Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Department of Economics

How to attract agricultural competence

- An employer branding case study of Lantmännen

Matilda Berghäll

Master's thesis · 30 hec · Advanced level
Agricultural Programme – Economics and Management
Degree thesis No 960 · ISSN 1401-4084
Uppsala 2015

How to attract agricultural competence
- An employer branding case study of Lantmännen

Matilda Berghäll

Supervisor: Cecilia Mark-Herbert, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Economics

Examiner: Karin Hakelius, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Economics

Credits: 30 hec
Level: A2E
Course title: Degree Project in Economics
Course code: EX0536
Programme/Education: Agricultural Programme – Economics and Management
Faculty: Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences

Place of publication: Uppsala
Year of publication: 2015
Name of Series: Degree project/SLU, Department of Economics
No: 960
ISSN 1401-4084
Online publication: http://stud.epsilon.slu.se

Key words: employer attractiveness, employer brand, employer branding, employee value proposition, focus groups, Lantmännen, organizational attributes, organizational culture, student's preferences, future employer

Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Department of Economics

Acknowledgements

As the author I would to thank the people who supported the making of this thesis. Among them are some stars at the department of economics who does a brilliant work with students and have helped me guide my way during these five years at the Swedish university of agricultural science; Daniel Lunneryd, director of studies and professor Hans Andersson. Of course, a special thanks to my supervisor Cecilia Mark Herbert who has given her support with encouraging words, positive energy and pedagocial advisory!

Further thanks to Daniel Aglöv and Carin Ritter for giving me this exciting opportunity to collaborate with you and for explaining how Lantmännen engage in employer branding. I would also like to thank all the students who participated in the focus groups for important input, interesting discussions and for taking time to participate. Moreover, extra thanks to family and friends who not only have been a pillar stone during ups and downs but also has contributed with clever ideas for improvements.

Abstract

In today´s society, both consumers and employees are becoming more aware of brands and the competition amongs firms to attract the best possible employees is closely related to having an attractive employer brand. A company's brand portfolio, considered as one of the most valuable assets needs to be nurtured and updated to fit the needs of the stakeholders. Applying classical branding theories towards employees' coins the term employer branding, a strategy of communicating the benefits of an employer. Employer branding involves all activities concerning promotion of the employer brand. A successful employer brand attracts future employees to join the organization. Employer branding is a concept that includes several steps of knowledge about the company itself but also its target group.

The creation of an employer brand is based on the knowledge of the organizational culture existing within the company. Altough most companies have a written document describing the organizational culture, only the employees within the firm can give a true picture of the existing culture. The employee value proposition (EVP), as a part of the employer brand, summarize the core values of the organizational culture and divide these values into categories of benefits provided to the employee. These benefits act as a guideline of the communicated message of the employer brand towards the stakeholders. The aim of the employee value proposition is to attract future employees with the competences needed whitin the firm. Altough, attraction is highly individual and can only be reached when the communicated message match the values of the target group. Therefore companies demands knowledge about their target group to communicate a customized message of their employee value proposition.

This study is based on a commission from Lantmännen with the aim to identify factors that determine the attractiveness of a company as a future employer in the eyes of students at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). The case company is a large organization with wide business divisions within the agricultural industry and in continuous need of competent employees. The agricultural division at Lantmännen wish to gain knowledge about the attributes valued by agricultural students with the long term aim of reaching employer attractiveness among this target group. In order to understand the full picture of attracting employees, how the company engages in employer branding activities are also investigated. Theories within employer branding and organizational culture were explored and applied on the empirical findings. Several types of methodological data sources was used to answer the aim of the study; focus groups with students, evaluation of survey after the focus groups and interviews with employees at Lantmännen.

The results of the empirical investigation point to the key factors as determining employer attractiveness. These factors are: development possibilities, challenging and varying job assignments, salary and culture. A supporting manager with continuous feedback was also important to the students. The case company invest in their employer brand and engages in activities such as: lunch lectures, inviting students to the office, career fairs, mentor program, trainee program and summer internship. The employer branding activities are to some degree manifested within the EVP of Lantmännen but a deeper evaluation of internal employer branding is recommended to get a complete answer. The result of the thesis may be useful in the creation of a customized message of the employer brand for any company striving to attract agricultural students.

