Knowing your targets in the war for talents

A quantitative study investigating the effect company experience has on the perceived importance of employer attributes amongst potential applicants in an employer branding setting

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Abstract: The war for talents is more intense than ever. In order to attract the best talents in this competitive environment, companies need to understand the preferences of *potential applicants* to specify and make their recruiting strategies more effective. However, surprisingly little is known about *underlying factors* that influence these preferences. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the effect of one such factor, *company experience,* on potential applicants' perceived importance of different *employer attributes*. Drawing on previous employer branding research and employer knowledge theory, we formulate hypotheses which are tested using secondary data from 631 business students from the *Stockholm School of Economics.* The results show that students with more extensive work – and interactions with companies and their employees – experience perceived the importance of personal development, training for future career, and company reputation to be higher when applying for a job. This not only puts emphasis on the importance of underlying factors within the field of employer branding, but also creates important implications for researchers and recruiters.

Key words: *Employer branding, Employer attributes, Underlying factors, Company experience, Employer knowledge*

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the following people for their help and support during our thesis process:

Andreas Werr for being a fantastic supervisor, taking more time than could have been expected to help and guide us to the finish line.

Professor **Richard Wahlund** at the Stockholm School of Economics for his great generosity in letting us use his data for a new purpose and creating new insights.

Our families for support during the long thesis process and calming us down in moments of stress and despair.

Our friends who were degraded to acquaintances during the intense parts of the thesis writing, but continued to check up on us, even during tough times, was of the essence.

Everyone in the **MBM** program for their fantastic spirit and helpful personalities. The past two years have been a roller-coaster of moments worth remembering.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Employer attributes	Company attributes which potential applicants may consider when evaluating a company as a potential employer
Potential applicants	An individual who a company might be interested in recruiting and whom have an interest in being recruited. Such as business students
Employer knowledge	A job seeker's memories and associations regarding an organization (Cable & Turban, 2001, p.123)
Employer familiarity	The level of awareness that a job seeker has of an organization (Cable & Turban, 2001, p.124)
Employer reputation	A job seeker's beliefs about the public's affective evaluation of the organization (Cable & Turban, 2001, p.127)
Employer image	The content of beliefs held by a job seeker about an employer (Cable & Turban, 2001, p.125)
Individual applicants/employee factors (e.g: P-O fit)	The congruence between patterns of organizational values and patterns of individual values, defined here as what an individual values in an organization, such as being team-oriented or innovative (Chatman, 1991, p. 459)
Employee/applicant attitudes	General positive feelings and attitudes that (potential) employees hold toward an organization and, subsequently, can lead to preferential responses (Theurer et al, 2018, p. 158, based on Aiman-Smith et al, 2001)
Employee/applicant action	The employer brand's influence on competitive advantage and performance (Theurer et al, 2018, p.169)
Employer branding	The process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p.502)
Employer company interactions	The experience an individual receives and develops from interacting with employing companies and their employees
Work experience	The experience an individual receives and develops by working for a company
Company experience	The combined experience an individual receives and develops from employer company interactions and work experience

1. Introduction

No one is alike. People enjoy different things, have different values, and find themselves in different situations. To treat everyone in the same way is inefficient and illogical, so why do companies try to recruit new employees as if they were are all the same?

"Acquiring the right talent is the most important key to growth. Hiring was – and still is – the most important thing we do." – Marc Bennioff, Founder, Chairman and co-CEO of Salesforce

Around the globe, there is a shortage of talents in many professional fields. In fact, the talent shortage is at an astounding 12-year peak in Sweden (ManpowerGroup, 2018). Meanwhile, the amount of people choosing to pursue a higher level of education has been on the rise for a long time and has reached close to 50% in Sweden during 2018 (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 06/11-2018). For many companies, their most important assets are the human capital that their employees bring with them into the company (Cable & Turban, 2001). To recruit highly educated talents in an environment where the war for said talents is ramping up, while the importance of excellent employees keeps increasing, is not an easy task for most companies. It takes a lot of planning, strategic recruiting and patience to find the right employees for a company, individuals that can have real positive impact on the strategy and success of organizations. To deal with this, many companies spend a lot of their resources on recruiting and retaining their current talents. Some companies have gone to the length of offering benefits for their employees that were previously only found in dreams, examples including paid volunteer time off, travel stipends and many other exciting benefits (Forbes, n.d.).

Only recently has there been an influx of studies focusing on this important issue from a theoretical perspective. The field, which has been named employer branding, have this far focused on investigating, to a limited extent, what job attributes company employees and potential applicants perceive to be most important when choosing an employer to work for. This is however not enough to succeed in the war for talent. To truly understand why these

individuals choose certain jobs and organizations to work for over others, and in the process gain an advantage over their competitors, companies need to understand why potential applicants have their specific preferences and how these can be influenced.

The experience that potential applicants gain from being in contact with companies, their employees, and from working with different employers should influence what companies they choose to work for in the future. The research has yet to gain a full understanding of this issue, something that could have a profound effect on the way organizations conduct their recruitment processes. Ultimately, this study should not only enhance employer branding understanding, but also give employers an opportunity to tailor a recruiting process that is more efficient in a world of talent shortage.

1.1 Problematization

For potential applicants to apply to an organization, they first must have knowledge about the company (Cable & Turban, 2001). Companies are aware of this and thus use different kinds of media and recruitment advertising to make sure that their target groups are aware of the company, its positions and possibilities (Collins & Han 2004). In order to increase the organization's attractiveness, they often market some of the company's key attributes like pay, personal development and work-life balance. The problem with this approach is that people are different and are not always attracted by the same company attributes. Since the definition of employer branding by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), research within the field has tried to understand individual preferences and how their importance affects attraction to certain positions or companies. Many studies, such as Lievens (2007), have tested the importance of different employer attributes on applicants as well as on employees. Studies have been tested on a range of different samples such as armed forces (Kaur & Pingle, 2018), students (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014), managers (Davies, 2008; Priyadarshi, 2011), and many more. These studies all adapted their individual approaches and questions in the process to better understand each samples preference. What appears to be lacking in the field is a deeper look into potential underlying factors that might affect individual preferences in study samples. Even though it is interesting to see which employer attributes potential applicants' value as most important in general, it offers little insight into why these preferences are created and what

factors may affect them. Therefore, this thesis proposes that there is a need to better understand these potential effects in order to gain a deeper understanding of employer branding results.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to further the field of employer branding by developing a better understanding of the potential effects that underlying factors might have on an individual's attribute preferences in the employer branding process. We propose that the level of experience a person has with companies as employers, which we define as *company experience*, is one such underlying factor which has not yet been explored in previous research.

1.3 Research Question

With a strong need to investigate the effect that company experience might have on potential applicants' preferences in the employer branding process. We propose the following research question:

Research Question: *What effect does company experience have on the potential applicants' perceived importance of employer attributes?*

With company experience, we refer to a combination of work experience, i.e. the experience a person gains from working in an organization, and employer company interaction, i.e. the experience a person gains from interacting with companies and their employees. A more precise definition and motivation will be presented in the literature review.

1.4 Delimitations

As underlying factors, to a large extent, have been neglected over the years in employer branding research, there should be many impactful factors worth studying. Potential factors could, amongst others, be educational level, life-stage and age. This thesis delimits the focus to one of the factors which is believed to be highly interesting and potentially impactful, i.e. company experience. Furthermore, this study will only focus on employer branding dimensions that are relevant to the perception of employer branding attributes. There are many other interesting parts worth exploring in the field of employer branding, those parts are however unnecessary for the purpose of this thesis and will thus not be a part of this report. Additionally, this study will only focus on a sample of Swedish business students, both delimiting the research to Sweden as a geographic zone but also to business students. Future research will however be able to take the

concept of this study and apply it to other geographical zones and samples of respondents. It should however be noted that it's likely that business students generally gain a lot of company experience as a part of their education, making them a good fit for this research focus.

2. Theory

In the following section, a literature review of important research in the field of employer branding is presented. The purpose of this review is to identify the research gap and contribution to the field. It also acts as the theoretical base for the hypotheses which is presented in the second part of this theory section.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Origin of employer branding

The field of employer branding has been developed throughout the years and was originally rooted in marketing research. In the beginning, Farquhar (1989) discussed a consistent brand image where he emphasized the importance of building a strong brand and that a key element to this was having a consistent brand image. Coincidentally, Keller (1993) developed an interest in how a company's marketing mix created brand equity which in turn helped differentiate the brand from others and made customers more likely to remember and recall the brand. Keller continued to conceptualize brand knowledge, which consists of brand awareness and brand image. He also stated that attributes are descriptive features that categorize products and/or services, something that was later adapted to employer research as attributes that can be connected to companies. Up until this point, the focus was still on marketing research, but in 2001, Cable & Turban used brand awareness in an employer setting, highlighting that an individual can't actively search for a job if s/he is not aware that the company exists, which is very similar to brand knowledge.

Around the time of Keller's (1993) article, brand was discussed as an important part of any organization regarding marketing. But it wasn't until Ambler & Barrow (1996) that it was adapted to a human resource context and they named it employer brand. They stated that employer brands have a personality and can be positioned much in the same way as product brands. With this, they touched upon the area of employer branding, an area that didn't arise until 2004. Within the employer brand, Gardner, Erhardt & Martin-Rios (2011) further the

understanding by suggesting that the theoretical models built around product/service brand knowledge also could accommodate employment brands and branding, without hybridizing the framework with industrial-organizational psychology. Gardner et al. (2011) also defined employment brand as "names, terms, signs, symbols, or designs or a combination of them intended to identify the employment offering of one employer and to differentiate it from the offerings of competing employers." (p.13), something that lies at the foundation of employer branding.

Another fundamental contribution that turned important to employer branding was Aaker (1997) who ascribed traits to a brand or a company. By adapting the "Big Five" human personality structures to brands, she proved that attributes could be used to describe a company, something that would be extensively used in the field of employer branding. Similarly, Collins & Kanar (2014) also discussed employer brand and the importance of associations to the brand in order to gain different employer branding outcomes, such as attraction and intentions to apply to an organization.

2.1.2 Employer knowledge

Employer knowledge is a foundational part of employer branding and is crucial for the understanding of why different potential applicants have different preferences regarding employer attributes. Cable & Turban (2001) have been very influential in discussing employer knowledge in recruitment. They set out to use marketing principles within a recruitment context to develop the employer knowledge concept. Their idea about researching this area was that "…[their] primary focus is job seekers' *employer knowledge* or what individuals believe about potential employers. Until [they] can understand the primary dimensions of people's employer knowledge, and how employer knowledge is converted into behaviors, such as "go to a recruitment information session" or "apply" for a job, [they] cannot understand how, why, or when organizational recruitment practices work." (Cable & Turban, 2001, p.117). They looked primarily on employer knowledge from the perspective of companies, but even so, employer knowledge is something that individuals gain and develop, making it crucial in their process to create preferences for employer attributes.

One of the most general implication from Cable & Turban's way of looking at employer knowledge is that companies must understand the beliefs of their targeted applicants in order to

understand what types of recruitment interventions and investments will generate the greatest value. Different groups of potential employees have different beliefs and preferences. This, according to Cable & Turban (2001), implies that employers need to be aware of who they are trying to recruit and then use the activities that have the highest efficiency amongst that target group. Companies must understand the potential applicants' preferences in order to match themselves with the targeted group to gain their interest. A study by Lievens, Hoye & Schreurs (2005) also confirms this, as they found that different varieties of employer knowledge, such as trait inferences as well as job and organizational attributes, influence the attractiveness of an organization amongst potential applicants.

Anchored in psychology and marketing (e.g. Keller, 1993), Cable & Turban (2001) defined Employer Knowledge ultimately as "a job seekers memories and associations regarding an organization." (p.123). Based on previous research they proposed that this concept be divided in three different facets: employer familiarity, employer reputation, and employer image. In their research, they theorized that these three domains work as a "template" that a job seeker uses to categorize, store, and recall information about the various employers that the potential applicants evaluate and consider joining, such as knowledge about employers' attributes.

Furthermore, Cable & Turban (2001) discussed that employer knowledge becomes important when looking at recruitment and the importance of attributes amongst job seekers, as the employer knowledge they possess will dictate how well they believe that their preferred attributes match that of different companies. They further state that the job seekers employer knowledge turns out to be a primary source of a firm's recruitment success or failure (Cable & Turban, 2001). This was further proven by Collins (2007) who found in his research that specifically low-information recruitment practices where significantly and positively related to application behaviors through employer familiarity.

