that Axis provides optimal conditions for its employees by offering some extra things, resulting in the employees’ desire to give back to the organization. Moreover, all the interviewed employees state that if overtime has been done, they are encouraged by the managers to balance it with going home early another day.

4.2.3 Personal- and professional development

The qualitative data indicate that Axis has high ambitions when it comes to personal- and professional development for their employees. This is further described as to be a part of Axis identity. The organization aims for employees to develop into higher positions and/or other functions, by ensuring continuous learning along their employment. One employee mentions that the continuous learning is an outspoken strategy and that it is ingrained “in the walls” of the company. This shows how integrated learning and development is in Axis culture, which can be seen as it is within the structural elements of the organization.

It is further demonstrated by the interviews that Axis brings up the importance of learning and development already in the recruitment process. The organization is clear that they strive for development, and the participants’ mention that Axis as an employer expects the employee to develop during their employment. This indicates that the external outspoken strategy about learning and development also aligns with the actual reality within the organization.

Moreover, managers clearly express that they expect that an employee works in one role for about two years, and then enter a new role or take on more responsibility. The organization offers various tools for development for the employees, both formal and informal. If an employee wants to develop in a specific area and there is a need for it, you are given the conditions and tools needed. For example by courses, audio books, or increased responsibility in specific areas. One interview person further describes it as: *“I believe that the growth mindset is present at Axis both in its operations with product development and such, but also in how the organization handles people and its employees.”*

Axis is an organization that always provides tools and opportunities for development when the employees express a will for this. Due to the strong learning and development culture within Axis, it stated by one interview person that it is almost taken for granted that you as an employee always can take initiative to create development. The qualitative data also indicates that Axis provides their employees with time to learn new things and develop.

4.2.4 Axis' employer brand

The qualitative data provided insights for further exploration of the brands interaction with employee engagement. According to one interview person, people often know about Axis and perceive it as a good place to work. He also states that what most people know Axis for, is also the reality internally in the organization. All the interviewed employees highlight Axis' strong value driven and positive culture, which they all take pride in being part of. They feel very proud and sincere when they talk about Axis to others because they are convinced that Axis not only looks like a good place to work at, but that the external picture aligns seamlessly with the reality in the company. This was explained by one employee as:

"I've worked in many different industries and companies, and what stands out here is that there's an amazingly positive culture. It's very culture-driven, both internally and externally. We reflect the same values internally as we do externally. That's very unique for a company. I've been at companies where this hasn't been the case, then in the executive management, it hasn't been important. These companies haven't seen the value it adds."

The employee further describes how clearly it is to see how working with the culture and aligning the value proposition externally and internally enhances the engagement. She describes that this is quantitatively measured in their annual employee surveys, consistently showing high levels of engagement and eNPS among Axis employees. She further states that she has never been to a company where they score this high on employee surveys as Axis does, she states:

“It’s a lot about pride. Being proud to work here and actually having the privilege to work for such a great company and for a company with such a fine brand. So, it’s a lot about pride, and the will to do a good job for the organization”.

In conclusion, the interview participants mean that there is a harmony between Axis external and internal brand, which further enhances engagement through them as employees feeling proud to work for an attractive employer.

4.3 Result from the qualitative data — The Municipality

In this chapter the qualitative data from The Municipality will be presented. The data shows that there was a consensus of factors positively affecting energy, fostering employee engagement. However, it was also clear that there was a consensus regarding factors negatively affecting both employee engagement and the employer brand.

4.3.1 Meaningful work

What clearly stood out as the most important factor regarding what affected the engagement in a positive way for the employees at The Municipality , was the feeling of doing something meaningful for other people in the society. All the interviewed employees mentioned this several times during the interviews, indicating consensus in meaningfulness as the most important factor. The need of meaningfulness demonstrates from one of the interview persons:

“I am very value-driven, which is why I enjoy working in the public sector. In the private sector, profit is the driving force, but that's not the case within a municipality. Here, we work more for the people, and that's what I feel most driven and engaged by, to work for something bigger than myself”.

Furthermore, another interview person express that this meaningfulness and the creation of value in the daily work is the reason why it feels good to work everyday, she states:

“It's all about the feeling of creating value, the sense of going to work and doing something good for the residents, even if it's not always a huge amount every day, it's something, every day”.

Another employee who lives in the municipality and have family there, explained in a similar way what affected her engagement level in a positive manner:

“Since I live in this municipality, I feel what I do is meaningful. I have children who attend school in this city, so it certainly creates engagement to gain an understanding of what lies behind all the decisions in the school and so on. These are very important issues for me.”

Moreover, an interview person said that he was born in the municipality, but did not live here now, but despite that he felt a big responsibility towards the residents in the municipality. He explained it:

“When you work in the public sector like this, you always feel a responsibility towards the residents, to assist them, that is my biggest motivation. What you do here is to make it as good as possible for the people living in the municipality . I am originally from here as well, even though I don't live here now, so maybe I feel an even slightly stronger connection to the municipality ”.

One of the interview person even expressed that the desire to have a meaningful work was the main reason for everyone working in the public sector. She states that if you are not engaged and motivated by that, you should not work at a municipality. She states:

“I think, if you do not feel motivated and engaged to work for the residents, you should not be working at a municipality. If I didn't feel motivated by it, I would quit my job immediately”.

Based on the qualitative result, the employees experience a lot of meaningfulness in working for the municipality and its inhabitants, which in turn enhances their engagement. The feeling of working with something meaningful creates energy, happiness and dedication to the employees.

4.3.2 Colleagues

From the qualitative data, colleagues stood out as a pivotal factor in positively impacting the engagement level at The Municipality. The interview persons described how it is the employees within the organization that makes it a good place to work. One interview person described the colleagues as one of the main reasons he did not work much from home. He explained:

“What makes it enjoyable to go to work is mostly having such great colleagues, which is actually very important. If I didn't have such great colleagues, I would probably work from home more than I do. The colleagues are a very big reason why I work here”.

This is confirmed by another employee who experience the daily small talks with colleagues as one of the most important factor for creating engagement:

“I would probably say something that drives my engagement level up is when you meet your colleagues during coffee breaks, or when you run into someone by chance and you can laugh and chat a bit, that really brightens up my days”.

Moreover, she described how sitting in the same room as her colleagues gives her a lot of energy, which further fosters engagement. She see her colleagues as the “rescue” on bad days, which demonstrates the importance of the colleagues:

“As we sit now, we are sitting in pairs in each room, and I think that provides energy to me because you are collaborating with others and when you get stuck, you can bounce ideas with someone. Similarly, those days when you feel like “this is so boring” or something like that, you know you have colleagues you can talk to about it, and they understand, and then you can let it go, and it always feels much better afterwards”.

4.3.3 Freedom and autonomy

All the interviewed persons mention that they structure their day a lot by themselves. This results in a great freedom and a high level of autonomy. All employees mentioned that one of the best things about their work was the variety of tasks and the broad scope of their roles. They described how no one worked solely as a specialist focusing on just one or a few tasks. Instead, they were involved in a wide range of activities, making each day different. An interview person explained the daily structure as:

“We create the structure entirely on our own. And likewise, when I schedule meetings with follow-ups and so on, we control all of those processes entirely ourselves.”

Moreover, another employee said the same thing: *“Overall, it's ourselves who set the agenda, so to speak”*. This was confirmed by the other interviewees as well. It was explained that even though a lot of the daily work must be done according to laws from the Tax Agency and the government, it is up to the employees to decide how the work should be done and what needs to be done. One of the interview person shared:

“You see, there's a lot of things in a municipality that must be done according to the Tax Agency and government regulations, and we must comply with and adhere to those, but then it's up to us to find what can improve our work and what we want to dedicate our time to. So, it's up to us, largely”.