Sammanfattning

I dagens samhälle, ökar medvetenheten om varumärken hos både konsumenter och anställda och konkurrensen bland företagen om att attrahera de bästa tänkbara medarbetarna kan summeras i vinkeln av ha ett attraktivt arbetsgivarvarumärke. Ansett som en av de mest värdefulla tillgångarna är ett företags varumärkesportfölj som behöver uppdateras för att passa målgruppens behov. Att applicera klassisk varumärkesteori mot anställda skapade termen arbetsgivarvarumärke, en strategi av att kommunicera fördelarna av en arbetsgivare. *Employer branding* involverar alla aktiviteter som rör marknadssföring av arbetsgivarvarumärket. Ett framgångsrikt arbetsgivarvarumärke attraherar framtida medarbetare att ansluta till organisationen. Employer branding är ett begrepp som innefattar flera steg av kunskap om företaget och även dess målgrupp.

Skapandet av ett arbetsgivarvarumärke är baserat på kunskapen om den existerande organisationskulturen inom företaget. Även om de flesta företg har ett nedskrivet dokument som beskriver organisationskulturen är de anställda inom företaget de enda som kan ge en sann bild av den existerande kulturen. Värdeerbjudandet till de anställda (employee value proposition) sammanfattar kärnvärderingar av organisationskulturen och delar upp dessa i kategorier av förmåner som erbjuds till medarbetare. Dessa förmåner fungerar som en utgångspunkt för budskapet av arbetsgivarvarumärket som ska kommuniceras till målgruppen. Målet med värderbjudandet till medarbetare är att attrahera framtida medarbetare som har de kompetenser som företaget efterfrågar. Attraktion är högst individuellt och kan enbart nås när det kommunicerade budskapet överensstämmer med de attribut som målgruppen värdesätter. För att kommunicera ett skräddarsytt budskap av sitt arbetsgivarvarumärke efterfrågar företagen kunskap om sin målgrupp.

Den här studien baseras på ett uppdrag från Lantmännen med målet att identifiera faktorer som avgör vad som gör en framtida arbetsgivare attraktiv enligt studenter vid Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet (SLU). Fallföretaget är en stor aktör med breda affärsområden inom lantbruksnäringen och är i kontinuerligt behov av kompetenta medarbetare. Lantmännen lantbruk efterfrågar kunskap om de attribut som lantbruksstudenter värdesätter för att på långsikt bli en attraktiv arbetsgivare hos målgruppen. För att förstå helheten av att attrahera medarbetare, utreds även hur företaget engagerar sig i aktiviteter som påverkar arbetsgivarvarumärket. För att förstå värdeerbjudandet som erbjuds anställda undersöks teorier inom arbetsgivarvarumärke och organisationskultur. Dessa teorier utgör en teoretisk ram för empiriska studier av ett fallföretag. För att samla in data och besvara syftet användes olika metodologiska tillvägagångssätt; fokusgrupper med studenter, en utvärdering av enkät efter fokusgrupperna och intervjuer med anställda på Lantmännen.

Resultatet av den empiriska undersökningen pekar på nyckelfaktorer som avgör arbetsgivarattraktivitet. Dessa faktorer är: utvecklingsmöjligheter, utmanande arbetsuppgifter och att ha en stöttande chef som bidrar med kontinuerlig feedback. Det är uppenbart att fallföretaget investerar i sitt arbetsgivarvarumärke och engagerar sig i fler aktiviteter så om: lunchföreläsningar, bjuda in studenter till arbetsplatsen, arbetsmarknadsmässor, mentorprogram, traineeprogram och sommarpraktik. Organisationskulturen på fallföretaget är baserad på existerande värderingar inom företaget vilket användes i skapandet av arbetsgivarerbjudandet. Förmånerna av en anställning på fallföretaget överensstämmer till viss del med de attribut som studenterna efterfrågar. Resultatet av uppsatsen kan vara användbart i skapandet av ett skräddarsytt budskap av arbetsgivarvarumärke för ett företag som strävar efter att attrahera lantbruksstudenter.