In conclusion, employer knowledge is an important building block within employer branding and impacts the formation of potential applicant's employer attribute preferences. To understand how employer knowledge works and what is refers to is to gain a better insight into how these preferences are created and developed within a recruiting context.

Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe & Lievens (2018) conducted a thorough literature review of the employer branding field. Based on previous research, they created an employer branding model covering the major building blocks of the employer branding process. Figure 1 shows an adapted part of the model focusing on employer knowledge, an important foundation for researching potential applicant's employer attribute preferences. Even though this thesis focuses on general preferences, rather than the attribute preferences towards a single company, which the model is intended for, much of the reasoning is still impactful for more general understandings. Therefore, a further exploration into the building blocks, which employer knowledge consists of, is found below.

Employer Knowledge

Fig.1: Theoretical model of employer knowledge effect on employee/applicant decision-making – adapted from Theurer et al (2018)

As shown in figure 1 above, the entirety of employer knowledge consists of its important sub-parts. Employer knowledge translates into different preferences for potential applicants or employers which in turn makes them more or less likely to act towards different companies, which can be, for example, applying for a job. However, the actions are outside the scope for this thesis and there will only be a limited discussion about this part, especially since there are plenty of studies focusing on that area, looking at both employee retention (e.g., Ito, Brotheridge & McFarland, 2013; Fisher & Fraser, 2010) and in general how employer branding affects the results of a company (e.g., Fulmer, Gerhart & Scott, 2003).

Employer familiarity:

The first step in the employer knowledge process, and thus also the start to potential applicant's process of gaining preferences for employer attributes, is to be aware of companies. Cable & Turban (2001) defined employer familiarity as "the level of awareness that a job seeker has of an organization." (p.124). It's the foundation on which the other parts of employer knowledge are built on. Even tough Cable & Turban (2001) speak about employer familiarity for specific companies, the argument holds on a larger scale, where individuals must be aware of companies both in order to reflect upon their attributes and in order to find if they are a match with their personal preferences. It's also crucial in the process of interacting with companies and in gaining experience. A deeper familiarity with companies could be gained from company experience creating a better fundamental awareness of specific companies and likely also industries. Turban (2001) also found that employer familiarity was positively related to attraction to companies, meaning that it not only creates the first base to store information about employers in, but also has an important effect in recruiting.

Employer reputation:

With the foundational level of familiarity achieved, employer reputation can be created. Highhouse, Brooks & Gregarus (2009) literature-based review aimed to better understand reputation as a social construction, focusing on what is relevant for the formation and foundation of corporate reputation. They created a model which attempted to "illustrate how constituents form an individual impression of organizational prominence that, when aggregated with other people's impressions, constitutes a corporate reputation." (p.1484-5). With this said, they explained that corporate reputation comes from many individuals' impressions.

Cable & Turban (2003) focused on reputation within a job seeker's context and how it affected them. They found that a job seeker's reputation perceptions influenced their job pursuit because they used the reputation as a signal about the company's employer attributes as well as an indication of what pride they can experience by becoming a member of the organization. Furthermore, Cable & Turban (2001) also showed that both corporate reputation and employer familiarity had a significant positive effect on job seeker's reputation perceptions towards the employer. Employer reputation is a key instrument in employer knowledge for potential applicants to learn about what attributes are available at different organizations. It also helps

them shape initial preferences and values regarding different employer attributes. Further, Collins & Han (2004) highlighted the importance of reputation in their study as they showed that a firm's reputation influenced a company's applicant pools quantity and quality.

Furthermore, as individuals gain work experience at different companies, they will begin understanding whether employer reputation matches their real-life expectation. Sokro (2012) described a Copenhagen Business School (2009) study which found that 65% of the candidates were attracted to an employer because of their brand image and that 62% of the employees who left an organization did so because the brand image didn't match what they were expecting. As shown by Cable & Turban (2003), employer reputation influences employer image. As employees start working and gaining company experience, they get an opportunity to compare the outside reputation with how it is in real-life. It's likely that there will be a gap between these two factors and the more they experience different jobs and gain more work experiences, the more they get a better understanding of what they can and cannot rely on when it comes to reputation. Thus, as individuals meet more companies through different means, including work experience, they should gain a better understanding to what extent they can rely on employer reputation.

Employer image:
Employer image is, according to Cable & Turban (2001), the third and final part of employer knowledge. They took the idea of brand image rooted in marketing research and applied it to the employer research field where they conceptualized employer image as "the content of beliefs held by a job seeker about an employer." (p.125). In other words, it's the set of beliefs that a job seeker holds about attributes of an organization (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Within the realm of employer attributes, Lievens & Highhouse (2003) divided attributes into either symbolic or instrumental. Symbolic attributes referred to more soft aspects, such as culture and innovativeness, while instrumental attributes referred to more hard aspect, such as pay and advancement. Van Hoye, Bas, Cromheecke & Lievens (2013) used this division of attributes to investigate different instrumental and symbolic image dimensions amongst Turkish university students. They found that both dimensions of attributes where positively related to organizational

attractiveness, showing that employer image can be divided but also that it has an important role within employer branding.

As individuals go from being outsiders of a company, and where their knowledge about attributes mainly comes from the company communication and its reputation, to becoming a part of an organization, they get to experience attributes in a completely new way. They gain real-life experiences of how different attributes work, as well as an understanding of their own perceived preferences. Their employer image should then increase and transform with their experience, making them able to take better decisions in the future.

Overall, within the realm of employer image lies employer attributes. They are a part of the overall image that individuals develop towards companies. Importantly, a potential applicant can have many perceptions of different employer images and thus of employer attributes. Together it is a part of creating the individual's employer knowledge which, as shown, is vital for the creation of preferences for different employer attributes (Theurer et al, 2018). Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt & Slaughter (1999) also proved that employer image affects potential applicants' intentions to apply for a job at a company, which is closely related to attributes, and is an actionable outcome.

Individual applicants/employee factors (e.g. P-O fit):
As previously mentioned, Theurer et al (2018) conducted an extensive literature review within employer branding resulting in a complete employer branding process model. In the employer knowledge part of the model, they not only lifted up the three fundamental parts described by Cable & Turban (2001) but also the argument that both psychology and job choice literature have found that individuals tend to choose jobs/environments that fit/match their personal values. Chatman (1991) defined P-O fit as "the congruence between patterns of organizational values and patterns of individual values, defined here as what an individual values in an organization, such as being team-oriented or innovative" (p.459).

It's difficult for an individual to know how well they are going to fit in with an organization until they start working at the company. As they interact with the company, employees should start to gain a better understanding of what attributes they find more important and what they perceive to be important when choosing a company to work for. This is in line with Chatman's (1991)

statement that "Person-organization fit is influenced by the organizational values existing at the time of membership and by changes in individual values following membership and tenure." (p.460). Work experience, i.e gaining more knowledge about a company, and interacting with organizations, should help individuals understand how their personal values compare to the organizational. In the end, this should help them choose suitable workplaces through life, which should also be reinforced with company experience.

2.1.3 Employer branding research

This study focuses on differences in potential job applicants' employer attribute preferences based on their company experience. These preferences are a part of the employer branding process that was defined by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) as "the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors." (p.502). Much of the previous research within employer branding has focused on which employer attributes various respondent groups prefer. We will now discuss studies based on attributes and groups of respondents that have been performed so far within the field of employer branding.

Research focusing on employer attributes:

Throughout the years of employer branding studies, several employer attributes have been researched. Many of the previous studies have been conducted on specific companies (e.g. Davies, 2008; Priyadarshi, 2011; Van Hoye & Saks, 2011) or entities (such as Army's) (Kaur & Pingle, 2018; Lievens, 2007). In these studies, the employer attributes which the researchers chose to look at were decided based on the environment and the study organization. One of the most prominent articles was written by Lievens & Highhouse (2003). They drew upon the instrumental-symbolic framework from marketing literature and adapted it to a recruitment perspective. They used two types of employer attributes in their study. The first category, called instrumental attributes, contained attributes such as Pay, Advancement, Job Security, Task Demands, Location, and Working with customers. These were considered "harder" attributes that were easy to measure and of a more static nature. The second group of attributes was so called trait inferences. These were, contrary to the instrumental attributes, of a "softer" nature and described employers with trait such as: Sincerity, Innovativeness, Competence, Prestige, and Robustness. These attributes were named symbolic attributes. With the new groupings of

attributes, respondents in the survey got to indicate how well these attributes, in their opinion, fitted with a company. The biggest contribution from their study was that they showed the feasibility of categorizing employer attributes into two crucial groups, instrumental and symbolic.

Within research looking especially at employer attributes and respondents' preferences towards them, there has been mainly two types of studies, explorative and more quantitative approaches. Both approaches have often, especially in the early stages of employer branding research, been combined to both explore and test results (e.g., Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg, 2002). One, if not the most, prominent research combining both approaches was (also discussed above) done by Lievens & Highhouse (2003). They used an initial inductive theory approach to explore which employer attributes would be of highest importance amongst applicants and employees in a bank setting. By letting two groups of 16 respondents individually mark what company they would prefer to work for, when choosing from pairs of organizations, they had to reflect on their reasoning behind their selection and then write down their top three reasons. This was later individually coded, and a list of both instrumental and symbolic employer attributes was achieved. A more quantitative survey study could then be conducted based on their exploration in order to see what employer attributes was preferred by the respondents. Their results showed that the traits, or symbolic attributes, affected to a higher degree which companies respondents were attracted to as employers. A similar study was conducted by Tumasjan, Strobel & Welpe (2011) who similarly, but with an even more qualitative focus, began their research by interviewing experts and workers through deep interviews in order to compile a list of employer attributes most preferred by employees. In this case they focused on general employer attributes but in a start-up setting. Their findings showed that team climate was the overall highest valued attribute from an applicant's perspective, followed by responsibility/empowerment and flexibility of work schedule. Chhabra & Sharma (2014) choose to first use semi-structured interviews to explore what attributes their respondents preferred and believed to be of highest importance to attract them to organizations. The final list was then used in a questionnaire sent out to a larger sample of respondents. The results showed that organizational culture and brand name were the most important attributes for the company attractiveness.

Amongst the more explorative research, a study by Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper (2004) can be found. They developed a corporate character scale to understand what factors affected reputation, something that was described in employer knowledge as an important part in the building of preferences regarding employer attributes. Drawing on previous literature they managed to find and explore different potential dimensions and items regarding this. To gain a better understanding of which ones of their potential dimensions had an effect, they asked over 2,000 respondents to, in the end, identify five major and two minor dimensions of corporate character. Davies (2008) would, in a later study, draw upon this exploration and conduct a more quantitative research approach based on the dimensions he and his co-researchers found in Davies et al (2004).

Amongst the more quantitative approaches, studies like Davies (2008), Priyadarshi (2011), Van Hoye & Saks (2011) and Arachchige & Robertson (2011) can be found. Kaur & Pingle (2018) used an instrumental-symbolic approach to investigate, in an Indian Armed Forces setting, which employer attributes were perceived to be most important for their attraction to the army. The study was of a comparative variety and they compared both potential applicants and employees to find that there was a difference between the two groups' preferences when looking at instrumental attributes. Potential applicants put more emphasis on these attributes compared to respondents who were already employed. Another study, with a quantitative approach, looking at respondents' preferences regarding employer attributes, was done by Lievens (2007). In his study he used the employer attribute division of symbolic and instrumental attributes, which he was a part of adapting four years earlier in 2003. In an army setting, he researched, using a quantitative survey methodology, the preferences of the two groups of attributes. He connected this to variance in company attractiveness and the results showed that instrumental attributes (such as pay, job security and advancement opportunities) explained, to a higher degree, the variance in attractiveness, especially amongst actual applicants.

Even though there have been some major approaches in the field of employer branding, which many studies fall within, all studies have been slightly different from each other. This difference has taken the shape of studies using different attributes on different samples. Below, a list of attributes is compiled showing the most common employer attributes found in the literature review process. It was necessary to conduct such a review since attributes were intended to be

used in this study. Instead of choosing attributes which might fit this studies data, the most common attributes from the extensive literature review were used instead. The measurements should also be more stable and solid since they are true and tested.

List of most common attributes:

To gain a better insight into the research of employer attributes, a list was compiled reflecting the most common attributes found in the literature review process (see Appendix 1 for full list). Below, in table 1, the top seven most common attributes are listed.