In this case, the employees feel a lot of autonomy due to the fact that there are not very clear expectations, goals or structures to be held.

Moreover, the willingness from the interviewed employee at The Municipality to put in extra effort in the job, is seen to be dependent on their high level of autonomy and flexibility. Overtime is occasionally required, but it is balanced by a flexible approach to working hours. Employees have the freedom to offset extra time worked one day, by leaving early on another day, thanks to the flex time policy. Through the qualitative data, it was understood that none of the interviewees experienced overtime as burdensome. They attribute this to the high level of autonomy and flexibility they have in managing their tasks. Furthermore, one employee notes that the ease of working extra hours depends on the nature of the task at hand:

"It depends very much on what type of task it is, whether it's one's own things that one has decided to work on, then it might not be as difficult as if one has pressure from outside to get certain things done."

Tasks related to deadlines or political matters may feel more demanding, whereas projects driven by personal interest and autonomy might be more manageable.

4.3.4 Lack in clarity affecting engagement negatively

All the interview persons mentioned there was a lack of clarity within the organization. Thus, the interview persons highlighted the level of the lack of clarity in different ways. Some see it as a very big problem, whereas others see it as a smaller problem. The lack of clarity is firstly rooted in an absence of the understanding of what was expected by them as employees. Secondly, it is rooted in the absence of both individual-, group-, and organizational goals. One employee described that, despite what is expected from The Municipality as an organization in general towards the residents and politics, he did not know what was expected from him. He further meant that if this weakness would have been handled, it would create value for the organization as a whole. He explained:

"I don't think it is really explicitly stated what is expected from us, there are more certain things as a municipality; we need to demonstrate financially and those things we need to somehow complete. But beyond those things it is a bit more vague about what is expected of us. It is more the kind of thing we talk about in the corridor, but not at a higher level than that. I think it would be beneficial if we set goals for the future already now".

Furthermore, the qualitative data shows a remarkable lack in the knowledge of The Municipality 's organizational general goals. This was shown by the disclosure that none of the interviewed employees knew the organizational goals. This is for example elaborated on by the quotations below:

“If I'm aware of the organizational goals? No, no, no. I would like to say yes, but no, I don't. I don't feel like we have worked or focused on it in that way, which I believe the management department themselves are realizing now after the employee survey and seeing that the employees are not aware that we have a vision, for example, like Vision 2040, which should, in fact, be revamped into a development, sustainability strategy instead. And we have key words, but since we're not working with them, then they don't exist.”

Another employee also stated that he did not know about the organizational goals. He explains:

“No, I might not have a very good grasp of the goals. No, it usually comes to light during these employee surveys, but it's not always very clear what we have. No, it's quite unclear actually.”

However, the lack of clarity goes beyond the lack of goals and expectations of the employees. One interview persons also described a lack of clarity regarding how to complete his work tasks:

“I'm not always so sure about how to perform the work myself. I would probably say that quite often, I am very unsure about how to do it, and of course, this creates challenges”.

This is further strengthened by another interview person who expressed that lack of clarity in how to complete work tasks resulted in negative consequences for his drive for action: *“The uncertainty can definitely lead to procrastination because you are not really sure where to start”*. When, as stated by interview persons, there is no understanding in how to perform a task, procrastination starts, which further restrains productivity.

Moreover, the employees describe that even though the organization lacks clarity and structure, they find their own methods for establishing personal goals and structures, thereby also creating clarity. One interview person mentioned that she believes others would benefit from more clarity provided by the organization. But personally, her own energy towards work, which stems from meaningfulness, in combination with her personality traits, prevent her from experiencing the negative consequences of uncertainty. This is reflected in the following quotation:

“There are those in our work group whom I truly believe lack clear goals. Perhaps because they need someone to guide them in which direction to go. I myself am a bit scattered as a person, I have a strong sense of the direction I believe we should be working towards, and what I want to achieve in my work for The Municipality . Of course, I am not the one making the final decisions. But my drive and energy as an individual certainly facilitate things, so I don't find myself lacking goals as much.”

However, it is stated that even though they are driven individuals who set goals and structure for themselves to create clarity, the organization’s lack in the area affect them and their performance negatively:

“Yes, well, it's difficult for us. We can set goals that we might think are suitable, but it's also difficult to think ahead when we don't have any organizational goals to lean on. We need to have overarching goals that we can break down to our own goals. And it's somewhere at an organizational level it has to start.”

This highlights the actual importance of organizational goals and clarity, showing that only personal drive and energy can not take you as far as it can in combination with clarity.

4.3.5 Professional- and personal development

When it comes to professional and personal development in The Municipality , the interviews indicate it is something the employee in most cases needs to initiate themselves. It is clear that learning and development is not prioritized by organization. For example, it is described

that due to cutting costs, the management department sometimes questions the relevance for employees attending conferences, which some employees state as something that restrains the development.

However, the interviewed employees at The Municipality mention they drive their own development because that is how they are as persons. For example, one employee describe it as:

“You need to be proactive yourself. There's no culture here of someone coming to you and asking, 'Hey, do you want to attend a course?'. But personally, I've always, and it applies to all of us here in my department, we always ensure that we develop and are up to date when it comes to keeping up with trends and education and further training.”

Interviews indicate a factor obstructing the development is that there is no room or time to develop The Municipality as an organization. It is rather about keeping the organization “floating”. One employee explains: *“You get stuck in this sort of daily routine, resulting in maintaining instead of evolving. And then I'm talking about the entire organization.”* This restrains not only the organization from developing, but also the people in it. As further described: *“Then unfortunately, there isn't much development at all, so it's just a matter of staying afloat, which is a huge minus for the development for us as employees.”*

This indicates that the employees at The Municipality drive their own development themselves, even though the organization does not foster learning or development opportunities.

4.3.6 The Municipality's employer brand

The qualitative data shows The Municipality's difficulties in attracting and maintaining employees. Even though the interview guide (Appendix 2) does not address questions about the employer brand until the end, interviewees raised challenges regarding the employer brand early on during the interviews. Several of the respondents stated that there is a problem in attracting people to work at The Municipality. Two of the employees experienced difficulties in their daily work due to the absence of a manager. The reason behind this was

that their previous manager had changed jobs, and The Municipality did not succeed in attracting and recruiting a new manager. One of the interviewees who was new in her role states:

"I was actually without a manager for quite some time because it was challenging to recruit a manager for my department. My team consists of three people, and the other two left while two new employees started, and I was also new, so 3 out of 3 of us were completely new, without a manager. I had to step up and take responsibility by guiding and mentoring the new employees, even though I was new myself. You could almost say I built my role by myself from scratch. But we found a good way to work nonetheless."

The lack of clarity due to the absenteeism of not having a manager, was experienced by another interview person as well. She expressed: *"Since we don't have a manager at the moment, clarity is lacking, so it probably wouldn't hurt to have a bit more clarity, and a manager"*. It is not just attracting individuals that is difficult for The Municipality, from the qualitative data it was emphasized that The Municipality also has difficulty in maintaining the employees. One employee explains that The Municipality often serves as a stepping stone, where new graduates begin but then leave to continue developing themselves elsewhere. She explained:

"Sometimes it's said that it's a bit like "municipality school," where many people start working at The Municipality after they have studied, since The Municipality is a great place for your first job to grow and develop. Of course, we want them to stay, but often it becomes a kind of stepping stone, since they move on to another employer. If you're very career-driven, there's a limit to how far you can go here. And that's where the problem arises in retaining employees".

All the interviewed employees in The Municipality state that they are proud to work at the organization, primarily since it is in the public sector, which involves creating value for other people. This meaningfulness in their work was the primary reason for their feeling of proudness towards the organization.