Abbreviations and choices of terms

CVP – Customer value proposition
EVP – Employee value proposition
HR – Human resources
HRM – Human resource management
SLU – Swedish university of agricultural sciences

In the thesis, the use of terms that can be seen as synonyms are used interchangeable to create a flow in the language. These terms are following:

Corporations – firms – business - company
Customers – consumers
Employees – workers – applicants – personnel
People – individuals
Work - job

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **IX**

LIST OF TABLES ..... **IX**

1 INTRODUCTION **1**

1.1 PROBLEM BACKGROUND 2
1.2 PROBLEM 4
1.3 AIM 6
1.4 DELIMITATIONS 6
1.5 OUTLINE 7

2 METHOD **9**

2.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN 9
2.1.1 Case study *10*
2.1.2 Literature review, theoretical framework and breakdown structure *11*
2.2 COLLECTION OF DATA 12
2.2.1 Focus groups *13*
2.2.2 Environment and material *15*
2.2.3 Conducting semi-structured interviews *15*
2.3 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS 17
2.3.1 Analytical strategy *17*
2.3.2 Analyzing the interviews *18*
2.3.3 Ethical considerations *18*

3 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES **19**

3.1 A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW 19
3.2 CORE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING 19
3.2.1 The definition of employer branding *21*
3.2.2 The use and objectives of employer branding *21*
3.2.3 Communicating the employer brand *23*
3.3 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE 24
3.4 EVP – EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION 25
3.4.1 Employer attractiveness *27*
3.5 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK 29

4 THE EMPIRICAL STUDY **30**

4.1 PREFERENCES OF A FUTURE EMPLOYER 30
4.1.1 Employer branding activities - personal network and a day at the office *31*
4.1.2 Affiliation and culture - shared values *31*
4.1.3 Career - to be appreciated *32*
4.1.4 Work content - to make a difference and to get a foothold *33*
4.1.5 Organizationaul culture - openness *35*
4.2 CASE COMPANY INTRODUCTION 36
4.3 RECRUITMENT NEEDS – FUTURE EMPLOYEES 37
4.4 EMPLOYER BRANDING ACTIVITIES 37
4.5 THE EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION OF LANTMÄNNEN 38
4.5.1 The people and affiliation *39*
4.5.2 Organization and leadership *39*
4.5.3 Opportunities and learning and development *39*
4.5.4 Compensation, benefits and work *39*

5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION **41**

5.1 EMPLOYER BRANDING ACTIVITIES 41
5.2 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE 42
5.3 THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION 43
5.3.1 Affiliation *44*
5.3.2 Work content *45*

5.3.3 Career *45*
5.3.4 Benefits *46*
5.3.5 Pay *46*
5.4 EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS 47
6 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH 49
BIBLIOGRAPHY 52
Literature and publications *52*
Internet *54*
APPENDIX 1 - DISCUSSION THEMES FOCUS GROUP 56
APPENDIX 2 – VISUALIZATION OF VALUED ATTRIBUTES 57
APPENDIX 3 – SURVEY 58
APPENDIX 4 – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 59
APPENDIX 5 - LITTERATURE REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH 60

List of figures

Figure 1. Theoretical breakdown structure 12
Figure 2. The alignment of the different brands 20
Figure 3. The relationship between internal, employer and corporate branding 22
Figure 4. The inter-relationship of employee value proposition 25
Figure 5. The five elements of the employee value proposition model 26
Figure 6. The different concepts of employer branding 28
Figure 7. The results of the survey of valued organizational attributes 30
Figure 8. The result of the survey within the theme affiliation 32
Figure 9. The result of the survey within the theme career 33
Figure 10. The result of the survey within the theme payment 33
Figure 11. The result of the survey within the theme work content 34
Figure 12. The result of the survey within the theme benefits 35
Figure 13. The business structure of Lantmännen 36
Figure 14. Adapted employee value proposition 44
Figure 15. Adapted conceptual framework of employer branding 47
Figure 16. Attributes valued by agricultural students that determines employer attractiveness 50

List of tables

Table 1. Specific search words and number of hits in each database 11
Table 2. The constellation of focus groups 16
Table 3. The interview process 17
Table 4. Summary of theories and concepts 19

1 Introduction

Brands can be considered as one of the most valuable assets of a firm and a useful tool to face the rapidly changing business environment. Since the digital revolution consumers have gained increased buying power, provided with a variety of goods and services that are easy to compare along with transparent information (Brodie *et al.*, 1997). Ever since these new conditions entered the market, competition among firms has evolved and stresses organizations to satisfy the customer needs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Customers are becoming more selective in the same pace the competition among firms increase (Keller, 1993). Marketers strive to build a strong and favorable brand to attract customers and to distinguish from competitors. Corporations put great financial resources into developing attractive brands while too often forgetting the changing demands in customers' needs, resulting in an economic waste and a loss of customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