Attributes	Articles	# of Articles
Advancement	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Ito, Brotheridge & McFarland (2013); Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Chhabra & Sharma (2014); Arachchige & Robertson (2011); Backhaus (2004)*	*6*
Pay	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Ito et al (2013); Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Sutherland et al (2002); Chhabra & Sharma (2014); Arachchige & Robertson (2011)*	*6*
Job Security	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Ito et al (2013); Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Lievens (2007); Arachchige & Robertson (2011)*	*5*
Personal development	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Tumasjan et al (2011); Ito et al (2013); Sutherland et al (2002); Chhabra & Sharma (2014)*	*5*
Reputation	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Lievens (2007)*	*3*
Work-life-balance	*Tumasjan et al (2011); Ito et al (2013); Lievens & Highhouse (2003)*	*3*
Innovativeness	*Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Sutherland et al (2002); Arachchige & Robertson (2011)*	*3*

Table 1: List of the seven most used attributes found in the literature review process. A summarizing name was chosen for each attribute event though they differ slightly from article to article, see appendix 1 for a full list of attributes and names

Research focusing on different respondent groups:

Not all employer branding studies with a focus on employer attributes investigate the preferences of similar groups of respondents. Instead, researchers have focused on different samples to differentiate their theoretical contribution and to further the understanding of employer attributes and persons preferences towards them. The presented articles above didn't only have different approaches when it came to investigating preferences, but also different respondents. This will be highlighted below.

Van Hoye & Saks (2011) looked at possible applicants for the Belgian defense. Using the Lievens & Highhouse (2003) instrumental and symbolic framework, Van Hoye & Saks investigated which type of employer attributes were most important in the evaluation of the Belgian Defense as an employer. In this case, they used respondents who were actively looking for a new line of work, a similar position that a last-year student might find himself in. Besides looking at potential applicants, there is a variety of articles which used students as an efficient way to gather good information. Arachchige & Robertson (2011) took a student focused methodological approach. By using answers from last-year Sri Lankan undergraduate students, they investigated which factors attracted students to a certain employer. They also compared these with other students in a similar position from Australia and thus adding another layer to their research where culture could, to some extent, be captured. Another student-focused study comes from Chhabra & Sharma (2014), which focused on management students and company attractiveness. Once again, they aimed to understand what employer attributes were perceived as most important amongst these student groups.

Going beyond a pure student focus, some researchers added a layer of data collection from more experienced individuals as a start to their studies before collecting the larger body of data from students. Tumasjan et al (2011), as discussed earlier, interviewed experts and workers in order to compile a list of job attributes that employees valued the most. With a qualitative list compiled, they then turned to a more quantitative approach with focus on gathering data from, in this case, German students.

Apart from a large focus on students within employer branding research, there has also been a few studies taking another route focusing on respondents who were employed and who thus had

accumulated more work experience compared to most students. These studies have often taken a focus on employer retention rather than recruiting. However, there are exceptions. Davies (2008) conducted a study where he looked at employer branding and its influence on a large number of managers. As with most other studies within the employer branding field, Davies also focused on the attributes aspect to understand which were most prominent in influencing outcomes. Similar to Davies (2008), Priyadarshi (2011) collected data from 240 executives from various organizations. The study showed the importance of managing employer brand image for existing employees by highlighting the difference between existing and preferred levels of employer attributes. The results showed that maximum importance was given to organizational environment followed by variety in work and work setting, opportunities and growth in career, and lastly organizational fame and flexibility.

With studies focusing both, to a larger extent, on students, but also on employees, very few articles have tried to make any sort of comparison between these groups. There are however a few that have made efforts to develop their understanding of attributes by incorporating both groups. Ito et al (2013) researched if important employer branding factors differed between newly employed individuals and workers with more experience. By doing so, they wanted to understand how the differences in position of employees, either in an entry or exit position, affected their view of which attributes they perceived to be important. While looking informally at work experience, they also looked at life-stages, differences between managers and non-manager employees and retention of these two different groups of employees. The study was conducted in 37-day care centers, a lower educational environment, in Canada, receiving 144 answers. By using factor analysis, they grouped together different attributes, and the results showed that four categories were important for workers who had just entered the company. These were (1) development, (2) values, (3) flexibility and security, and (4) promotion and pay. For those in an exit position only two categories of attributes were important, namely (1) development and values and (2) pay, flexibility and promotion. They also found that many attributes changed in importance between the entry and exit group where for example pay, security and promotion were more important when exiting, and development and values were more important for the entry respondents. Ito et al (2013) also looked at the effect of life-stages in their article, however it is only mentioned briefly. Another recent study was conducted by

Kaur & Pingle (2018) and took form as a comparative study. They investigated the preferences of symbolic and instrumental attributes amongst potential recruits and current employees in the Indian Armed Forces. The results found that potential applicants had a higher preference for instrumental attributes compared to those who were already employed. Even though the setting of an armed force is not reflective of a normal work experience and position, it does show differences in what the two groups might perceive as important.

Lastly, some employer branding research has been conducted within a high-knowledge setting, something that's interesting to look further into and is also the focus of this thesis, as business students can be considered as high-knowledge individuals. One of the main studies using highly educated respondents came from Lievens & Highhouse (2003) who investigated which attributes contributed most to how attractive an employer was received, but this time it was done within a high-knowledge banking setting. They captured this environment by surveying both banking employees as well as targeted students drawn from banks application pools. They drew from the symbolic and instrumental categorization of attributes and found that innovativeness, working with customers, advancement, competence and pay were most correlated to the company's attractiveness. Sutherland et al (2002) recognized that knowledge workers are a critical success factors for organizations. For companies to succeed in the war for talents organizations, they must brand themselves as employers of choice. With their study they wanted to understand what attributes made companies attractive for this group of knowledge workers. To gain insight into this, they conducted both qualitative interviews as well as quantitative data collection. The interview answers were boiled down to 11 underlying factors which were then used in their survey data gathering. The results showed that career growth opportunities and a challenging work environment were the most preferred attributes of an employer of choice.

To summarize, there has been many studies looking at attribute preferences amongst a plethora of different respondents, such as students, the army and managers. An implication of this is that studies tend to adapt their attributes to the sample in order to achieve a higher level of explanation. This is understandable as it says more about the sample, but at the same time it makes it difficult for them to create any generalization, which is hurting the research field and can be seen from the lack of overarching models explaining patterns found in these studies.

2.1.4 Research on factors affecting employer attribute preferences

Researchers have only little investigated factors that could have an effect on these preferences. This study thus aims to explore and further the research field within this area of employer branding.

Some studies, such as Fisher & Fraser (2010), talk about a social contract that is dynamic as employee preferences change from recruitment through career and life stages. This means that preferences are changing as individuals move through their work life and enter different life stages. Attributes that made a company appealing for a potential applicant might thus not be of the same importance as the applicant goes through new life stages and e.g. have a child. Fisher & Fraser's (2010) study indicates that as an employee goes through the work life, they receive different work options and possibilities (and to some extent thus also chances to develop personally and professionally) which shape their outlook of the company's brand image and evaluation of its attributes.

Ito et al (2013) further talks about life- and career stages as factors that can influence individual's preferences for different employer attributes. This trio of researchers framed their research questions as "... are preferences for branding attributes similar for entry and retention? In other words, do experience and career stage affect what is valued...?" and "...are there generational and career stage differences in one's entry and exit priorities?" (p.733-4). With this focus, they targeted an understanding of how life and career stages affected which attributes employees believed to be important when choosing a company to work for. The results didn't differ much based on age and generational differences but did however differ more between different career stages. The managers that were participating in the study rated development as less important compared to other employees. They also found that young people planned to stay a shorter amount of time at the company compared to older ones, and that the importance of security for satisfaction, commitment and decreasing turnover intentions was important and can be used to make young people stay longer in organizations.

Lastly, Lievens & Slaughter (2016) listed moderating factors in four groups that other studies had investigated. The four groups consisted of individual difference moderators, sample/subgroup moderators (including demographic variables such as age and ethnicities), temporal moderators (the effect of being in different stages of the recruitment process) and cross-

cultural moderators (being located in different countries). This review, however, solely looked at these moderating factors from the perspective of employer image and didn't consider other parts of employer knowledge or the employer branding process, indicating that there still is a gap in the current research regarding underlying factors.

2.1.5 Company experience

During the review of the employer branding field it became clear that no study has previously focused on differences in company experience amongst potential applicants when looking at employer attribute preferences. This thesis thus aims to investigate this aspect and to bring insights into this part of the research field. The argument for company experience as an underlying aspect is mainly built on the field of psychology, as psychologists have for long time looked at the effects that work experience, a crucial part of company experience, have on a person. Before going further, it is important to understand how company experience is defined in this paper.

Creation of company experience:

Company experience as a differentiating factor was created for this research. It is built from a combination of the experience a potential applicant receives through work, and the experience they gain through interacting with companies and their representatives. First, a definition of work experience is needed. We define it as: the experiences an individual receives and develops by working for a company. Many students work besides their studies, gaining both work experience and some extra money. Not all students choose to work extra however, as can be seen in our data set Wahlund (2018), but most business students, at least at the Stockholm School of Economics, meet companies as a part of their education. As stated by Sciarini & Woods (1997), these types of interactions also affect individuals' views of companies and is thus also a part of what is compiled as company experience. Combining the interactions students have with employers and the work experience they gain by working extra, we define company experience as: the employer experiences a person receives from working or interacting with a company.

Why company experience is expected to make a difference:

In his study, Adkins (1995) looked specifically on how work life experience might affect the socialization process, i.e. "the process through which individuals change from outsiders to functioning members of an organization" (Fisher, 1986). Adkins (1995) suggested that previous

work experience may allow individuals to learn new tasks faster and that this is essential for work performance. He also suggested that work experience might allow for faster development of work role clarity, another important part of the socialization process. Finally, Adkins (1995) also believed that work experience might allow for faster development of interpersonal relationships at a new job. The study results showed that work experience indeed impacted these factors, but not necessarily positively. One example was that work experience might lead to overconfidence and therefore make the transition to a new job harder.

Mortimer & Lorence (1979) made a similar study to Adkins (1995). They looked at the effect of work experience on reward values, that in turn affects occupational choice. They found that work experience impacts the values which employees finds important. Their main findings showed that the values impacting the occupational choice are reinforced by the fact that the employee had chosen a company that maximizes the values he or she finds important. i.e. if intrinsic (e.g. interest and challenge) or extrinsic (e.g. pay and security) values drive an individual, he or she will try to maximize an outcome to provide the most of the one that matters to him or her the most.

Both articles highlight the ways that work experience, which is an important part of company experience, impacts the individual and that they change with the experience. We argue that the link between work experience and job choice, that can be found in work psychology, indicates that this also should be present in a study based on employer branding theory. This is especially likely as the reward value used in studies, such as Mortimer & Lorence (1979), is very similar to the attributes prevalent in employer branding literature. Therefore, with basis in this argument, it's not far-fetched to believe that preferences of employer attributes also should change as individuals gain more company experience.

In a less generalizable – but interesting – article, Wilden, Gudergan & Lings (2010) proposed a conceptual framework for employee-based brand equity. In this framework it was suggested that "the effectiveness of a brand signal to potential employees is dependent on the consistency, clarity, credibility, and associated investments in the employer brand." (p.70). When conducting multiple deep interviews, it became clear that previous experience was found to influence trust that potential employees place on the employer. Further, Wilden et al (2010) concluded that

because of this, employer should differentiate their marketing and HR efforts according to the work experience of the potential recruits. It was also noted that recruiting employers should consider work history when developing their employer-branding strategies. This highlights the importance of work experience in an employer branding setting. However, as the study was done based on interviews, it was difficult to generalize, and the authors also emphasize the need for further studies on the area.

Finally, there is another aspect to company experience. In their study, Sciarini & Woods (1997) looked at different aspects that influence students in the hospitality industry job choices. Of all the factors, the ones that had the greatest impact were actual interaction with a company, such as having an internship or meeting a representative either at a career fair or as a customer. This thesis argues that these types of interactions are also a part of the individuals' experience of employers and even industries. Therefore, we argue that this factor, together with work experience, should have an important differentiating effect on employer attribute preferences worth investigating.

2.1.6 Research gap

Researchers have focused on many parts of employer branding over the years, investigating the importance of different attributes in different settings and among many different groups. Yet, very few have researched underlying factors that might influence potential applicants' preferences. This is strengthened by Theurer et al (2018) who stated "Moreover, the moderating role of environmental influencing factors in the relationship between employer knowledge dimensions and employee attitudes leaves room for further investigation" (p.168). There has been studies looking at the potential effect of being in different lifecycles on preferences, although the results where rather non-conclusive (Ito et al, 2013). We argue, with the backing of studies from the field of psychology, such as Adkins (1995) and Mortimer & Lorence (1979), that company experience should be one of these important factors worth investigating further. Especially, Mortimer & Lorence (1979) looked at work experience and found that it impacted the preferences for work values, that are very similar to the attributes used by many researchers in the employer branding field. Therefore, it's highly likely that work experience, an important part of the larger concept of employer experience, will have a clear effect on preferences, therefore making it an interesting underlying factor to study.