The employees also said that they would recommend the workplace to others. Moreover, some employees mentioned that for those who live in, or are born in the municipality, it is especially enjoyable to tell others that they work in The Municipality.

What could be seen from the qualitative data was also that despite the feeling of being proud to work at The Municipality, the interviewees also experienced a sense of needing to “justify themselves” for why they worked at The Municipality. They felt compelled to argue that it is not as boring as it may sound. Indicating the external perception of The Municipality as an employer brand is bad. This can be seen in the following quotations:

“In general, there are many prejudices about working in a municipality, with the perception often being that it's rigid, dull, with many rules, and sometimes perceived as obstructive. I believe everyone working in a municipality has to deal with or encounter these perceptions in some way. Personally, I empathize a lot with my colleagues in this regard. I'm proud to work for this municipality because I know my colleagues do fantastic work, even if they sometimes receive criticism for it. It's because we are bound by laws and regulations, but that's just the way it is”.

Furthermore, another employee had the same experience about telling others he worked at a municipality. He explained:

“I often feel the need to explain that it's not as boring as it sounds. Before I started working here, I had hardly ever been here and almost never heard of this municipality. But now, after so many years here, I've come to realize that it's just as good as anywhere else. There are many good things here, and I feel like I have to explain that it's enjoyable, more enjoyable than it sounds”.

Another interview person highlighted that she thought that the reason why The Municipality had a weak employer brand and experienced problems with attracting and maintaining employees, was due to the Municipalities location in Sweden. She emphasizes the importance of branding The Municipality, not only as an employer, but also as a whole concept, showing that The Municipality can provide more than just an employer. She explained this:

We often have incredibly successful recruitments, but there are certain positions where it's challenging, such as in healthcare and roles for highly educated engineers. The main problem is that they don't live here in the municipality. Therefore, it becomes difficult to recruit for such positions. I strongly believe in marketing the municipality and being an attractive employer. It's not just about promoting The Municipality as an employer but also as a place to live. We have incredible potential; it just needs to be consolidated under some form of concept. I believe that if we do that, we'll go a long way.

The qualitative data reveals challenges in attracting and retaining employees, such as difficulties in recruiting managers and the perception of the Municipality as a stepping stone. Despite these issues, employees expressed pride in their work, particularly due to the meaningfulness of their public sector roles. However, they also felt the need to justify their employment at the Municipality.

5. Analysis/Discussion

The analysis and discussion will further elaborate on the result, including both the quantitative- and qualitative data. This will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2.

The chapter is structured by first analyzing and discussing each organization separately by answering the sub-question “*Which factors contribute to these branding and engagement results?*”, which lay the foundation for answering the main question “*How do the employer brand and employee engagement interact?*”. After this, the sub-question “*What is the Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS) and the level of employee engagement within each organization?*” will be answered for both organizations. Following this, a comparison between the two organizations will be presented lastly in the chapter.

5.1 Factors contributing to Axis’ employer brand and engagement

To address this question, the analysis and discussion has been broken down into various headings representing different factors that contribute to the employer brand and employee

engagement at Axis. The factors discussed in this section are based on the results of data, from both the qualitative- and quantitative method. How these factors affect the employer brand and employee engagement will be explained and analyzed under each subheading.

5.1.1 A strong sense of community

Upon analyzing the result of the data from Axis, a strong connection between engagement at Axis and its strong sense of community, can be seen. The community aspect is seen to be reinforced by various initiatives and informal gatherings such as daily breakfasts, training activities and participation in different groups of interests, all fostering a social atmosphere amongst employees. The results show that this creates a joyful atmosphere where employees can joke and have fun even though they are at work. As Bakker et al. 's (2011) model in chapter 2.2.3 shows, employees who can experience feelings of pleasure and happiness at work have easier to experience work engagement, something the employees at Axis experienced, according to the qualitative data. This is further strengthened by the quantitative data, showing a high level of engagement within the Axis.

The strong sense of community at Axis and the relationships built at work all can be referred to as *meaningfulness at work*, which Lysova et al., (2019) describes as the desire to be part of something bigger. The colleagues are thereby a big part of creating belongingness. In this case, the employees feel meaningfulness to be a part of the organization where the feeling of a community exists. The community and relationships at work are seen to be two pivotal factors in further Axis affecting the meaningfulness at work, which in turn enhances engagement (Lysova et al., 2019; Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011). This shows how Axis not just offers their employees a paycheck, instead it aligns with what Hiltrop (1999) brings up, that employees are searching for a self-fulfilling journey, strengthening their attractiveness as an employer in today's labor market.

5.1.2 Work-life balance enhancing engagement

Another factor enhancing engagement positively is the Axis clear prioritization of work-life balance. Axis facilitating for their employees to balance their life, can be seen as a factor possibly affecting the employees high likelihood to put in the extra effort in their work, indicating engagement. This aligns with Kecklund et al., (2010) concepts of work-life balance, where the employee has a balance between their personal- and professional lives,

which makes them more satisfied and motivated, thereby enhancing engagement. (Kecklund et al., 2010; Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011).

According to Sana & Zohair (2016), organizations can promote work-life balance through regulations, which Axis somewhat achieves by, for example, providing their employees with a gym in the same building. This allows employees to exercise during lunch breaks. Additionally, as mentioned in the empirical data, overtime at Axis occurs for good and relevant reasons, making it feel meaningful. It is also often known in advance, minimizing its potential impact on private life for the employees. By ensuring these conditions, Axis provides opportunities for work-life balance for their employees.

This indicates that Axis offers more than just a paycheck, but also a place where employees can pursue other interests and essentials important to them, further enhancing engagement (Hiltorp, 1999). This also highlights the individual perspective on work-life balance, which Sana & Zohair (2016) describe as the willingness of individuals to make efforts to perform well. If employees feel a sense of work-life balance, as seen in the case of Axis, they are more likely to put in extra effort, showcasing engagement and contributing to organizational success.

5.1.3 Development

Axis as a company not only prioritizes a strong sense of community and work-life balance, but also fosters learning and development. This is evident through both formal- and informal learning opportunities. As Ekberg (2006) suggests, integrating development into the structural elements and culture of an organization leads to increased development for both the organization and individuals within it. This aligns with Wharton's (2023) assertion that personal and professional development leads to a more skilled workforce and enhanced engagement, as may be the case at Axis.

Granberg (2009) identifies three perspectives on the "will to learn", with Axis clearly aligning with the *reciprocity motive*. This motive to learn can be seen as the learning and development are embedded in the culture, with employees striving together to achieve common goals. The results show that Axis is transparent about the importance and the heavy value they put in learning and development from the recruitment stage. This ensures they

attract individuals who are curious and eager to develop. The *curiosity motive* is highlighted by Granberg (2009) as another motive for development.

The transparency regarding learning and development in the recruitment process increases the chance for a good work-fit, especially regarding the person organization fit which refers to that the individual's own values and mission are in line with the organization's (Rajper et al., 2020). In Axis and its candidates' case, this means the alignment of the value of development and continued development. This further set the stage for the best condition for employee engagement (Rajper et al., 2020; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

This also indicates that the external brand of Axis, which openly promotes learning and development opportunities as part of their strategy, aligns with the internal climate. This alignment, as shown in the empirical data, positively affects employee engagement. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) emphasize the importance of organizations living up to their externally branded strategy and values internally, to enhance employee engagement.

Furthermore, there is an interaction between the availability of development opportunities in the organization and individuals' own initiative, as noted by Ekberg (2006). The best conditions for fostering development is when employees feel that they can take initiative to create their own development through learning opportunities, which is something that can be seen at Axis. The result show that employees are provided with tools and opportunities for development whenever they express interest and there is an organizational interest in it as well, leading to increased engagement. Additionally, Axis allows employees the resource of *time* to learn and develop. This fosters their likelihood to take initiative and further enhances engagement, as emphasized by Ekberg (2006) and Ellström (1996).