The changes in the consumer market are similar to those in the labor market, between applicants and employers. The research stream of relationship marketing and resource-based theory, valuing people as a competitive advantage of the firm has given a shift in the branding concept (Eiriz & Wilson, 2006). Branding was originally used to differentiate products but has during recent years been applied to differentiate people and firms (Keller, 1993). Branding principles applied on human resource management coined the term "*employer branding"* as a strategy to manage perceptions of stakeholders regarding a particular firm (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). With the employer brand firms communicate an image of the firm as a desirable place to work. Corporations are expected to gain knowledge about the behavior and need of the target group to be able to create a strong brand that attracts them (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Hence, firms struggle to find the right message to communicate, due to lack of information about the true values of the company and insufficient knowledge about the target audience (Parment & Dyhre, 2009).

In today´s era of a boundary less and rapidly changing business environment, corporations face the challenge to meet the increasing demand for workforce (Chhabra & Sharma, 2011). The success of firms depends upon the competence of its employees to meet these challenges. The corporate challenge lies in the attraction of skilled workforce which is scarce in today´s competitive business environment. It has been projected by the Swedish Employment Service that during 2013 the total demand on workforce reached its highest level in Sweden since 2001 with 4.1 millions people (Swedish employment service & Statistics Sweden, 2014). The increasing demand on workforce stress corporations to develop adequate plans to attract competent employees. Rucci *et al.* (1998, p 88) states that "*companies that see employees as their first customers, keep their external customers more satisfied*". It is accepted that investments in employees are transferred to the external stakeholders via the employees as the ambassadors of the organization.

Employees are the vigorous resources of the corporation, because the quality of their performance contribute to increasing the results of the organization (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). That is why corporations are concerned with finding the ideal employee. In order to secure the continuous need of employees, firms have to build a pool of potential applicants. University students are a preferred target group for hiring because of their updated knowledge but also the corporations' ability to shape the employee in the culture of the firm. Being present among university students can ensure the supply of competence for the organization.

1.1 Problem background

"The need to establish thought-through and effective employer branding strategies and practices that are consistent over time has never been stronger than in today's fickle labor market environment. As the world is undergoing a recession, this is a great opportunity to change and develop a sustainable employer brand that makes the organization attractive both now and in the future" – Parment & Dyhre (2009, p 7).

The labor market shares many characteristics with the consumer market. A company with a strong brand, satisfied customers and competitive advantage is possibly experienced as a good workplace (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). Without being an attractive employer, companies struggle to be competitive in the consumer market. A change in economic conditions is evident for many developed economies and has given rise to an increasingly competitive labor market, where the competition for skilled employees is strong (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Barrow & Mosley, 2011; Dyhre & Parment, 2013). The way of doing business in the 20th century has changed to a more complex, from industrial society to a knowledge society, where technological advancement has given a shift in work tasks (Muscalu & Stanit, 2012). In the developed world a larger extent of unskilled jobs are outdated and replaced by an expanded professional role which demands both technical knowledge and customer service. This shift means more jobs has become office jobs while production is moved abroad (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The corporations are under economical pressure and the employee's individual skills are in focus which raises the need for improved delegation. A complex business environment is intense and the room for supervision is limited stress emphasizing a greater need for trust in employees. Although, employees are getting less loyal to their employers due to more available job choices, reaching outside the country barriers (Dyhre & Parment, 2013).

In the past, workers moved to where the job were, but now, firms move to where the people are (Wilden *et al.*, 2010). The European Union regulations make it possible for people to move and reach more attractive employers to choose from. According to Parment and Dyhre (2009) the globalization stresses Swedish work force to move abroad. International corporations have explored recruitment in Sweden to be successful because of swedes English skills, being used to travelling and interacting with different cultures (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). The globalization raises the competition, hence, providing employees with more choices of possible employers all over the world. Although, on the other side, the globalization may benefit firms with a greater source of potential employees but to reach this advantage firms have to distinguish among its global competitors. The problem of decreasing labor resources affects the competition on the labor market. With decreasing human capital, corporations will struggle to achieve their financial goals. Regardless to industry, the need for qualified staff has increased during the last years (Lievens *et al.*, 2007). Increased value of immaterial resources is evident in all industries where the work assignment broadens and knowledge is a scarce factor. A greater need for knowledge means corporations need to be flexible and able to adapt to survive and be competitive in the globalized market. A globalized world with more opportunities and a fast pace of change puts pressure on the corporations to develop a strong and attractive brand.