Investigating underlying factors that have an effect on preferences of employer attributes should be an important contribution to the field, since it will allow researchers to better understand why some potential applicants believe certain preferences to be of higher importance than others. It was surprising to find this apparent neglect in the field of employer branding, the reason for this is believed to be because many studies focus instead on changing their tested attributes to specifically fit the company or group they are studying. This in turn makes findings difficult to compare and generalize, also resulting in difficulties to create an overarching model of the field. It is understandable that there is a value to conduct these deeper studies, as they have many practical applications, but, as researchers, the authors believe that there is a need to understand which are the important factors that might have an effect on preferences in order to gain a better understanding of attribute preferences, and how they are created.

2.2 Hypothesis generation

Below the hypothesis generation will be described. First, the decision to use specific employer attributes in the hypotheses will be explained. Secondly, each hypothesis will be theoretically argued for, based on the previous literature review, before they are summarized in a table.

2.2.1 Choice of hypothesis attributes

The focus of this thesis is not on the individual employer attributes. Instead, it is to investigate how company experience affects potential applicants' preferences for employer attributes. Because of this, the choice of individual attributes to test is of lesser importance.

This thesis uses secondary data from Richard Wahlund's (2018) *Stockholm School of Economics Image Barometer.* In this report, a fixed set of 16 employer attributes was available for analysis. From the literature review, a list was created with the top employer attributes mentioned amongst the different employer branding studies (see table 1 above). For the hypotheses, the top seven most common employer attributes, which also were available in the secondary data, were chosen for the different hypothesis.[1]

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[1] Out of the seven most common employer attributes, only one was not present in the data set, namely job security.

2.2.2 Hypotheses

H1 - Pay/Income:

Salary is one of the most substantial and fundamental part of an employment. Unless income or salary is given from the employer, the work is a form of charity or volunteering rather than employment. When Lievens & Highhouse (2003) divided employer attributes into either instrumental or symbolic attributes, pay was included with the instrumental attributes. Pay was one out of six attributes which made up this initial attribute categorization and was an essential part of its structure. Kaur & Pingle (2018) used this categorization for employer attributes to investigate which of them was most preferred and had the highest impact on the respondent's attractiveness towards the Indian Armed Forces. They looked at differences between potential applicants to the Armed Forces and those already employed by the organization. Their results showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups where the potential applicants perceived instrumental attributes, including pay, to be of a higher importance compared to those already employed. Further, it was also shown in the Kaur & Pingle (2018) article that pay had a higher mean value amongst potential applicants than amongst employees, although significance levels weren't presented on individual attributes. Even though their study didn't look at complete work experience, this effect should be present with the employee group having more working experience in the organization. This should also be the case in a more general setting. Thus, we hypothesize that this relation found by Kaur & Pingle (2018), indicating pay and instrumental attributes are less importance amongst workers, should apply in a more general study focusing on company experience as well. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: *The importance of pay will decrease with company experience.*

H2 – Advancement:

In their study, Agrawal & Swaroop (2009) found that students application intentions towards companies are influenced by their perceptions of the responsibilities and empowerment inherent to jobs, as well as compensations and local considerations. Most of these attributes are increased and comes with advancement, as an employee climbs up the corporate ladder, they often receive jobs with more empowerment and compensation. Further, their study showed that prior work

experience had a moderating effect on this relationship where students with prior work experience were more interested in applying to organizations that would give them greater autonomy and responsibility. As these two things are inherent to advancement, it becomes natural that as work experience, and thus also company experience which is made up in large parts by prior experience from working, increases the potential applicants' focus on advancement should also increase, to perceive it as a more important employer attribute. With this reasoning, hypothesis 2 was formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 2: ***The importance of advancement will increase with company experience***

H3 - Personal Development:

Paloniemi (2006) showed that employees found work experience to be the main source of their competences. Employees developed these competencies mainly through learning at work. It was also emphasized that social participation in work communities and learning through experience was a big part of it. With this in mind, their study emphasizes the importance of work experience for individuals to learn, gain experience and develop personally as well as their competencies. Thus, work experience leads to more experience and heightens an individual's personal and professional development.

Sutherland et al (2002) looked at the preferences of employer attributes for knowledge workers. These individuals had gone from potential applicants and to working in different organizations. The results showed that the attribute "personal training and development opportunities" was perceived to be the second most important attribute of all. This indicates that even though they have work experience it continues to be of great importance to them. As potential applicants gain company experience, they will, according to Paloniemi (2006), develop personally and gain new competencies and knowledge. Based on this, we hypothesize that as potential applicants gain company experience, they will start developing personally which will give them more insights into how this employer attribute works, which should both change their employer image and their perception of the attribute in relations to each other. The data in Lievens (2007) showed the mean importance of educational opportunities where potential applicants had a lower mean value compared to those who were working. This indicates that the relationship is positive and that as a

person gains company experience and an updated employer image, through the experience of personal development, their preferences of this attribute should move to be more important. Thus, we formulate the two very related hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3a: ***The importance of personal development will increase with company experience***

Hypothesis 3b: ***The importance of good training for future career will increase with company experience***

H4 - Company Reputation:

One important part of employer knowledge, which was previously discussed, is employer reputation. Reputation in turn is closely related to employer image, as shown by Cable & Turban (2001). Sokro (2012) described a study from Copenhagen Business School (2009) which found that 65% of candidates were attracted to an employer because of their brand image. At the same time, 62% of employees who choose to leave an organization did so because its brand image didn't match their expectations. The brand image and the reality were, in other words, not consistent enough. Employer reputation should, because of its relation to employer image, be a large part of creating the initial expectations in the employer image that the applicants have. As they come in contact with the employer more closely, through work or otherwise, they understood that this brand image and reputation was not congruent with reality, which in turn might be of such large disappointing effect that they choose to take drastic measurements and leave the company. With more company experience, it is expected that individuals gain a better understanding of what to expect in employer situations regarding reputation and employer image, and understand that it's not always congruent with reality. With this knowledge, applicants should understand that they can't always rely on employer reputation as an indication of what employer image the company will actually have. Thus, we hypothesize that potential applicants will put less emphasis on employer reputation when evaluating employer attributes. We hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4: ***The importance of company reputation will decrease with company experience***

H5 – Work-life balance:

Within employer image, which is an important part of the Theurer et al's (2018) employer branding framework, the core of employer attributes can be found. According to Highhouse et al (2009), one of the key characteristics of employer image is the fact that it might fluctuate, it's therefore not a fixed image of companies, but can instead change and be altered depending on information and time.

Deery (2008) investigated how work-life balance might have an effect on creating better employee retention and motivation within organizations. She discussed the fact that stress has become a very prominent damaging part of organizational life, something that can affect both individual problems such as burnout and larger company problems such as employee turnover. Deery (2008) looked at previous research within work-life balance and noticed that previous research had indicated that a poor work-life balance could have a negative influence on employee's stress level and well-being. As potential applicants gain company experience, there is a high chance that they encounter the widespread problem of burnouts and stress, and thus also naturally the question of work-life balance. As employer image is not fixed and can fluctuate (Highhouse et al, 2009), potential applicants' image should change when they come in contact with this high stress in the workplace, which Deery (2008) connected to work-life balance and described as both prominent and dangerous. This should then alter their employer image and thus also their preferences for different employer attributes, which is linked to employer image. By gaining more company experience, and understanding this problem, potential applicants should put increased preference on work-life balance as an employer attribute. Thus, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5: *The importance of work-life balance will increase with company experience*

H6 - Creative and Innovative:

The reputation of companies does not only affect their results, products or how they are as employers. Another trait that is often carried within company reputation is that of innovativeness and creativity. Chun (2006) found that innovativeness was an important factor which impacted firms' reputations. As discussed earlier, based on the research by Highhouse et al (2009),

employer image can be changed and is not considered to be fixed. Further, based on Cable & Turban (2001), employer reputation has an effect and helps changing the employer image. Based on the article by Chun (2006), innovation was an important factor that could have an impact on a firm's reputation. Drawing upon employer research, this should then also be applicable to employer reputation as they are very closely related (Cable & Turban, 2003). It thus becomes logical that as innovation affects the employer reputation, it also changes employer image. As potential applicants gain company experience, they might develop an employer image – including a company's reputation – as more or less innovative and creative. However, Wired magazine named innovation the business buzzword of the decade (O'bryan, n.d.). It is a word or attribute that many organizations use, often without high substance with the main focus on creating a buzz. As potential applicants increase their company experience, they might find an incongruence regarding innovativeness as an employer attribute and thus not be as impressed as they first were based on employer reputation. Their employer image should then change with the new experiences which then also changes their preferences for innovation as an employer attributes to less important. Thus, we stated hypothesis six as follows:

Hypothesis 6: ***The importance of a creative & innovative company will decrease with company experience***

2.2.3 Hypothesis summary

Hypothesis 1	*The importance of pay will decrease with company experience*
Hypothesis 2	*The importance of advancement will increase with company experience*
Hypothesis 3a	*The importance of personal development will increase with company experience*
Hypothesis 3b	*The importance of good training for future career will increase with company experience*
Hypothesis 4	*The importance of company reputation will decrease with company experience*
Hypothesis 5	*The importance of work-life balance will increase with company experience*
Hypothesis 6	*The importance of a creative & innovative company will decrease with company experience*

Table 2: Summary of generated hypotheses

To summarize, as argued within each hypothesis, different parts of the employer branding process is expected to change based on company experience. Figure 2 visualizes the argued process that company experience has on potential applicants' perceived preferences for employer attributes. It also acts as an easy way for the reader to overlook the hypothesis generation.
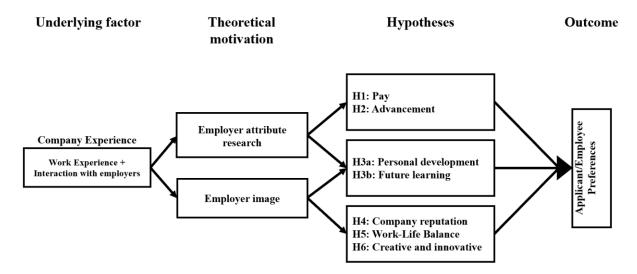

Fig. 2: A visualization of generated hypotheses and the theoretical foundation they were based on

3. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used to answer the research question and the stated hypotheses. First the research approach is introduced. Following, the preparatory work will be discussed, followed by the description of the main study and the used data. Thirdly, the survey and data will be described in more detail before the analysis process is described. Lastly, there will be a discussion about the data quality going into reliability, validity, replicability, adjustability and the use of secondary data.

3.1 Research approach

This thesis takes a deductive research approach in order to test the stated hypothesis and ultimately to answer the proposed research question (Bell & Thorpe, 2013). The six hypotheses were built upon previous studies within the field of employer branding and employer attributes described in the literature review. A quantitative approach, where survey data is used to either support or reject the hypotheses, was used. The choice to use a quantitative methodological approach constitutes a good fit with the research question as this report is looking to explain

differences in preferences between groups. Furthermore, this study is in a field where there is previous research and measures to be leveraged, which, according to Edmondson & McManus (2007), indeed indicates that it is the correct choice to use quantitative data and hypothesis testing.

3.2 Preparatory work

Before deciding on the main study, an exploration of different available study options was conducted. At first, explorations were made towards conducting a study and data collection through a quantitative survey with the students at the Stockholm School of Economics as respondents. This would give the authors full control over the data and was initially perceived to be the best possible option for data gathering, as specific questions could be created for the purpose of this study. This became the main strategy until a discussion between the authors and the supervisor indicated that professor Richard Wahlund, at the Stockholm School of Economics, had already conducted an annual study asking similar questions to the students. A thorough evaluation of how well the latest yearly *The Stockholm School of Economics Employer Image Barometer* fitted together with the study, and if the questions could be used to answer the hypothesis and research question stated in this thesis, was conducted. It quickly became clear that the questions to a large extent overlapped with the initial planed questionnaire and that a company experience variable could be approximated to reflect the needs of this study. Furthermore, two important aspects that suggested a use of the secondary data had to do with the fact that the quantity and quality of the data was significantly higher than what could have been collected for this study given the time limit of the thesis process. A complete evaluation of the two options was done, resulting in the decision to use the data from Wahlund's (2018) report as it created the best way to understand how company experience affects perceived preferences for employer attributes within the field of employer branding.