Moreover, employees at Axis seldom experience uncertainty regarding task performance. This may be attributable to the extensive development opportunities provided by the company. This equips the employees at Axis with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfill their responsibilities, boosting their confidence and sense of security, and reducing role ambiguity, which can hinder engagement (Sawyer, 1992; Manas et al., 2018; Chenevert et al., 2013). This indicates an interesting discrepancy, since Axis scores higher than The Municipality in the quantitative result in terms of having "unfocused" employees who need

more clarity to effectively use their high energy. However, this lack of clarity was not mentioned in the qualitative data in the interviews. This may stem from the fact that Axis has many enthusiastic and loyal promoters who may unconsciously overlook this need or consciously choose not to mention any negative aspects due to their loyalty to Axis as an employer.

5.1.4 The interaction of Axis employer brand and employee engagement

The data reveal alignment between Axis external and internal employer brand. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) emphasize the crucial role of the alignment between the internal and external brand, in establishing a strong employer brand to boost employee engagement. The alignment can be seen as attracting candidates whose values align with the employer brand, ensuring that the promises made during recruitment align with the actual reality within the organization. According to Froom (2021), when employees find that the external image accurately reflects the internal reality, engagement is enhanced, which is evident at Axis.

It can be further argued that this alignment accounts for the high number of promoters at Axis. A large number of promoters indicates a significant number of satisfied and engaged employees, leading to increased retention (Conference Board, 2001). This success can be attributed to an effective internal employer branding strategy that ensures current employees are engaged with the organizational culture and strategy (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). For employees to become promoters, initial engagement must be established, something Axis seems to have successfully achieved.

Axis has successfully fostered employee engagement through several key strategies, as revealed by the result. Firstly, by creating a sense of meaningfulness through a strong community and supportive colleague relationships. Secondly, by offering work-life balance, which facilitates employees' private and professional lives and ensures their well-being. Thirdly, by providing professional- and personal development opportunities and cultivating an atmosphere that encourages continuous learning. All strategies are shown to foster engagement (Lysova et al., 2019; Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011; Kecklund et al., 2010; Ekberg, 2006; Ellström, 1996). As a result, a remarkable part of Axis employees become promoters, genuinely feeling proud to be part of the company and that Axis are a good employer, which in turn boosts Axis's employer brand.

Furthermore, a positive cycle is thereby created, reinforcing both the employer brand and employee engagement within the organization. Employees are given conditions to feel engaged, which foster pride and loyalty towards the company. This pride and loyalty lead them to speak positively about the organization, enhancing its employer brand and making it an even more attractive employer. This increased attractiveness further strengthens employee engagement as employees feel even prouder to be part of the company, thus becoming more engaged. Axis's high eNPS likely stems from this sense of pride in the company's brand and its offerings to employees. Quantitative indicators, such as high eNPS scores and external employer rankings, as well as knowing that their employer is attractive and attract top candidates, affirm Axis as a desirable workplace. This, in turn, enhances employee engagement and their role as proud promoters, resulting in increased employee engagement, which is related to satisfaction, commitment, and enthusiasm about their work (Larsson et al., 2020).

This case empirically shows how employee engagement results in recognized value for the whole organization, highlighting not only what employees get out of the organization, as promoted in the employer brand, but also what employees give back to the organization (Berthon et al., 2005; Turner, 2020; Bakker et al., 2011). As seen in the result, Axis's strong employee engagement and employer brand reinforce each other. This demonstrates that employees give back to the organization through a high level of commitment and a willingness to do a good job and maintain their employer's strong brand. This illustrates the dynamic interaction between employer branding and employee engagement at Axis fostering each other.

5.2 Factors contributing to The Municipality's employer brand and engagement

To address the interaction between the employer brand and employee engagement at The Municipality, the same structure as used in the sections before for Axis will be applied. Firstly, several subcategories that represent various factors contributing to the employer brand and employee engagement will be presented. The last subchapter will then present more clearly how employer brand and employee engagement interacts, answering the main research question.

5.2.1 Meaningfulness role in fostering engagement

The employee engagement at The Municipality is seen to stem from the meaningfulness the employees feel in their work. Their desire to positively impact others explains their choice of employment at a municipality. Doing something for someone and something that is bigger than oneself, can thereby be seen as a clear driver for engagement amongst the employees at The Municipality (Larsson et al., 2020). This also relates to what is stated by Lysova et al. (2019), that meaningfulness *in work* - the purpose oriented perspective, is easier to experience if the job is designed to create purpose and to be of importance for others. The meaningfulness the participants from The Municipality experiences, seems to somewhat compensate for the organization's weak employer brand, by attracting individuals who are a good fit for the specific type of work. Their success in attracting the best work-fit, even though a weak employer brand, may stem from the organization being particularly — a municipality.

This may stem from the fact that even though the municipality participating in this study has a weak employer brand, municipalities in general have a brand based on societal perceptions. There is a general perception of what it means to work at a municipality and the meaningful work it entails. This means that the specific municipality in this case will be included in the broader brand of municipalities in general. With that said, individuals may seek employment at The Municipality not necessarily because they specifically want to work at that *particular* workplace, but because they want to work at a municipality in general. This, in turn, increases the chances of a good work-fit, as it is likely that the organization is able to attract good fit candidates, even if the employer branding in this specific municipality is weak.

Moreover, colleagues stood out as a pivotal factor in positively impacting the engagement level at The Municipality. Lysova et al. (2019) mentions this can be seen as a factor facilitating a sense of meaning at work. Meaningfulness at work can be enhanced by being a part of something bigger, which includes colleagues and a supportive culture, something that is seen to be present at The Municipality due to the qualitative data.

Since the need for meaningfulness is being met for the participants from The Municipality, the employees explain a feeling of energy and happiness towards their work, which aligns

with Bakker et al.'s (2011) model in chapter 2.2.3. The model shows how the feeling of working with something meaningful creates energy, happiness and dedication, which in turn fosters engagement. Research by Lysova et al. (2019) highlights the importance of experiencing work as meaningful, emphasizing that it has become the most crucial factor for many employees to feel engaged. This analysis supports the notion that when individuals find their work meaningful both regarding the purpose, the task and the job in general, it can influence the level of engagement.

5.2.2 Development opportunities

The employees at The Municipality did not feel they were provided with much development opportunities. Ekberg (2006) states that in work environments where learning opportunities are restrictive, the learning environment is perceived dull and non-challenging, which deteriorates engagement. However, Ekberg (2006) further states that the engagement level strengthens if the individuals have influence over their work situation and have room for initiatives, which the qualitative data indicates the employees at The Municipality has.

Even though the Municipality does not provide formal development opportunities for its employees, the interviewed employees still pursue their own development. This may relate to a strong work-fit, particularly regarding personal organization fit as described by Rajper et al. (2020), meaning the employees' values align with the organizational values and mission. This creates a sense of meaningfulness which further enhances their energy level. Despite the lack of clear goals and organizational clarity, which Caillier (2016) argues is necessary for engagement, employees invest their own energy into developing themselves. This is also facilitated by the autonomy they are given. Having that said, the employees at The Municipality are observed to have a lot of autonomy and energy. Coupled with finding their work meaningful, this results in employees creating an environment that fosters development, resulting in more engagement.