Immaterial factors such as an organizations' values, culture and brands are the key to create competitiveness (Biswas & Suar, 2013). With the development of communication technologies the world is becoming more transparent. To be competitive corporations have to meet the demand of a number of interests; ethical, financial and ecological (Turban &

Greening, 1997). With more information available, individuals are expressed by more opportunities and information tools helping them to make decisions which stress the importance of a strong brand. More demands, transparency of information and tougher competition, the more important is the value of human resources within the organization (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). The increased value of human resources stresses corporations to become an employer of choice. People who are not satisfied with their working situation are likely to deliver less to the organization (Barney *et al.*, 2001). With the competition among employers, organizationns cannot afford non-effective employees. Like any marketing situation, understanding of the target group is the first step in effective communication and finding the right people for the organization. Fast communication and increased transparency means the balance of power is shifting from corporations to the workforce (www, The Economist, 2005).

A report from the Swedish employment service (2010) states that the Swedish labor market will experience a remarkable level of retirements between the years 2010-2015. Approximately 1.600 000 individuals will leave the labor market because of age until the year 2025 (Arbetsförmedlingen, p 6, 2010). This can be compared to the 1.350 000 age retirements that has occurred during the years 1995 and 2010 (*Ibid*., p 6). The agricultural sector is forecasted as the industry that will experience the greatest level of retirements, 46% of the 70 000 workers will leave the labor market within the years 2010-2015 (*Ibid*., p 9). A remarkable level of retirements might result in a knowledge gap, since the person retiring leave with experience and knowledge while educating and introducing a new employee is time consuming (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). It is important for companies to attract new competence into the organization to avoid this gap, although recruitment is a great challenge for companies today (Universum, 2014).

One of the greatest challenges for corporations is to find and retain employees (Universum, 2014). This has resulted in more companies trying to gain a strong employer brand. Dyhre and Parment (2013) stress the problem of finding new staff is an increasing problem due to big group of retirements, more discerning candidates and social media spreading information about companies. The cost for an organization to recruit a new employee is valued to a third of the annual cost of an employee, and for managers the cost raises up to one million SEK (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). This includes the cost of advertisement, time to choose a candidate, interviews and the time to introduce and learn the new employee. Hence, a mistake in recruitment can cost up to one million SEK in addition to the risk of getting a negative ambassador (Parment & Dyhre, 2009, p 47). During an economic downturn firms risk acting in the belief of being the strongest actor on a buyers' market and choose to invest money that would be put on the employer brand into other activities (Agrawal & Swaroop, 2011). When the economic cycle returns to the stronger, firms who have lost all contact with potential applicants are not seen as an attractive employer anymore and will fall behind. Continuous contact with the target group is therefore important to remain competitive on the labor market.

A new generation of employees create changes in the labor market which will increasingly function as a market (Whitney Gibson *et al.*, 2011). This workforce enters the job market with new demands compared to the earlier generation. Labelled as generation Y with beliefs of that work is more than job assignments, rather a part of self-fulfillment, they have planned their careers at an early age and are aware of what they want (Kunkle & Sorensen, 2008). Hence, the next generation Y is an ideal target for employer branding. In the new era of employment, functional benefits are getting less important while emotional experiences are of growing interest. Generation Y desires a work that creates a meaning and that leads to individual

development. As consumers, generation Y are used to having a variety of choices and constant change. Generation Y are willing to work hard but at flexible times and value their personal interest before money (Ng *et al.*, 2010). Understanding of this new workforce generation is crucial to create a successful employer brand. Hence, there are misperceptions between employers and applicants. Research shows employers tend to overestimate benefits such as salary and flexible working hours while applicants rather value work and life balance and relationships with colleagues (Christiaans, 2012). According to Parment and Dyhre (2009) this misperception might be a result of corporations prioritizing financial issues prior to invest in the employer brand and gain knowledge about the target audience.