3.3 Main data

The data used for this thesis was collected by Richard Wahlund, a professor at the Stockholm School of Economics, during 2018 and was summarized in *The Stockholm School of Economics Employer Image Barometer*. Below the sample and data is discussed in further detail.

3.3.1 Sample

The data from Wahlund (2018) consisted of 631 respondents across all bachelor and master programs and years at the Stockholm School of Economics. The students had to be enrolled in one of said programs during December 2017 to be a part of the study. The questions asked in the survey included, but were not limited to, questions about the students' current working pattern (if they worked full-time, part-time or hourly), employer attribute preferences, amount of time they spent on work and studies, as well as who their dream employer was. In total, there were approximately 62 different questions asked in the questionnaire and many of them consisted of sub-questions. Most questions were either of open variety, mainly those questions asking for preferred company to work for or where they were currently employed, or on classical 7-point graded Likert-scales which Söderlund (2005) highlights as an appropriate scale for similar questions to those of Wahlund's (2018) survey.

	BSc Y1	BSc Y2	BSc Y3	BSc Y4*	MSc Y1	MSc Y2	Total
# of respondents	110	86	94	25	150	166	631
% of total	17,4%	13,6%	14,9%	4,0%	23,8%	26,3%	100%

*Table 3: Sample demographic data divided into educational year. * Students had not yet finished their bachelor's degree during the original 3 years*

The questionnaire from Wahlund (2018) is a part of an ongoing data collection, resulting in new *The Stockholm School of Economics Employer Image Barometer* report each year. This barometer has been published annually since 1990 (except 2002) and creates value for the school's partner organizations that are investing money in the school and its education, companies trying to recruit the talented students and for the school's professors and students (Wahlund, 2018). The measurements and questions used in the survey have thus developed and been improved over time and the longevity of the report is an indication of its stability and successful nature. The sample appeared to be of both high quality with little outliers and close to 100% answer frequency on the questions asked. The overall sample was also large with over 600 respondents which creates a great foundation for the analysis and testing of the hypotheses. Lastly, there was also a natural spread of respondents across all years of studies (see table 3 above) and the only group lacking in respondents is year four of bachelor studies (n = 25), which

is not strange since a bachelor is normally completed in three years. It should also be noted that the respondents took part in a lottery for both cinema tickets as well as a paid dinner as an incentive to participate.

3.3.2 Data collection

As stated above, the data was of a secondary nature and was collected by Professor Richard Wahlund in 2018. The collection of data was made together with, and financed by, SSE Corporate Relations and was conducted between January and March of 2018 (Wahlund, 2018). The survey involved all students registered in a SSE study program in Sweden in December of 2017: The Bachelor of Science Program in Business and Economics, the Bachelor of Science Program in Retail Management, the Master of Science Programs in Economics, in Accounting and Financial Management, in Finance, in International Business, and in Business and Management. The total population consisted of 2,007 active students at the time of the survey. Of these, 631 (31,4 percent) completed the internet-based questionnaire (Wahlund, 2018) and is represented in the collected data.

3.4 Analysis

3.4.1 Analytical program

With data from Wahlund (2018), the statistical analytical program SPSS version 25 was used to run statistical analysis and gain insights into the stated research question. SPSS is a well-recognized analytical program that, with somewhat easy methods, can generate strong analytical capabilities more than sufficient for the purpose of this thesis. With SPSS, basic but crucial analysis could be conducted. This mainly took the form of creating of new measurements, groupings of respondents and t-tests. Together, the tests were conducted with focus on testing the six formulated hypotheses. In the end, the analytical objective was to either support or reject the hypotheses, which in turn give an insight into the research question.

3.4.2 Recoded variable – Company experience

The approximation of company experience is based on the combination of a work experience dimension and the experience that potential applicants gain from interacting with companies and their employees. Both dimensions will be discussed below, followed by a discussion of their combination, resulting in a strong and valid approximation variable of company experience.

Dimension 1 – Interaction with companies and their employees:

Apart from work experience, the experience which students gain from meeting companies and their employees during their studies is a crucial part of the experience they have with companies and is an important part of company experience. Every year at the Stockholm School of Economics there is a broad range of company events, the largest event each year being the annual career fair (http://www.handelsdagarna.se/) where bachelor and master students have the opportunity to meet companies, talk about why they should apply to their open positions, and how it is to work for the organization. By interacting with companies and their employees, the students gain insight into how different organizations appear to perform on employer attributes and how it is to work for them, all without being employed. With this logic, the students that have advanced further in their education, such as the master students, have had more opportunities to meet with companies, talk to company representatives, and understand what a work life might include compared to the students on their first or second year of their bachelor studies.

Dimension 2 – Work Experience:

From a work experience perspective, a student with more years of education has had more opportunities to gain work experience. Both because they have gained more knowledge, making them more valuable to employers, but also because they have had more contacts with companies and recruiters during their education which should increase the work opportunities for them. The older master students should therefore have had a higher possibility to work compared to younger students whom just started their academic journey.

Among the students starting their master's degree at SSE in 2018, the average age was 24 years across all the different programs (The Stockholm School of Economics, n.d.; Business & Management; Finance; Economics; Accounting, Valuation & Financial Management). In the Swedish educational system, a student should be 22-23 years of age when starting their master's education unless they had taken a one or several year-long break. Based on the difference, master students have on average taken at least one year off from their studies before starting their masters. This year off can of course be used for many things, such as other studies or catching up

with old exams, but there is a high chance that many of the ambitious SSE students used the time to gain work experience, something that is also supported by our own experiences.

As the decision was made to use secondary data, there was no variable which explicitly asked the respondents how much compiled work experience they had gathered in total. The closest question regarding work experience in the data from Richard Wahlund (2018) was regarding the students' current work situation, and how many hours they were working on average each week. This is believed to be suitable as a substitute for a direct measurement of work experience since current work time is an indication of how much an individual is working during their studies. We are aware that this might fluctuate between years, as can also be seen in the data, which is therefore also reflected in the variable. This can be due to workload at school as well as more work opportunities being available to more senior students.

Furthermore, Dundes & Marx (2006) showed that students working 10-19 hours each week performed better than their counterparts. With this fact in mind, it's logical that those students working a moderate amount would continue to do so as they receive both extra income and perform better in school. The more senior students, with a higher amount of weekly work hours, should thus have worked to a larger extent throughout their years of studies and should therefore have gained more work experience compared to those who were not working to as large of an extent. It can also be assumed that those students who worked more, most likely had a more recent picture of how it is to work. This should make them evaluate employer attributes with more clarity. From the Wahlund (2018) report, one question was stated as "About how many **hours per week** (on average) do you work for this employer?" (see Appendix 2). Because the working variables were separated based on the different type of work contract the students had at the time of the questionnaire (full-time, part-time, or hourly), a combined variable was created to gather the work time per month for all respondents. Working hours are presented below in table 4 and are divided by educational year.

	BSc Y1	BSc Y2	BSc Y3	BSc Y4	MSc Y1	MSc Y2
Mean # of working hours/month	16,2182	37,2093	44,4255	60,0000	25,9733	40,9398
MIN	0	0	0	0	0	0
MAX	96	300	220	200	180	160
Std. Deviation	22,01585	49,91145	47,53444	67,32465	43,72418	53,63357
# of respondents	110	86	94	25	150	166

Table 4: Summary of respondents working hours split by their year of education

The data displayed in table 4 shows that there is a broad range of students working to different degrees throughout all years of education. The students whom at the time of the questionnaire were in their first year of studies at the bachelor program worked in general less hours compared to later in their education. The first-year students average roughly 16 working hours per month which was by far the lowest number compared to the other years. However, there is still individuals working up to 96 hours a month during their first bachelor year, showing that some students are focusing more on gaining work experience than others. Overall, across the years, there were students not working at all but also those that chose to work close to a full-time (40 hours/week) position or even more.

Creation of company experience approximation:

Combining the experience students receive from both working on their spare time and interacting with companies and their employees, together with an educational dimension, creates an opportunity to make an approximation of company experience.
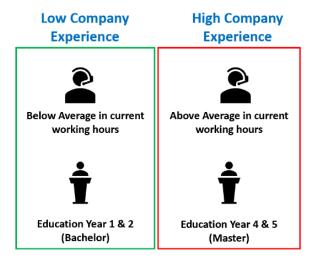
Fig.3: Illustration of company experience groupings based on working hours and educational years

With a reasoning of education and current work situation, the respondents were divided into two groups where company experience is captured as the differences between the groups. The respondents were placed in groups based on the year of education they were attending at the time of the survey, where the focus was on the first two years of the bachelor and the two years of master studies. The reasoning for bringing two years together in each group was to gain a larger base of respondents, making the results clearer and the analysis more stable. Following the division on year of education, the respondents whom worked more than average in the group with bachelor students was removed. Thus, only year 1 & 2 bachelor students who worked below average amongst their peers were left in group one. The same procedure was conducted with the group filled with master students, but here, the students who worked below average were instead removed. Thus, only year 1 & 2 master students who worked above average amongst their peers were left in group two.
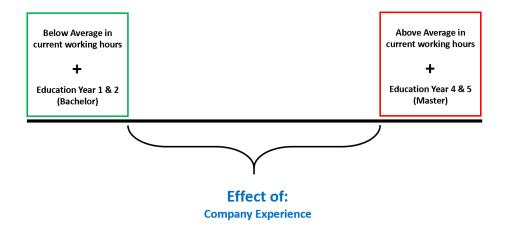
Fig. 4: An illustration of the two groups, showing the capture of the underlying factor company experience as the difference between the groups

With the creation of the groups, the remaining respondents were checked for errors. Respondents who, for some reason, didn't answer the questions about any of the employer attribute-related questions that were hypothesized about were removed from the analysis. In total 3 respondents were removed from the data sample. After the approximation variable and data cleaning, the original 631 respondents became a total of 294 students representing year 1 & 2 bachelor students with below average working hours (named "Low Company Experience") and year 1 & 2 master students with above average working hours (named "High Company Experience").

	Low Company Experience	High Company Experience	Total
# of respondents	117	177	294
% of total	39,8%	60,2%	100%

Table 5: Summary of respondents divided based on low or high company experience

With an approximation of company experience, the hypotheses can be analyzed and the research question answered. Some students are more focused on work during their studies than others. The approximation of company experience is based on the previous discussion regarding current working and education level. Together, they form two individual groupings of students which will be used for the analysis of the secondary data. Using these two groupings for the analysis

should allow to capture of the effect of company experience on potential applicants' – in this case business students' – perceived preferences of employer attributes.

3.4.3 Analytical tests

With an approximation of company experience based on two groups of business students, statistical analytics could be run to analyze the stated hypotheses. With both groups consisting of over 30 respondents (n > 30), and since the focus is on the differences between the groups' mean values, research praxis is to analyze using parametrical statistical tests, in this case Independent Sample t-tests. This test compares the two groups' – i.e. those with lower and higher company experience – mean values on the chosen variables – in this case their perceived importance of different employer attributes. The statistical analysis then outputs a significance value (p-value) which describes with what certainty the two groups differ from each other. The difference in mean value from the Independent Sample t-test between the groups can then, if an accepted significance level is reached, be ascribed to company experience. The p-value shows if there are statistical differences between the groups. A standardized acceptance of statistical significance within the field of employer branding is a 5% significance level (p-value < 0,05), based on articles within the literature review. If the significance level is equal or below the 5% threshold, this thesis will accept that there is a difference between the groups and conclusions can be made. When looking at the p-value, this thesis will assume equal variance between the two groups as both groups are compiled by students at the Stockholm School of Economics with similar high-pressured study experience (which is needed to get accepted to SSE). The respondents are assumed to be fairly homogeneous as most should be in similar life-stages and life-positions with a focus on their education.

3.4.4 Tested questions

To test the generated hypotheses, questions from Wahlund's (2018) survey had to be matching what was intended to be investigated. Table 6 summarizes the questions which were used to test each individual hypothesis. The question was formulated in the following way, "How important do you consider the following aspects when looking for a job?". The related aspects are found in the table.

Hypothesis	Question from Wahlund (2018)
H1 - The importance of pay will decrease with company experience	That the employer offers good pay and other terms of employment.
H2 - The importance of advancement will increase with company experience	That the employer offers good opportunities to advance quickly (getting managerial positions quickly).
H3a - The importance of personal development will increase with company experience	That the employer provides good opportunities for my personal development.
H3b - The importance of good training for future career will increase with company experience	That the employer offers a good springboard and good training for my future career.
H4 - The importance of company reputation will decrease with company experience	That the employer is well-known with a good reputation.
H5 - The importance of work-life balance will increase with company experience	That the employer offers a good life balance between work and leisure.
H6 - The importance of a creative & innovative company will decrease with company experience	That the employer is very creative and innovative.