Moreover, the drive for development amongst the interviewed employees at The Municipality may stem from a good work-fit. Due to Rajper et al. (2020) a good-fit employee wants to grow in the organizations and thereby seek new opportunities, which is consensual with the employees at The Municipality who develop themselves even though they are not formally given opportunities for it. One could argue that if the work fit between the employees and

The Municipality were not as good as it is, the employees might not have found ways to develop on their own. Instead, they would have felt that their abilities were not being utilized, leading to boredom and decreased motivation, which in turn would have led to decreased employee engagement. The high work-fit can thereby be seen as one of the reasons why The Municipality is scoring relatively high in the quantitative data in engagement (Rajper et al., 2020). The engagement score is almost as high as Axis, even though they are given completely different conditions, opportunities and huge differences in eNPS. The good work fit The Municipality has with their employees can be seen as a pivotal factor for their high engagement level. When companies have found these good work-fits, employees will stay longer in the company, foster engagement and thereby give back a lot to the organization. (Michigan State University, 2024).

5.2.3 Lack in clarity

According to the qualitative data, the employees felt a lack of clarity. This lack is firstly rooted in an absence of the understanding of what is expected by them as employees, which pose a danger for engagement due to Caillier (2016), and can lead to role ambiguity. The lack of clarity is secondly rooted in the absence of both individual-, group- and organizational goals, which is putting the engagement level at risk.

One can say that the reciprocity motive, where you strive for goals together with others to enhance personal and professional development (Granberg, 2009), cannot be fulfilled, as The Municipality does not have any outspoken common goals to strive towards. Furthermore, The Municipality is not having a clear value proposition that they communicate externally as a central message in order to attract best fitted candidates, (Eisenberg et al., 2001), which further creates ambiguity within the organization as well. This shows that if there are no shared goals clearly presented to the employees internally, and the employer branding externally is weak, it can negatively impact both the clarity and the professional- and personal development within the organization, which will affect employee engagement negatively. This is confirmed by Sawyer (1992) who states the importance of goals to enhance engagement.

Caillier (2016) states that without a clear understanding of expectations and goals, employees put less effort into their work and are less likely to do the extra work. However, all

interviewed employees at The Municipality demonstrate their willingness to put in extra effort, such as working overtime, and to drive their professional and personal development within the organization. This indicates that extra effort can still be exerted even without a clear understanding of expectations, clarity, and goals.

Nevertheless, if the employees at The Municipality did not have such high energy levels — likely resulting from a good work fit, which provides the best conditions for meaningfulness and engagement — there is a risk they would not create their own clarity and structure, nor drive their own development. In such a scenario, they might feel unsatisfied and bored rather than engaged, as they do now, shown in the quantitative and qualitative result.

This indicates that, even though clarity, structure, and goals are important for engagement (Caillier, 2016; Sawyer, 1996; Brilliant Future, 2024), their absence can give employees a sense of flexibility, enhancing their autonomy and their ability to manage their own time. A job design with high levels of autonomy positively impacts meaningfulness, which further enhances employee engagement and the possibility for employees to think more creatively and generate more innovative ideas (Lysova et al., 2019; Penna, 2007; Gawke et al., 2017).

Moreover, the absence of structure and clarity may then possibly enhance the feeling of flexibility for the employees at The Municipality. This may play a role in why the interviewed employees are willing to work additional hours and put in extra effort, as well as the high engagement levels evidenced by the result. Kecklund et al. (2010) describe flexibility as a factor nurturing work-life balance by facilitating opportunities for employees to influence their schedules, allowing them to align work with personal lives more easily, which further boosts engagement (Kecklund et al., 2010; Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011).

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that if The Municipality provided more clarity for its employees, their engagement levels would likely increase. Interviewees mentioned the lack of clarity as an area they would like to see improved. This underscores the importance of organizational goals and clarity. It highlights that even if individual drive and energy are essential, combining it with clear organizational direction can boost the engagement, as noted by Caillier (2016) and Brilliant Future (2024).

This underscores a missed opportunity for The Municipality to enhance engagement by providing clarity in addition to leveraging the employees' existing energy. It illustrates how employer branding influences engagement through work-fit. Employees attracted to meaningful work, like that offered by municipalities, seek purposeful employment. This alignment of values between the organization and the individual facilitates engagement, as employees feel a deeper connection to their work. When employees experience a good work-fit, they are more likely to contribute positively to the organization, surpassing the engagement levels of those without such alignment (Rajper, Ghumro & Mangi, 2020).

This highlights the potential for The Municipality to further elevate its engagement levels by enhancing clarity, as employees already demonstrate meaningfulness and energy. With clarity added to the equation, they possess even greater potential to create engagement.

5.2.4 The interaction of The Municipality's employer brand and employee engagement

Both the quantitative and qualitative data highlight The Municipality's weak employer brand, evidenced by a low eNPS of -17, with 41% of respondents being "detractors." The organization faces recruitment and retention challenges. Employees operate without clear guidance and expectations, resulting in a general lack of clarity. Despite the fact that the interviewed employees feel proud to work at The Municipality, they often have to explain their choice of employer to others. This indicates a negative external perception of The Municipality's employer brand.

This illustrates that the external employer branding is weak, lacking shared goals and a clear value proposition communicated as a central message — which is an essential component of a strong employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Internally, there is no clear value proposition marketed to the employees, resulting in a lack of alignment and direction. This internal branding failure prevents employees from working towards common goals, which is crucial for creating a strong employer brand and fostering engagement (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sawyer, 1992; Bakker et al., 2011). Consequently, the organization cannot fully harness the energy of employees who feel a strong sense of meaningfulness towards their work, thereby restraining engagement and in turn employer brand success by having less engaged

employees who may serve as promoters for the organization, enhancing the brand and eNPS (Brilliant Future, 2024).

The Municipality's weak employer brand fuels a negative cycle affecting both the employer brand and employee engagement. If employees know their employer struggles to attract and retain staff, it creates a sense of instability and insecurity. This perception of organizational failure can cause employees to focus on negative aspects, exacerbating low engagement and contributing to a negative spiral. This negative cycle results in decreased productivity and reduced profitability, common consequences of low employee engagement (Derek, 2009; Brilliant Future AB, 2024; Crawford et al., 2010; Harter et al., 2002). Consequently, The Municipality's already weak brand becomes even weaker.

However, even though The Municipality's brand is weak, its employees feel a strong sense of meaningfulness and exhibit proportionally high engagement levels relative to their eNPS. This engagement may stem from the nature of their organization as a municipality, where societal perceptions play a role in shaping their employer brand. As the interviews revealed, that employees often feel the need to defend their workplace against negative stereotypes, suggesting that preconceived notions about municipal employment are prevalent.

These negative perceptions may though be counterbalanced by municipalities being associated with employment offering a sense of purpose. Working for a municipality may be seen as an opportunity to make a difference in residents' lives and the community, contributing to a meaningful work experience that feels personally significant and worthwhile, which makes it feel meaningful and enhances engagement. Lysovia et al. (2019) brings up both the meaningfulness *in work*, focused on the purpose-oriented perspective, where your job is designed to create purpose and positive importance to others, and meaningfulness *at work*, described as the feeling of being a part of something bigger. Both these perspectives may be fulfilled by The Municipality, as all interviewed employees expressed that they find it meaningful to work for others. The Municipality can also create the feeling of being part of something bigger. In this case, it can be the actual municipality, and not the organization itself, contributing to meaningfulness at work.

The brand of The Municipality as a "municipality" thereby may impact the organization by attracting employees who seek meaningful employment where they can make a difference for

something more than just a company, namely other people and the society. The result shows an alignment between the employees personal missions to work for “something bigger”, and the organization’s mission as a municipality’s nature in serving the people and community, indicating a good work-fit (Rajper et al., 2020). Showing that personal values and goals, and organizational values and goals in The Municipality, are in harmony. Consequently, their engagement might not be connected to The Municipality itself, but to their role within the broader municipal context. This disconnection could explain the low eNPS and the prevalence of detractors within the organization, while still scoring high in engagement.