Increased individualism is one of the new challenges facing the business environment with the new achievement oriented generation of workforce. Loyalty towards the employer is decreasing because of freedom of choice and individuals are willing to change jobs more often, hence, job applications are not a lifetime commitment anymore (Ng *et al.*, 2010). A great number of choices have created an era of less loyalty. Young people are less willing to work for the same organization for a longer period of time, unless they get to develop through different positions within the firm (Whitney Gibson *et al.*, 2011). Less loyalty means staff will leave the organization more often which needs to be filled by another applicant leaving their position, creating mobility in the labor market. Historically, changing jobs often were considered as something negative: today, leaving an organization at the right time implies a driven and career oriented applicant (Ng & Burke, 2006). This supports strong reasons for corporations to reconsider how the organization appeals to generation Y. A career is defined by who the employer is rather than what the work assignments are. During the last few years in the labor market, strong brands have been a competitive advantage (Aaker, 2009). Growing up in a brand competitive world has made generation Y well aware of judging a brand and made them sensitive to the brand message (Whitney Gibson *et al.*, 2011). The career awareness has made them used to evaluating a brand out of its benefits on the CV. More than ever this stresses the firms to develop a market image that appeals to the new generation.

1.2 Problem

In the slowdown of today´s economic environment companies are plagued with low financial results, for those firms to thrive they must attract the employees they need and become the employer of choice in the eyes of potential employees (Herman & Gioia, 2001). Beeing an attractive employer becomes increasingly important as companies realize how it can improve the business and save both time and money in recruitment (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). When a lack of competence is evident, the challenge of how to find and retain competent employees becomes a challenge. It is equally important for corporations to look for skilled employees as it is for the applicants to be attracted to those corporations (Chhabra & Sharma, 2011). Competent employees are essential to be a successful business (Barney *et al.*, 2001). To attract competence a corporation has to be the choice of future potential employees, employer branding is one such strategy.

The globalized labor market and remarkable levels of retirements results in a competitive labor market and stress corporations to differentiate. The success of the corporate image is the key to attract this competence and the ideal employee (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). Employer branding can only be successful when factors that influence what makes the employer attractive is integrated in the brand. Employer attractiveness is determined by the correlation of the attributes desired by the target group, and the benefits offered by the employer (Christiaans, 2012). Having knowledge about the level and attributes of employer

attractiveness may be a useful tool in the competition of competence. Attractiveness as an employer is achieved in areas where the agricultural students' value the attributes that are offered by Lantmännen and the benefits stated in their employee value proposition (EVP). The more attractiveness as an employer, the more likely are the candidates to apply for a job within the organization. Hence, employer attractiveness is a critical measurement to determine the ability to attract new employees and to ensure future recruitment needs. Understanding of the factors that contribute to employer attractiveness is crucial to successful employer branding strategies (Berthon *et al*., 2005; Dyhre & Parment, 2013). To identify the factors that determine attractiveness as an employer the five elements of employee value proposition; *affiliation, pay, benefits, career, work content* is used (Kunkle and Sorensen, 2009, p 16). These factors are later divided into smaller topics and served to describe the attributes valued by students and the correlation of the benefits stated in the EVP of Lantmännen.

Research by Trank *et al.* (2002) reveals that students' preferences about a future employer vary depending on educational program. Prior research reveals attributes valued by university students in different educational backgrounds but no research focused on only agricultural students can be found and is therefore chosen in this study (Christiaans, 2012). The reason to focus on agricultural students is also a request from the case company Lantmännen who has reports about employer attractiveness for students in other educational fields but request similar information about the agricultural students.

Several prior research states how a corporation can become an employer of choice and how to develop strategies useful for an employer brand (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Wilden *et al.*, 2010). Although, from a scientific point of view there is a gap in the research field of employer branding focused on the agricultural industry, which makes the agricultural industry a relevant topic for this study. Several reasons make the agricultural industry particularly interesting to study from an employer branding perspective. Firms within the Swedish agricultural industry may differ from other markets and be unique in the way the actors share the value for agriculture. Shared values may affect how corporations distinguish from other employers within the same industry, making it challenging for potential employees to distinguish employers from one another.