Table 6: Summary of the questions used to analyze each individual hypothesis, from Wahlund (2018)

Each of the questions were answered by the respondents on a 7-point Likert scale where:

1=Not all important; 2=A little important; 3=Somewhat important; 4=Rather important;

5=Even more important; 6=Very important; and 7=Extremely important.

3.5 Data quality

3.5.1 Reliability

A study's reliability is how well that study was conducted, or in other words, if it's possible to achieve the same results with multiple measurements (Söderlund, 2005). "Reliability is fundamentally concerned with issues of consistency of measures" (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.168).

Stability:

The reliability of this study can be considered rather strong. The creator of the data collection, and Image Barometer, professor Richard Wahlund, have conducted this study for many years and it has always been focusing on the students at the Stockholm School of Economics. An important measurement of reliability is that of a study's stability, where it's important to investigate how well research holds up over time. In other words, stability can be described as:

"are similar results achieved if the research is done again at a later stage asking the same respondents?" (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.168). For this thesis it's difficult to conduct a stability test due to a couple of key facts. Firstly, the data received from the Wahlund (2018) study was anonymous, which hinders the possibility to ask the same questions again to the same respondents. Secondly, the fact that the questions were asked in the beginning of 2018 makes it difficult to locate a part of the sample as some of the respondents have finished their education. Putting this aside, it does however become clear when looking at the annual Image Barometer that the reliability and stability is quite high. The employer attribute questions that have been similar, or the same, over the years is somewhat stable over time even with different samples.

Over the years, Richard Wahlund has been making improvements to the survey regarding the measurements and questions based on the previous year's results and feedback. One example is the use of a 6-graded scale in the 2016 *The Stockholm School of Economics Employer Image Barometer* (Wahlund, 2016) on some questions, which then was changed to a 7-graded Likert scale in the 2018 report. Another important way to increase the reliability of a study according to Söderlund (2005) is to use measurements that have been used in previous research and are known to work. In his study, Wahlund (2018) has used employer attributes and questions common to the field of employer branding (for example Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). This help to increase the internal reliability of the study. As similar questions have been used in previous well-known and fundamental research in the field, the measurements are shown to be of a high standard, making sure that the respondents are answering what the researcher aimed for. If another study were to be conducted with the same questions amongst the same respondents, it should thus generate very similar results.

3.5.2 Validity

Validity judges whether a study measures what it says it does (Söderlund, 2005). "*Validity* refers to the issue of whether or not an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to a concept really measures that concept." (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.170).

One of the main concerns regarding the validity of this study comes from the use of secondary, rather than primary, data. This decision created some loss of control over the data and how the study could be conducted. The loss of control comes from the fact that the questions were chosen, and the data was gathered separately from this study. Thus, this thesis had no control

over the conduct and the process with which the data was collected, potentially decreasing the validity of this thesis study. However, there is no reason to believe that Wahlund's (2018) study has been conducted with bias or error. The process was described in the Image Barometer (2018) and is similar to standard research procedure.

Internal Validity:

According to Bryman & Bell (2015), internal validity relates mainly to the issue of causality. "If we suggest that x causes y, can we be sure that it is x that is responsible for variation in y and not something else that is producing an apparent causal relationship?" (p.50). This investigates a causality where the underlying factor, company experience, is theorized to influence what potential employer attributes potential applicants perceive to be important. To ensure a high level of internal validity, and to make sure that the analysis is looking at company experience and nothing else, an approximation was created and used to split the respondents into groups. No other variables were allowed to further change the groupings and all other attributes and demographic factors are either the same for the entire population or randomized to make sure that they are not influencing the results.

The measurements and approximation used to capture company experience is, even with this explained, one of the largest weaknesses of validity in this study. The **content validity** is described by Söderlund (2005) as to what extent a measurements content, in the form of questions and answer options, covers the content in the theoretical variable that the thesis wants to measure. With a focus on company experience, it would have been ideal to form a question tailored for this purpose. However, several problems about measuring, for example the total work experience of an individual, came to light. Having a question asking about company experience would put the respondents in a difficult situation as it's assumed to be very difficult to, with any precision, remember how much work experience, or contact with companies, one has had in his or her lifetime. The alternative, to use Richard Wahlund's (2018) data, was considered to be a better option for the content validity purpose in this thesis. With measurements not fully in line with the sought-after company experience variable, the content validity is weakened slightly with the problematization of how to capture the respondents' company experience without a specific question targeting that aspect. To strengthen the content validity, much thought was put into the creation of a well composed approximation, making sure

to have solid arguments for its structure and creation. It is not a perfect solution and there might be other factors apart from company experience that influences the approximation. However, with a strong approximating factor, the experience the respondents have from companies in an employer setting perceived to stand for the overwhelming part of the differences between the two groups.

Continuing with **construct validity,** in Bryman & Bell (2015) it is noted that "...the researcher is encouraged to deduct hypothesis from a theory that is relevant to the concept" (p.171). The hypothesis generation in this thesis is built on strong fundamental research within the field of employer branding. All hypotheses were created from relevant employer attribute and employer branding theory. Many of the key authors whose articles were used are highly known within the field. Filip Lievens, for example, has had over 15,000 citations in his academic career and has been involved in writing over 200 articles (Google Scholar, n.d.).

External Validity:

External validity is concerned with "the question of whether the results of a study can be generalized beyond the specific research context." (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.50-51). Much of the generalizability comes from the sample and data used in the analysis. With the use of secondary data came the loss of control including that of ensuring generalizability. The study was sent out to all registered students studying as SSE at the end of 2017. No potential tampering with the data, or influences trying to get certain groups of students to answer more than others, has been discovered. The respondents thus seem to be random based on the population the survey was sent to. This is positive for this study as it creates a higher external validity and a stronger generalizability in an economics student setting. It must be noted though that the fact that only students from the Stockholm School of Economics were represented in the data is weakening the external validity, making generalizability not as strong as initially aimed. The students in the sample might have other qualities and personality traits that are less common amongst business students from other schools and caution must be taken when generalizing the results to other students outside SSE.

3.5.3 Replicability

Replicability is by Bryman & Bell (2015) described as the ease with which it is possible to replicate a study to support or disprove the findings.

The replicability of this study is of a very high nature as professor Richard Wahlund conducts the Image Barometer study amongst students at SSE annually. This shows that the data collection and study are possible to be replicated not only once but several times. Further, the analysis uses only frequently used and simple statistical tests that anyone with basic to moderate knowledge in statistical analysis should be able to replicate. Eventually, the school as a study object has been around for over 100 years and the probability that it should stop existing soon is very low. With all of this in mind it should be easy to replicate this study if need be.

3.5.4 Secondary data

Bryman & Bell (2015) listed many advantages, as well as disadvantages, with using secondary data gathered by other researchers. Firstly, the most obvious advantages are reduced cost and time savings. The use of secondary data frees up time which can be spent on the analysis and time-consuming literature review parts rather than preparing and collecting data. Secondly, the quality, as well as the quantity, of the data is, according to Bryman & Bell (2015), generally greater than what students can hope to achieve. This is also the case for this study as it would have been extremely difficult to collect over 600 responses in the given timeframe for this thesis. The authors have full confidence that the data gathered by professor Wahlund holds a higher quality and quantity than could have been gathered, one of the main reasons for using the secondary dataset for this report. Finally, Bryman and Bell (2015) also mentions that it is encouraged for researchers to use secondary data, as a lot of data can be used for more than one purpose and new discoveries can be made. This is not only resource effective but also respectful towards those who participated the study as their data comes to a greater use, similar to this thesis.

On the other hand, there are also drawbacks associated with using secondary data. One such drawback that is highlighted by Bryman and Bell (2015) is the loss of control over the data. This drawback was taken into consideration, since in a perfect world it would have been preferable to have a more dynamic variable for company and work experience. Furthermore, there was no way to impact the quality of the data, although as previously mentioned this is not seen as a significant problem in this case. There is also a risk that other important variables for the study are missing in the secondary data, but in this case, the study by Wahlund (2018) closely follows many common employer attributes from the field of employer branding.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of the analyzed data. First, the differences between the groups with high and low company experience are presented for each hypothesis together with the significance value. Each hypothesis will then be rejected or accepted based on the results. Lastly, all hypotheses and results will be summarized in a table for an easy overview.

4.1 Hypothesis results
H1 – Pay:

Hypothesis	Low Company Experience (n =117)	High Company Experience (n = 177)	Difference	P-Value
Importance of pay	5,68	5,56	- 0,116	$P = 0,388$

Table 7: Results of analysis regarding hypothesis 1 – Pay

The statistical analysis did not show a significant level of difference between students with a higher level of company experience compared to those with lower company experience. Since the hypothesis is only accepted with a p-value of 0,05 or lower (5% significance level), and the results for hypothesis 1 had a p-value of 0,388, it's concluded that there was no significant difference between the groups. With this result, it's not possible to say that there is a difference in perceived importance of pay as an employer attribute based on company experience. With a clear non-significant result, hypothesis 1 is thus **rejected**.

H1 - The importance of pay will decrease with company experience

H2 – Advancement:

Hypothesis	Low Company Experience (n =117)	High Company Experience (n = 177)	Difference	P-Value
Importance of Advancement	5,24	5,19	-0,047	$P = 0,766$

Table 8: Results of analysis regarding hypothesis 2 – Advancement

Looking at the students' perceived importance of advancement as an employer attribute, there was no significant difference based on company experience. With a p-value of 0,766, it was far from being significant at the 5% level and it's therefore not possible to state that company experience influences the perception of advancement positively or negatively. Looking at the difference between the two groups there was only a difference of 0,047 scale steps on the 7-

graded scale. With a non-significant result and a high p-value, this indicates that there is no difference between the two groups and therefore that the importance of advancement continues to be of similar importance even with a higher company experience. With a non-significant result, there is no support for hypothesis 2 and it must therefore be **rejected.**

H2 - *The importance of advancement will increase with company experience*

H3 – Personal Development & Training for Future Career:

Hypothesis	Low Company Experience (n =117)	High Company Experience (n = 177)	Difference	P-Value
Importance of Personal Development	5,97	6,44	0,466	*P* = 0,000
Importance of good training for future career	6,01	6,31	0,302	*P* = 0,007

Table 9: Results of analysis regarding hypothesis 3a – Personal Development & 3b – Training for Future Career

Running an independent sample t-test resulted in a strong significant result on a 1% level for both hypothesis 3a and 3b. As argued from previous theory, company experience was believed to increase the perceived importance of personal development and training for future career. The results show a clear sign, with a p-value of below 0,000 and 0,007 respectively, that there is a difference between students with less company experience compared to those with more. Looking at the mean of each group, it shows that the group of respondents with higher company experience rated personal development on average 0,466 and training for future career 0,302 scale steps higher than those with lower experience. The results show that the perceived importance of personal development and training for future career in fact significantly increase as individuals gain more company experience. With the support from the data, hypotheses 3a and 3b are therefore **accepted**.