In conclusion, The Municipality’s employer brand may have played a pivotal role in attracting a good work-fit as their brand as a “municipality” and the work that is associated with from the common man's eye. This enhances engagement by a good work-fit where the employee feels meaningfulness and as being part of something bigger, thereby enhancing engagement. However, the engagement does not seem to be that strong it enhances the organization's employer brand, since there are remarkably more detractors than promoters. Even though the interviewed employees explain they are proud of working at The Municipality, they have to explain their choice of employer to others, which probably may not make them go round and brag about their employer. This indicates that the organization's brand as the “The Municipality” may contribute negatively to engagement within the organization.

5.3 The Employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS) and the level of employee engagement within the two organizations

Axis is ranked in the top 50 for IT and top 100 for MSc Engineering on Universums Awards (2024) list of the strongest employer brands in Sweden. The organization boasted an “outstanding” eNPS of 61, showing their success in employer branding. Conversely, The Municipality scores -17 in eNPS, indicating a “bad” employer brand. This distinct difference in the organization's eNPS score, shows that Axis has many more promoters actively spreading good words about the organization. The Municipality has fewer promoters, and a lot more detractors who are dissatisfied and do not have a good relationship with the organization (Brilliant Future, AB).

Axis employees are likely to spread positive word-of-mouth about Axis externally due to the quantitative data revealing they have 67% promoters who are engaged and gladly talk good about Axis. This perpetuates the positive image of the organization externally, enhancing Axis' employer brand even more. Their low percentage of 6% detractors, can thereby be seen as a small threat against their brand supported by 67% of the employees in the data.

On the contrary, the data shows that the Municipality has only 24% promoters, 36% passives, and 41% detractors. This indicates a higher number of dissatisfied employees who have poor relationships with the company and often speak negatively about it. Consequently, the employer brand is deteriorating due to the majority of employees conveying negative sentiments about their employer.

It is worth noting that although Axis is ranked as a strong employer brand and scores much higher than the Municipality in the eNPS-score, the quantitative analysis of employee engagement levels within the two companies reveals only minor disparities. To illustrate their similarities in engagement levels, an engagement index has been developed, to be able to make Diagram 2 presented below. This index is based on the scores in each engagement category; engaged, satisfied, unfocused, passengers, and bored. The measurement methodology for this engagement index is further elaborated and described in *chapter 3.5.1, data analysis in the quantitative method*.

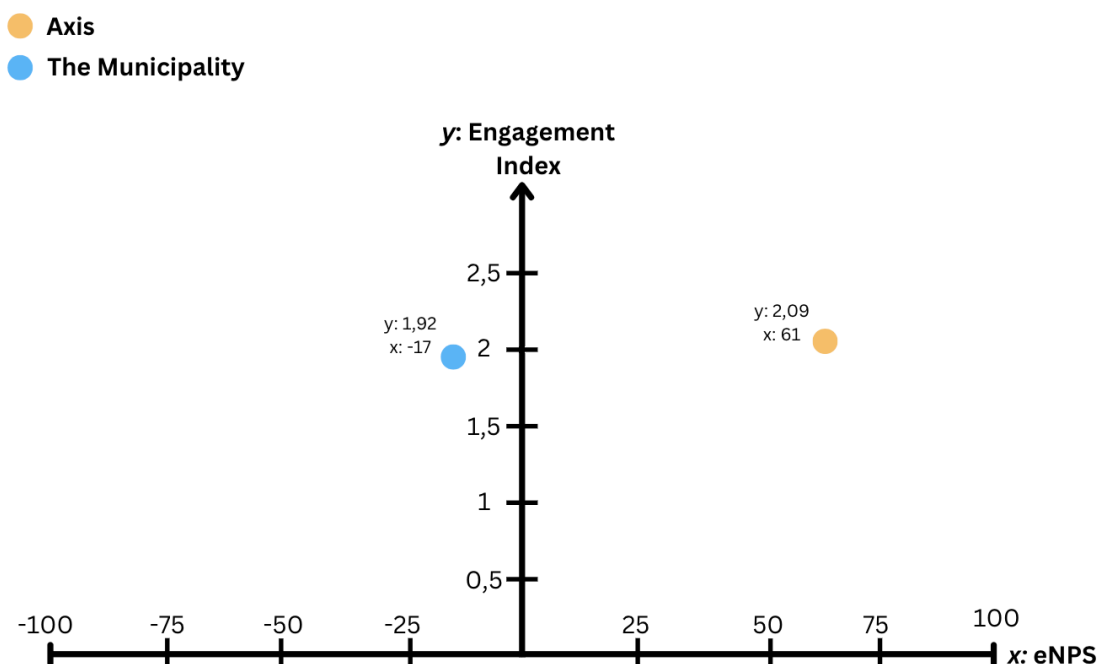


Diagram 2. Engagement index and eNPS for both organizations.

Diagram 2 shows that despite major disparities in eNPS scores between Axis and the Municipality, their engagement indexes are very close, indicating almost similar engagement levels. This suggests that other factors, beyond the employer brand and eNPS, affect engagement at The Municipality. These factors, such as job fit and meaningfulness, are discussed in this study. However, this also implies that factors other than the ones positively affecting engagement, must exist and contribute to The Municipality's low eNPS score.

5.4 Comparison of the interaction of employer branding and employee engagement within both organization

When comparing the result and analysis of Axis and The Municipality, it is clear that despite the difference in the employees' potential drivers for engagement and the organization's nature and purpose, an interaction of the employer branding and employee engagement can be seen.

From the qualitative data, it is evident that employees at both The Municipality and Axis find satisfaction in working for a company that holds recognition. This underscores the importance of employer branding, as it not only energizes employees, but also instills a sense of pride when the organization is well-known. However, it is also evident that other factors than the employer brand play a pivotal role in engagement, and vice versa, which in turn also affect back on both employer brand and engagement.

It is clear that the engagement for employees at Axis is related to the company as a brand and the organization's priorities regarding fostering a community amongst the employees, offering professional and personal development, and facilitating work-life balance. Their strong brand, honesty in the recruitment process, and the alignment between their internal and external employer brand further gives conditions for a good work-fit, which plays a role in giving the best conditions for engagement. This engagement further strengthens their employer brand, as a majority of employees are promoters, which further strengthens their engagement as well since the employees are proud to be part of an attractive company. This mutual reinforcement in the interaction is illustrated in Figure 10, showing how engagement and employer brand intersect and contribute to each other.