H3a - *The importance of personal development will increase with company experience*

H3b - *The importance of good training for future career will increase with company experience*

H4 – Company Reputation:

Hypothesis	Low Company Experience (n =117)	High Company Experience (n = 177)	Difference	P-Value
Importance of Company Reputation	5,07	5,46	0,389	*P* = 0,009

Table 10: Results of analysis regarding hypothesis 4 – Company Reputation

The perceived importance of company reputation was hypothesized, based on previous research, to decrease with a higher level of company experience. The result from the analysis did however show a vastly different story with a significant, but opposite, result. Instead of decreasing in importance with a higher company experience, the result showed that the students' preference for company reputation increased significantly for the sample group with high level of company experience compared to those with lower. With a p-value of 0,009, the results were significant on a 1% level, showing that the differences are clear. Between the two groups, there was a mean difference of 0,389 scale-steps. The results thus indicate that company reputation is perceived as a more important employer attributes for potential applicants who have a higher degree of experience from interactions with employers and through work. The possible reasoning for this surprising result will be discussed further in the discussion part. For now, the result from the statistical analysis shows clearly that the perceived importance of company reputation as an employer attribute is higher with more extensive company experience and not lower. Based on the results, hypothesis 4 must thus be **rejected.**

H4 - *The importance of company reputation will decrease with company experience*

H5 – Work-Life Balance:

Hypothesis	Low Company Experience (n =117)	High Company Experience (n = 177)	Difference	P-Value
Importance of Work-Life Balance	4,78	5,13	0,352	*P* = 0,073

Table 11: Results of analysis regarding hypothesis 5 – Work-Life Balance

It was hypothesized that the perceived importance of work-life balance would be higher for a student with a higher degree of company experience. The results suggest that this is indeed the case. Analysis of the data showed that there are some tendencies towards a higher emphasis on

work-life balance amongst the group with higher company experience. Unfortunately, even though the results have tendencies towards the stated hypothesis, the results do not reach the significance level of 5%. Thus, we cannot be confident in the level of differences between the groups when it comes the perceived importance of work-life balance. Worth noting is that the results technically are significant on a 10% level. However, as we previously stated, we are only accepting results with on a 5% significance level basis or lower meaning that the result will not be seen as significant in this thesis, therefore the hypothesis that the importance of work-life balance will increase with company experience, must be **rejected.**

H5 - *The importance of work-life balance will increase with company experience*

H6 - Creative & Innovative:

Hypothesis	Low Company Experience (n =117)	High Company Experience (n = 177)	Difference	P-Value
Importance of a Creative & Innovative company	5,04	4,98	-0,060	$P = 0,727$

Table 12: Results of analysis regarding hypothesis 6 – Creative & Innovative

The perceived importance of a company's creativity and innovative nature was hypothesized from previous literature and research, to decrease with a company experience. The results showed a very modest difference in the results between the two groups and the p-value of the analysis was very high, *P*= 0,727. This concludes that with the data based on students as respondents there is no difference between the two groups with different levels company experience, on their perceived importance of a creative and innovative company. With little change amongst the two groups, and with a high p-value, we are not able to see any effect from company experience on this tested employer attributes. Based on this, hypothesis 6 must be **rejected**.

H6 – *The importance of a creative & innovative company will decrease with company experience*

4.2 Summary of hypothesis testing

Below, in table 13, a short summary of the results from the hypothesis testing is presented.

H1 – The importance of pay will decrease with company experience	**Rejected**	*P-Value = 0,388*
H2 – The importance of advancement will increase with company experience	**Rejected**	*P-Value = 0,766*
H3a – The importance of personal development will increase with company experience	**Confirmed**	*P-Value = 0,000*
H3b – The importance of good training for future career will increase with company experience	**Confirmed**	*P-Value = 0,007*
H4 – The importance of company reputation will decrease with company experience	**Opposite Effect**	*P-Value = 0,009*
H5 – The importance of work-life balance will increase with company experience	**Rejected**	*P-Value = 0,073*
H6 – The importance of a creative & innovative company will decrease with company experience	**Rejected**	*P-Value = 0,727*

Table 13: Summary of results from hypothesis testing

5. Discussion

In this part of the thesis a deeper discussion of the results will be presented. The discussion will take a standpoint in the proposed hypotheses to answer the research question. Firstly, the general findings from the hypotheses testing will be discussed. After that, focus will be put on a potential explanation for the opposite result of company reputation. The results will then be put into context of the employer knowledge model and within the field of employer branding.

5.1 Discussion of results

This aimed to answer the following research question: *What effect does company experience have on the potential applicants' perceived importance of employer attributes?*

A combination of hypotheses focusing on different employer attributes, investigating how the difference in low and high level of experience with companies as employers affects the way they perceive employer attributes, was created. The results presented above give insights into crucial underlying factors in employer branding and provide an answer to the stated research question. The results showed that three hypotheses generated significant results, most notably, hypotheses 3a and 3b showed that students with a higher degree of company experience perceived both personal development and training for future career to be of a higher importance when choosing an employer compared to those students with less company experience. This result is in line with

the theoretical reasoning argued for in the hypothesis generation. With reasoning based on Paloniemi (2006) and Sutherland et al (2002), the results further strengthen the indication found in Lievens (2007) where the employees rated educational opportunities, closely related to personal development and training, higher than that of potential applicants. This indicates that as potential applicants work and gain experience, they learn and develop, which then puts more emphasize on its importance. Furthermore, it's also likely that the argument put forward in the hypothesis generation regarding employer image has some substance to it. It's difficult for students with little company experience to really understand what a focus on development and training means and entitles to before they gain experience themselves. This was then argued to influence the image they have towards employers, which also affects the employer attributes they perceive to be important, also showed by the results.

The third significant, but surprising, result was from hypothesis 4 regarding company reputation. Even though theoretically argued for, the results showed an opposite effect that a higher level of company experience leads to a higher perceived importance of company reputation. This result will be discussed further in next sub-section.

The overall results show that company experience has a significant effect on potential applicants' perceptions for some employer attributes, but not on all of them. Both the importance of personal development/training for future career and reputation differed significantly between the two groups based on level of company experience. Together with the perceived importance of work-life balance, which technically was supported on a 10% significance level (with a p-value of 0,073), the results indicate that company experience does have a strong effect on some employer attributes while having little to no effect on others. Further, it's also interesting that the results, even though not hypothesized that way for reputation, for all three significant attributes were higher in importance for the students with higher level of company experience. Even hypothesis 5, about work-life balance, indicated towards a positive direction. Together it creates an interesting forum for discussion where the results show that company experience has an effect on making certain employer attributes increase in perceived importance, while leaving other attributes on an unchanged level. In order to draw larger conclusions however, with company experience and other underlying factors, further research is still needed. These results do not only

show a positive effect of company experience, but they also point out that underlying factors can have an important role in the creation of employer attribute preferences.

5.1.1 Results of reputation

Hypothesis 4, regarding company reputation, had as mentioned above the opposite effect compared to what was initially hypothesized. Instead of decreasing in perceived importance with company experience, the results showed that company reputation increased instead. To understand the reasoning for this result, and why the theory ended up predicting the wrong outcome, another review of the hypothesis reasoning was done.

The argumentation for hypothesis 4 was based on Cable & Turban (2001) and the Copenhagen Business School (2009) study described in Sokro (2012) which stated that 65% of candidates found brand image important when picking an employer and that 63% of the people who quit their jobs said they did so because that brand image did not fit their expectations. This fact was interpreted like the employees who chose to quit did so because they were disappointed as the company had a certain reputation it didn't live up to. Based on this, it was argued that the reputation would be perceived as less important as the potential applicants understood that it's difficult to accurately interpret employer reputation and draw conclusions from it. Reflecting on the theoretical argument, it seems, in hindsight, that the theory can be interpreted in two different ways. It's therefore possible that the opposite effect comes from the other interpretation rather than the one used as argument in the hypothesis. The 63% who quit their job because of a mismatch in image is interesting, however, as it does not indicate how many employees that choose this option. The fact that they quit because of a reputation and image mismatch might instead indicate that they believed the reputation to be so important that they chose to quit their job when it was not congruent with their belief. Instead of putting less emphasis on company reputation, as hypothesized, students with company experience might have done the opposite, taking actions because it's so important to them. Instead of decreasing their perceived importance of company reputation, they would instead put more emphasis on it and make sure that they have a correct view of the company before applying. This theoretical confusion is understandable as the field is relatively new and doesn't give any indication of which of the two interpretations might have been correct. This is especially true for underlying factors within

employer branding and highlights the need for a more developed framework that includes these factors in the future.

5.2 The effect of company experience

This thesis has tried to gain an understanding of what effect company experience as an underlying factor has on the perceived importance of employer attributes amongst potential applicants. The results show that company experience has an underlying effect on the perceived importance that potential applicants put on different employer attributes. Few other researchers have focused on such underlying factors within employer branding research. Ito et al (2013) look at a limited number of moderating factors in the form of career stage, seniority (if they were manager or not) and age. The study, even though narrow and limited, did find that managers put more emphasize on certain attributes compared to other employees. Their findings, together with ours, further reinforce that underlying factors of different variety have an important role within employer branding research, and specifically when it comes to employer attitudes. It thus seems as if the parts discussed within the Theurer et al (2018) framework, with focus on employer knowledge, are neither static nor randomly arrived at. Instead, different important factors affect parts like employer familiarity, reputation, image and P-O fit to create an employer knowledge that ultimately leads to employer attribute preferences and actions towards employers. However, further research needs to be done in order to show how different underlying factors affect preferences and what parts of the employer branding process they influence. That underlying factors, such as company experience, play an important role in creating employer attribute preferences is, with this study and together with limited previous research, established and helps to further emphasize underlying factors as a future area of research interest.

5.3 Results within employer branding

The main theoretical discussion in this thesis took a leap from the previous literature in the employer branding field. The literature review by Theurer et al (2018) was based on previous research which was compiled into an employer branding model. Key parts of the model were extracted and adapted to this report in the hypothesis generation. Looking at the broader picture of employer knowledge, the results, together with Cable & Turban's (2001) proposal that applicants' employer knowledge influences employer branding outcomes, show that knowledge has a key role when discussing company experience. Discussing in broader terms within an

employer branding setting, the results indicate that company experience has an important effect in altering and deepening a person's employer knowledge, through for example a change in employer image, and thus also their perceived employer attribute preferences.

As the students gain company experience, they develop their general employer knowledge, attribute insights and employer image. By i.e. working for an organization on the side of their studies, they start gaining insights into how a working life might be. Similar experiences can be achieved by interacting with company representatives and HR. Based on their stories and information, they can start to understand how different workplaces differ and what it means to work in certain roles and places. This means that the experiences are not just gained from working at a company, but also from interactions with the firm and its representatives. All these company experiences help the students develop their employer knowledge. This is also something that was discussed from different angles in the hypothesis generation and which the results indicated towards.

From a complete, overhead perspective, looking at the full employer branding process, employer knowledge leads to potential applicant's, in this case students, attitudes which in turns lead to their decisions to take recruiting actions (e.g., apply for a job). The results indicate the same, although there is a need for adaptation to incorporate underlying affecting factors into the model, such as company experience.

As previously shown, a person's employer knowledge influences the employer branding outcomes, which include both retention as well as the person's desire to apply for a job position. The results show that underlying factors, in this case company experience, can have an effect on the attitudes that potential applicants have towards employer attributes. In practice, company experience should influence the amount and variation of employer knowledge that students gain, which then influences their preferences and attitudes. The results help nuance employer knowledge, going deeper into why, and how, it's created and what factors affect it, showing that there is more to the employer branding process than what has previously been proven.

6. Conclusion

This concluding chapter will first discuss the implications of the study from a theoretical and managerial perspective. After that, the limitations will be discussed, bringing up why some decisions were made and why these, in hindsight, could have been improved. Lastly, this thesis will conclude by discussing what can, and should, be further researched based on this study and previous theory in the field of employer branding.

6.1 Conclusions of the study

The purpose of this study was to further the field of employer branding by investigating the previously neglected area of underlying factors, in this case company experience. The study aimed to answer the research question which was proposed as: *What effect does company experience have on the potential applicants' perceived importance of employer attributes?*

To answer this, 6 hypotheses were created based on previous employer branding research with a focus on employer knowledge and employer attributes. Each hypothesis argued for a change in one employer attribute based on the underlying factor company experience. These hypotheses were then tested using secondary data from Wahlund (2018) which consisted of survey answers from 631 students studying at various programs and years at the Stockholm School of Economics.

The results from analyzing the data showed that there is a positive effect of employer experience on the perceived importance of some, but not all, employer attributes. Three hypotheses were significant on a 5% significance level (personal development, training for future career, and company reputation) and the perceived importance was higher in the group with more extensive company experience. However, company reputation, that was previously hypothesized to decrease with higher work experience, showed an opposite effect compared to what was initially hypothesized.

To summarize, this study has proven that company experience, as an underlying factor, influences the perceived importance of different employer attributes. Further studies are however needed to gain a more complete picture of this relation and the effect of other underlying factors within employer branding.

6.2 Theoretical contribution & managerial implications

6.2.1 Theoretical contribution

With an already strong understanding of what employer attributes different groups of individuals believe to be important, this thesis brings up an interesting set of factors that might have an effect on this. Most of the previous research has neglected the process and factors that change what employer attributes people perceive to be important. This became clear in the extensive employer branding-based literature review – focusing on employer attributes – conducted for this paper. By showcasing what has been done, this thesis highlights a gap that previously has lacked in research focus. Thus, one theoretical contribution is the fact that this gap is highlighted and discussed to be of importance to future research.

Further, the results from this study show that there can be factors that affect the perception of what employer attributes are important and that company experience is one of them. Not only does this emphasize the importance of continuing to research company experience as a factor in other parts of the employer branding field, but it also highlights the importance of underlying factors that have been mostly neglected by researchers in this field. The proof that company experience has an influencing effect is important for the theory and future research as it shows that other factors can affect the results when investigating employer attributes. Researchers thus should have this fact in mind and create their data collection with questions to capture their respondents' company experience. By doing so, they can make sure that the sample they are looking at is not affected by this underlying factor and that the results they are looking for come from their focus and not from differences in company experience.

6.2.2 Managerial implications

As many companies are fighting for top talents, and the war for these talents is at a peak, they are in dire need to understand different groups of potential applicants and how they should target them. If the organizations can understand what these groups perceive to be important in terms of employer attributes, and what attributes they need to have in order to make them interested in working for them, they can create smarter and more effective employer branding strategies. The results show that the importance of personal development, training for future career and company reputation is significantly higher amongst students with a higher level of company experience. Companies that are focusing on recruiting students with extensive company

experience can thus draw on these results and focus further their communication regarding employer attributes towards these attributes to gain a higher leverage and appeal towards these possible applicants. This could result in real potential outcomes for managers as they create smarter marketing and communication and gain better matched applicants and employees. Organizations can also use the results from this thesis as an indication that not all employer attributes are important to every group of potential applicants. Instead they should investigate what attributes their targeted group of potential applicants perceive as most important and then target their recruiting efforts based on that insight. Doing so, knowledgeable companies will have a better chance of succeeding in the war for talents.

6.3 Limitations

One of the most fundamental limitations stems from the limited amount of available theory and studies on underlying factors within employer branding. This created difficulties in the hypothesis generation as there were few studies that were relatable to the topic of this thesis. Due to this, different theoretical solutions had to be deducted from existing theory in order to build the hypothesis arguments in a theoretical way. This increases the room for error, which could be seen in the results of hypothesis 4 that concluded an opposite effect of what was expected.

Another limitation comes from the use of secondary data and the problems with validity resulting from this. Even though there are positives with using already collected data, the main problem for this study was the lack of a key variable truly capturing company experience. Instead, an approximation was created to capture the effect of company experience. In the approximation, there is a likelihood that other factors were also captured, even though company experience is perceived to make up most of the effect in the analysis. It's therefore difficult to understand exactly what effect other factors might have had on the approximation. A third limitation is the results generalizability. The fact that the data was gathered only from students at the Stockholm School of Economics might have implications on the generalizability. Even though the results are focused on business students, and therefore should be somewhat transferable to other similar students, the fact that the data consisted of only SSE limits the results' generalizability. Other students might have different perceptions of which employer attributes are important when choosing a company to work for.

Lastly, employer branding as a research field is still fragmented (as noted by Theurer et al, 2018) and continues to be explored. The field is just recently gaining large momentum and there is still a lot of research left to be done within the field until it becomes mature. The implication was that this thesis had to rely on the few articles available throughout the literature review and hypothesis generation, making the study not as nuanced and developed. It's something that was difficult to change, and it is a limitation of this thesis.

6.4 Suggestions for future research

Theurer et al (2018) noted in their article, "Over the past two decades, scholarly interest in employer branding has strongly increased. Simultaneously, however, employer branding research has developed into a fragmented field with heterogeneous interpretations of the employer branding concept and its scope, which has impeded further theoretical and empirical advancements." (p.155). As highlighted earlier, the effect of underlying factors within the field of employer branding is still a gray area where further research must be conducted. While articles like Ito et al (2013) studied factors that could influence the importance of certain employer attributes, such as age and lifecycles, most articles have completely ignored such factors. This thesis focused on one such factor, company experience. There should however be many other factors that in the future should be researched, such as level of education, different demographic variables, and respondents with more full-time work experience compared to the student population. If these moderating factors are found, future studies can include control questions to understand if these factors are having an impact on their studies.

Furthermore, research within employer branding has previously focused heavily on looking at the importance of different employer attributes without any further nuances. Therefore, future research should focus on more diverse studies, comparing different groups and samples of respondents while looking into other factors that might influence employer branding, and the perceived importance of employer attributes. By exploring further, a deeper and broader understanding of which attributes are preferred by different potential applicants could be gained. This would then further enhance the theoretical and managerial implications as companies will be able to increase their understanding and effectiveness of their recruiting activities.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – List of employer attributes found in the literature review

Attributes	Articles	# of Articles
Advancement / Promotion / Career Prospect & Growth / Provides opportunities for better jobs in the future	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Ito, Brotheridge & McFarland (2013); Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Chhabra & Sharma (2012); Arachchige & Robertson (2011); Backhaus (2004);*	*6*
Pay Benefits / Satisfaction with Pay / Pay / Pay (including linked to performance, profit sharing) / Compensation /Above average basic Salary	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Ito, Brotheridge & McFarland (2013); Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002); Chhabra & Sharma (2012); Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*6*
Job Security	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Ito, Brotheridge & McFarland (2013); Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Lievens (2007); Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*5*
Educational Opportunities / Learning Curve / Developmental Opportunities / Personal Training & Development Opportunities	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Tumasjan et al (2011); Ito, Brotheridge & McFarland (2013); Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002); Chhabra & Sharma (2012);*	*5*
Structure / Hierarchy / Well-Defined Structure	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Tumasjan et al (2011); Lievens (2007);*	*3*
Task Diversity / Task Variety / Variety set of Tasks	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Tumasjan et al (2011); Lievens (2007);*	*3*
Prestige / Prestigious --> Is well-known with a good reputation	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Lievens (2007);*	*3*
Flexibility of working schedule / Flexibility	*Tumasjan et al (2011); Ito, Brotheridge & McFarland*	*3*

(schedule, work hours, leisure vs work) / Flexibility working hours	*(2013); Lievens & Highhouse (2003);*	
Innovativeness / Global, innovative company / Innovative Employer	*Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002); Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*3*
Working with Customers / Customer-oriented organization / Customer-oriented	*Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Arachchige & Robertson (2011); Backhaus (2004);*	*3*
Benefits (other than pay) / Overall attractive compensation package / Compensation(/Benefits)	*Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Arachchige & Robertson (2011); Backhaus (2004);*	*3*
Corporate Culture / Work Climate	*Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002); Chhabra & Sharma (2012); Backhaus (2004);*	*3*
Physical Activities	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Lievens (2007;*	*2*
Travel Opportunities	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Lievens (2007);*	*2*
Excitement / Exciting Environment	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*2*
Competence	*Kaur & Pingle (2018); Lievens & Highhouse (2003);*	*2*
Responsibility(/empowerment) / Employee Empowerment	*Tumasjan et al (2011); Chhabra & Sharma (2012);*	*2*
Location	*Lievens & Highhouse (2003); Backhaus (2004);*	*2*
Large organization offering job rotation and diversity / Gaining Experience in different Departments	*Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002); Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*2*
Successful company based on strong products / High Quality Products	*Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002); Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*2*
Challenging work, in a non-hierarchical company (excluding job security and/or	*Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002); Backhaus (2004);*	*2*

large organization) / Challenging Work		
Organizational Environment (as a group of attributes) / Fun working Environment	*Priyadarshi (2011); Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*2*
Socially Responsible Organization / Corporate Social Performance	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011); Backhaus (2004);*	*2*
Social Activities	*Kaur & Pingle (2018);*	*1*
Sincerity	*Kaur & Pingle (2018);*	*1*
Cheerfulness	*Kaur & Pingle (2018);*	*1*
Ruggedness	*Kaur & Pingle (2018);*	*1*
Team Climate	*Tumasjan et al (2011);*	*1*
Company Shares	*Tumasjan et al (2011);*	*1*
Leadership Functions (possibility to get leadership fast)	*Tumasjan et al (2011);*	*1*
Entrepreneurial Knowledge Building	*Tumasjan et al (2011);*	*1*
People Factors (honesty, fairness, concern for people etc.)	*Ito, Brotheridge & McFarland (2013);*	*1*
Task Demands	*Lievens & Highhouse (2003);*	*1*
Sincerity	*Lievens & Highhouse (2003);*	*1*
Robustness	*Lievens & Highhouse (2003);*	*1*
Like the work and the industry	*Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002);*	*1*
Value based organization	*Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002);*	*1*
Other Benefits	*Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002);*	*1*
Comfort in knowing people there	*Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002);*	*1*
Job Profile	*Chhabra & Sharma (2012);*	*1*
Brand Name	*Chhabra & Sharma (2012);*	*1*
Organizational Fame and Flexibility (as a group of attributes)	*Priyadarshi (2011);*	*1*
Variety in Job and Work setting (as a group of attributes)	*Priyadarshi (2011);*	*1*

Compensation and Career (as a group of attributes)	*Priyadarshi (2011);*	*1*
Someone of my family is in the Army	*Lievens (2007);*	*1*
Working in the Army is the fulfilment of a childhood dream	*Lievens (2007);*	*1*
You can become a Pilot	*Lievens (2007);*	*1*
Involves a lot of Social/Team Activities	*Lievens (2007);*	*1*
Work on board of a Ship	*Lievens (2007);*	*1*
Recognition/appreciation from management	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Feeling Good about yourself as a result of working for the organization	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Feeling more Self-Confident about yourself as a result of working for the organization	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Gaining Experience that will help your career that will help your career	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Good relationship with superiors	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Good relationship with colleagues	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Supportive and encouraging colleagues	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Company Values and Makes use of your Creativity	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
The company produces Innovative Products and Services	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Opportunity to apply what was learnt in University	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Opportunity to learn others what you learnt during University	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Acceptance and Belonging	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Happy Work Environment	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*

A very Profitable Organization	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
A Large Company	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Company is Well-Known	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Quality of the Management	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Organization Known for their Honesty and Fairness	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Giving you greater Respect from Family and Friends	*Arachchige & Robertson (2011);*	*1*
Supportive Environment	*Backhaus (2004);*	*1*
Work/Family Balance	*Backhaus (2004);*	*1*

Appendix 2 - Richard Wahlunds (2018) Image Barometer Survey

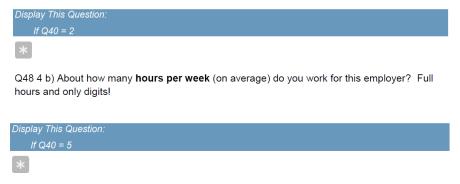Below, the survey questions used for the data analysis is presented.

Q52 2. How important do you consider the following aspects when looking for a job?

That the employer ...

	Not at all important (1)	A little important (2)	Somewhat important (3)	Rather important (4)	Even more important (5)	Very important (6)	Extremely important (8)
... provides good opportunities to work internationally. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... invests heavily in CSR and sustainability. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... is very creative and innovative. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... offers good opportunities to advance quickly (getting managerial positions quickly). (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... offers a good springboard and good training for my future career. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... offers a good life balance between work and leisure. (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... offers good pay and other terms of employment. (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... provides good opportunities for my personal development. (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q40 4. What else do you at present do besides your studies at SSE? You can choose more than one alternative, but they must **not** be **overlapping** (i.e. they must not concern the same work)!

☐   I have a full time employment with a fixed monthly fulltime salary. (1)

☐   I have a part time employment with part of a fixed monthly salary. (2)

☐   I am working paid for per hour. (5)

☐   I am self-employed (run my own business). (3)

☐   I'm also studying at another university or college parallel with studying at SSE - **not** including being on exchange. (4)

☐   I'm engaged in extracurricular **work** activities at SSE, e.g. work for the SSE student organization SASSE. (8)

☐   I'm engaged in voluntary work outside of SSE. (9)

Full-time work is presumed to be approximately 40 hours/week according to normal Swedish praxis as there were not questions further asking about specific number full-time hours worked.

Display This Question:
    If Q40 = 2

✳

Q48 4 b) About how many **hours per week** (on average) do you work for this employer? Full hours and only digits!

Display This Question:
    If Q40 = 5

✳

Q123 4 b) About how many **hours per week** (on average) do you work for this or these employers? Full hours and only digits!

Q53 9. How important do you consider the following aspects when looking for a job?

That the employer ...

	Not at all importa nt (1)	A little importa nt (2)	Somewh at important (3)	Rather importa nt (4)	Even more importa nt (5)	Very importa nt (6)	Extremel y importan t (7)
... is well-known with a good reputation. (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... offers a nice and positive work environment. (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... is very entrepreneuri al. (16)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... invests heavily in equality as to gender, diversity etc. (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... offers good opportunities to work analytically. (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... offers a job in an exciting industry or field of work. (13)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... is looking for people with my formal qualifications (my education, work experiences, language skills etc.) (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

... is looking for people with my personal qualities (being analytical, creative, social, entrepreneuri al etc.) (15)

○　　　○　　　○　　　○　　　○　　　○　　　○