The interaction of the employer brand and employee engagement – Axis

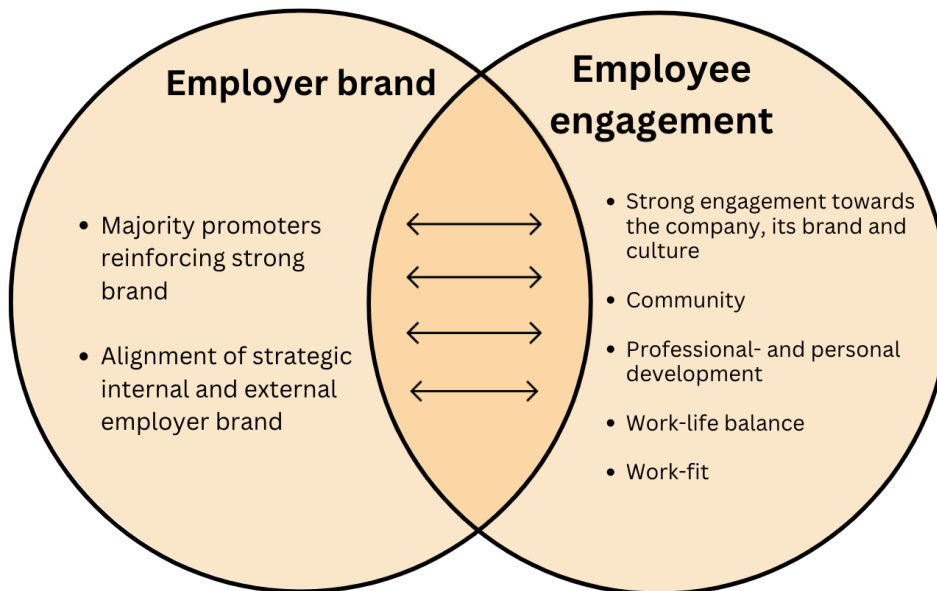


Figure 10. The interaction of Axis' employer brand and employee engagement

The engagement level for employees at The Municipality stems from the organization's role as an employer in the public sector. This attracts employees who perceive working at a municipality as a meaningful job, creating a sense of purpose and meaningfulness through their contributions to society and its residents. Consequently, the strong work-fit fosters a high level of engagement among employees. Despite these high engagement levels, the employer brand and eNPS for The Municipality remain very weak. Unlike Axis, this shows that high engagement does not positively affect the eNPS. The Municipality still has a majority of detractors, reinforcing a weak employer brand, which may negatively affect engagement. This is illustrated in Figure 11, showing the interaction of The Municipality's employer brand and engagement. The high engagement does not positively impact the employer brand. However, the weak employer brand may negatively affect the overall perception, with employees not feeling proud to work there, potentially decreasing

engagement and further weakening the brand. This is why the two concepts still interact, but very little. The high engagement is not a consequence of the employer brand, but is instead driven by the meaningfulness and work-fit.

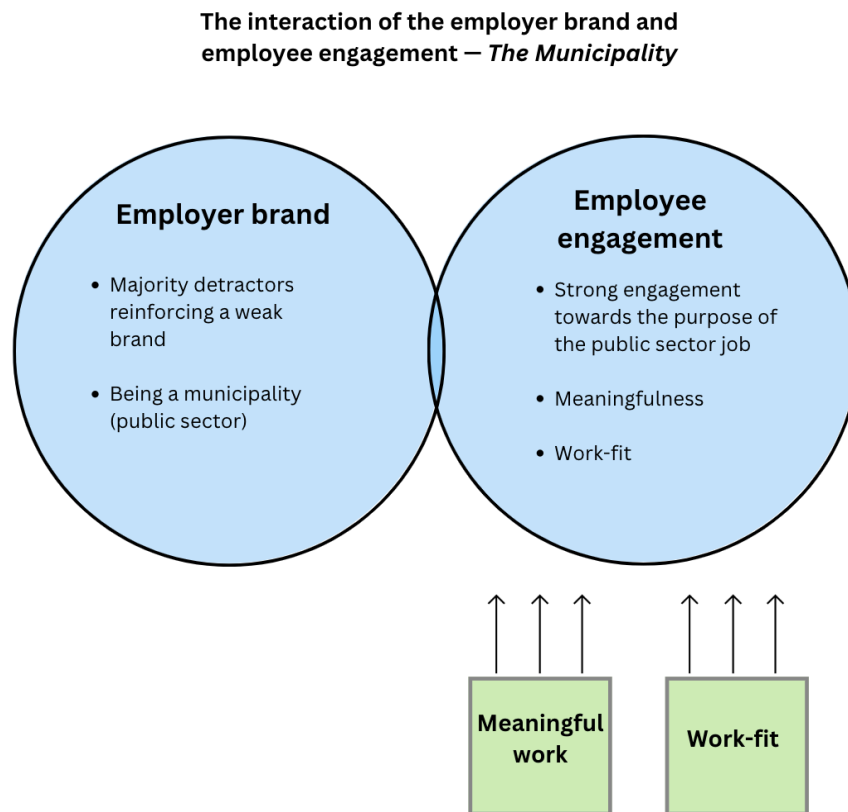


Figure 11. The interaction of The Municipality's employer brand and employee engagement

In summary, Axis shows a connection between a strong employer brand and high employee engagement, and vice versa. However, The Municipality's case demonstrates that there does not have to be a connection between the two concepts, as a weak employer brand does not necessarily result in low levels of engagement. Therefore, there is no causality in the relationship between employee engagement and employer branding. These concepts can be seen as contributing factors that may affect each other, but it is not necessary that they do so. This results in the absence of a linear relationship between employee engagement and employer branding.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of employer branding and employee engagement within the organizations reveals an interaction between the concepts. However, no linear relationship was found in the interaction. Even though similar levels of engagement were identified, Axis' brand is boosted by this, while The Municipality is still facing employer branding and recruitment challenges.

The analysis underscores the importance of factors beyond branding in fostering engagement. At Axis, the alignment between external- and internal employer brands play a pivotal role. Other factors contributing to the engagement levels are the opportunities for development, a community creating a strong connection to colleagues, and work-life balance. Conversely, The Municipality succeeds in having almost as high engagement as Axis, by attracting employees seeking meaningful work despite branding weaknesses, emphasizing the importance of work-fit in fostering employee engagement.

Furthermore, the discussion highlights the cyclical nature of employer branding and engagement. Strong branding reinforces engagement at Axis, fostering a sense of pride and promotership among employees. Conversely, weak branding at The Municipality perpetuates a negative cycle, negatively impacting both branding and engagement levels.

In summary, this exploration highlights how the brand and engagement can affect each other, but it is not a necessity. Other factors like work-life balance, meaningful work, developmental opportunities, and an organizational atmosphere fostering community, can have considerable influence on employee engagement as well.

6.1 Our contributions

Despite this thesis being a case study with limitations on generalizability, there are insights that can inspire other contexts. A strong employer brand can reinforce employee engagement, just as employee engagement can enhance the employer brand, creating a positive loop. Conversely, weak branding can perpetuate a negative cycle, resulting in less engaged employees and more "detractors." Therefore, management teams should invest in building and maintaining a strong employer brand to foster engagement. Emphasis should also be

placed on maintaining high engagement levels within the organization to ensure there are many promoters in the organization.

The difference in eNPS scores between the two organizations in this study, which were not proportional to the level of engagement, highlights that engagement is influenced by factors beyond employer branding. This underscores that while employer branding and employee engagement interact, ensuring a good work-fit is the foundation. When an organization successfully attracts, hires, and retains employees who are well-suited for their roles and align with the organization's values and purpose — ensuring a good work fit — positive outcomes will follow. This alignment will be a decisive factor for sustaining high engagement levels within the organization. Understanding the intersection of the concepts, as well as the importance of work-fit between the employee and the organization, can lead to success on both individual and organization level.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between employer branding and employee engagement. While discussing the result of this study and the contribution, one could argue that there is a strong interaction between the two concepts. However, it is hard to confirm what concept contributes to the other in a linear way, since the concepts interact and reinforce each other differently in the two organizations.

While the literature stresses the importance of clarity for experience engagement, this study showcase that the clarity must not be provided from organization. Employees in this study demonstrate how a good work-fit and a strong sense of meaningfulness generates energy and engagement, enabling employees to create their own structure and clarity.

Despite some employees complaining about the lack of structure negatively impacting engagement, others highlight the high degree of autonomy and flexibility as drivers of engagement. This shows how lack of clarity may contribute to a feeling of autonomy, which enhances engagement. Moreover, the contrast in the perceptions underscores that what one employee may view as negative, another may see as positive. This showcases individual differences and the challenge of satisfying everyone's preferences due to varying appreciation of different aspects.

6.2 Limitations

Even though this thesis has resulted in many findings and contributions, it is important to remember that there are also limitations in our discoveries. As previously described, this is a case study, which means that our findings are not generalizable, instead only applicable to the companies participating in the study, Axis and The Municipality.

Furthermore, all interviewees in the Municipality said during the interviews that they would recommend the organization as a workplace, when this question was asked to them. However, the Municipality's bad eNPS of -17, shows that they have 41% of detractors which are employees who would not recommend the company. Therefore, it can be assumed that the participating interviewees from the Municipality were among the 24% of the promoters within The Municipality. This may present a biased view and thus can be seen as a limitation that does not provide a fully accurate representation. This assertion is reinforced by the fact that our contact person at the Municipality selected the interviewees.

Additionally, a limitation could be that we have based much of the thesis on secondary data collected by an external company, Brilliant Future. This has been taken into account with extensive awareness, which is why a thorough investigation of Brilliant's validity and reliability has been conducted before using their graphs and measurement methods.

Despite the findings on how the interaction between employee engagement and employer branding differs between the companies, no in-depth exploration has been conducted into the fact that one company is privately owned while the other is a public sector entity. The reason behind this is the timeframe. This can be seen as a limitation, as a theoretical background on private- and public sector companies could have resulted in a broader foundation for more complex, and in-depth discussions.

6.3 Further research

Given the limited research on how employee engagement and employer branding interact, it would be valuable for further research to explore their interaction further in other organizations, allowing for more generalizable findings than those derived from this case study.

It would also be interesting for future research to go beyond the interaction of employee engagement and employer branding, and to delve deeper into these concepts. For example, future research could investigate what negatively affects engagement in both organizations, given the fact that there could have been more employees in the category of engaged in both organizations. It would be particularly interesting to further explore the very low eNPS at The Municipality. Gaining access to collect qualitative data from employees who are detractors could result in a deeper understanding of what lies behind the low eNPS at -17.

Since this thesis did not delve deeply into the differences between privately owned and public sector operations, it would be interesting if future research takes this further into consideration to further discuss how this affects the interaction of employee engagement and employer branding.

Future research could also incorporate leadership, which is highly related to engagement, but was selected as a demarcation in this study due to its broad concept (Crawford et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2011). It would be highly interesting to investigate the importance of leadership, both regarding employer branding perceptions and employee engagement levels. For instance, further research could compare the effects of different leadership styles on employees' alignment with the organization's values, potentially influencing their levels of engagement. Moreover, future research could delve into how leadership communication strategies shape the delivery and reception of employer branding messages, and explore in what way this influences the engagement level. Lastly, future research could also investigate the alignment between leadership behaviors and the organization's stated employer brand values. This could entail evaluating the consistency between leaders' actions, decisions, and communication styles and the organization's values in employer branding, and how this impacts employee engagement.

6.4 Possible practical implications

The qualitative data revealed how Axis as a company has realized that employees relocate from cities and countries to work at Axis. Consequently, Axis offers many internal benefits to its employees, aiming to make them feel they are moving for more than just a "job"; they are moving for professional- and personal development and for a strong sense of belonging that extends beyond working hours as well. Given the fact that The Municipality's experience

difficulties in attracting and retaining employees, mainly due to the sparse population for some positions in the area, it is worth speculative discussing whether The Municipality could take inspiration from Axis's approach. Namely by marketing itself as a comprehensive concept, to entice employees to leave their cities and current jobs to work for The Municipality, and to gain much more than just a “job”. The qualitative data indicated that employees at The Municipality view it as a good employer with potential. This potential could be leveraged by offering a whole concept.

Other speculations that can be made include the idea that The Municipality would benefit from branding itself as a unique concept by identifying its uniqueness — that is, how it stands out from other companies and what it can offer that other employers cannot. For example, their uniqueness might lie in the meaningfulness of the work at The Municipality and the difference it makes in people's lives, factors that private companies can not always provide. This can be part of their value proposition, which is the first step in building a strong brand. It involves gathering information about what the organization can offer, and will later be manifested in the employer brand. This can then be branded externally to attract individuals who have those things as their engagement driver, thereby creating a work-fit.

Since the municipality already has highly engaged employees with a lot of energy due to the high level of work-fit, the organization has great potential to develop and create even more engaged employees. By creating more clarity regarding both organizational- and personal goals, and by strengthening their employer branding both internally and externally, there is a likelihood that their eNPS and thereby their number of promoters will increase as well. With this said, The Municipality has a lot of potential to bolster and strengthen as an organization.

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1- Informed consent

Informed consent

Hi XX!

We are sending this to you because you have chosen to participate in our master's thesis investigating how employer branding and employee engagement influence each other. This study is based on informed consent, which means there is voluntary participation, and you can withdraw at any time. What you share with us will be treated confidentially, meaning no one else will have access to it except us or our supervisor. In the report, you will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure your anonymity in the study to protect your privacy. Quotes and other information included in the thesis will therefore not be attributed to your real name. The interview will take place on a digital platform, unless otherwise requested, and is estimated to take about an hour. We also request permission to record the conversation, where the recorded material will only be accessed by us and will be deleted once the study is approved.

Please confirm your consent by responding to this email if you agree to participate in the study. If you have any questions or uncertainties about the study or the interview, please feel free to contact us.

Contact information:

Marina Hultén: marinahulten2@gmail.com or 0761642799

Alice Fredin: fredinalice@gmail.com or 0734298171

Appendix 2 - Interview Template

Interview Template

Introduction:

We would like to start by thanking you for participating in our study! The purpose of this study is to explore employee engagement and employer branding in two different organizations, to see if there is a difference and further investigate possible reasons behind it.

We want to inform you that the interview is based on informed consent, meaning you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time. If there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, please feel free to abstain. All your answers are valuable, and we are incredibly grateful for your willingness to participate. If anything is unclear, please don't hesitate to ask us, and we will explain it again.

Finally, before we begin, may we ask if it's okay to record? The recorded material will be deleted once the study is completed and will be treated confidentially by us. The reason for recording is to facilitate data analysis.

Initial Phase:

- What is your role in the organization?
- How long have you been working there?
- How do you feel your role fits you as a person? Considering your interests, strengths/weaknesses?

Main Phase:

Energy

- When it comes to motivation at work - what motivates you?
- How would you describe your motivation today, regarding the company you work for?
 - What makes you feel that way?
- Can you describe a specific situation where you felt particularly motivated at work?
 - What made you feel so motivated?
- Do you sometimes work overtime or put in extra time at your job?
 - What are the reasons behind it?
 - Do you feel like you gain something from it?
- How do you feel when you have to go to work?
 - What motivates you to go there?
- When you talk about yourself and tell others that you work at XX - how do you feel then?

- Are there any specific challenges or obstacles that can affect your motivation at work?
 - How do you handle them?
- How do you view the opportunity for personal and professional development within the company?
 - Does it affect your motivation?
- Do you have any strategies or routines to maintain your energy and motivation during the workday or workweek?
- What about meeting colleagues outside of work?
 - Are there resources for that?
 - Is there something you engage in?

Clarity

- When you arrive at work on a typical day - do you know what you're supposed to do?
 - How and who structures your day?
- Can you describe how communication regarding expectations and goals is within your department or team?
- How do you work with goals in your organization?
- Do you feel like you know what your manager or others expect from you in your daily work?
 - Why?/Why not?
- How do you get the information? - is it your own assumptions, a template you follow, someone who has told you, etc.?
- Do you feel confident about *how* to perform your job?
- Are you aware of your organization's major goals?
- How are the goals communicated according to you?
- How do you view feedback as a tool to clarify expectations and goals?
- Can you provide examples of how you use feedback to improve your performance and understanding of your tasks and goals?

Employer Brand

- How would you describe your workplace to others?

- Would you recommend it?
 - Why?/Why not?

Closing Phase

- Is there anything else you would like to add that you haven't had the chance to say?
- Do you have any questions for us?
- Is it okay if we contact you again via email if we need further clarification on your answers?