The annual report from the Swedish employment service (2014) indicates a rise in workforce during the coming year. On the other hand corporations experience recruitment problems (Universum, 2014). The availability on competent staff is a critical condition to the Swedish growth and the competition on workforce put pressure on corporations to differentiate themselves from others (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). A competitive labor market can problematize finding suitable human resources since there are fewer applicants and more competition per vacancy (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p 507). To ensure the human resources are adequate with doing business, firms need to develop a strategy. By becoming the employer of choice and increase the likeliness to apply for a job and number of applicants to each vacancy the firm can reach strategic advantages (Wilden *et al.*, 2010). As a consequence, firms invest in strategies to attract qualified employees (Berthon *et al.,* 2005). Employer branding is one such strategy that in the context of recruitment refers to functional, psychological and economic benefits that future employees associate with an employment at the particular firm (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). Although, one of the largest and most essential challenges for firms is to improve and raise the consciousness of the firm's image as an attractive employer and to distinguish by their brand (Universum, 2014). The employer needs to ensure current and future employees by communicating and deliver convincing reasons to why they are an attractive employer.

1.3 Aim

Awareness of employer branding is growing among managers in diverse industries. Companies acting in a changing society have realized that in order to be competitive on the labor market, they need to establish a strong employer brand to attract potential employees. Although, there is a need for firms to understand the target audience to be able to communicate a successful employer brand. The employer brand needs to be developed based on the core values of a firm in order to distinguish from competitors and to communicate what makes the firm a desirable work place. This problem is especially significant in the agricultural industry, due to a large group of close-by retirements and a young generation of potential employees with high demands on the employer. The situation is the frame to the subject of employer branding. *The aim of this study is to identify factors that determine the attractiveness of a company as a future employer in the eyes of students at the Swedish University of Agricultural Science, SLU.*

In studying employer branding, there are two major perspectives that are of interest, that of the future employee and that of representatives of the corporation. Therefore, one of the chosen research questions relates to the potential employee perspectives – and one question relate to the corporate perspective.

Research questions of particular interest are related:

- How is employer attractiveness determined in the eyes of agricultural university students?
- How does a company within the agricultural industry engage in employer branding activities?

The study is carried out as a commission case study on behalf of the agricultural company Lantmännen. Lantmännen is not the only corporation or organization with particular needs in their recruitment of new employees; the findings of this thesis might be useful for other organizations to evaluate and adjust job offers according to the preferences and expectations of the target group which might be helpful to increase employer attractiveness. The insights provided from this study may result in strategies that can save both time and money. With the knowledge provided, organizations will be able to improve their recruitment marketing in a way that will lead to a reduced need for adverts and more adequate job applications.

1.4 Delimitations

Delimitations are made in three dimensions related to method, empirical focus and theoretical perspective. Firstly, the choice of focus groups and structured interviews as a method may affect the result of study. Prior research mainly consist of quantitative character however this study is a qualitative study. The arguments for seeking a qualitative approach are to provide deeper understanding of the students' objectives of a future employer and provide a nuanced picture. Employees participating in the semi-structured interviews were chosen in collaboration with Lantmännen from the perspective of their position and skills and reasonability to the purpose of the study.

The delimitations in the empirical study focus on Swedish agricultural student in their later years of their university program and may therefore give another result than the same study with students of another academic field, earlier in the program or within another country.

Prior research provides numerous studies concerning students of other educational backgrounds but none with the focus on agricultural students. The agricultural industry is a unique market and as firms shares many characteristics this may be the same for the students. As agriculture is related to personal values the choice of education may affect attributes valued in a future employer. Therefore the choice of the target population is based on the gap in research and on the commission with Lantmännen. The same study could be successful within another company within the agricultural sector. The choice of the empirical target Lantmännen is based on it being one of the largest employers within agriculture, thus, suitable when studying agricultural students (www, Lantmännen, 2014). Lantmännen provides a wide range of work within the agricultural industry, therefore all fields of agricultural studies are suitable for the company.

Delimitations in the theoretical and literature chapter concerns language barriers, limitations to Swedish and English literature, and the choice of literature reviewed. Employer branding is a wide concept which can be studied in several field of research. Within the research stream this study concentrates on understanding the students' perceptions of a future employer and theories chosen to support and analyze the empirical findings. The perception of the particular employer brand of Lantmännen is not investigated, rather the general perception of what students' prefer in a future employer, applied on the employer brand of Lantmännen.

There are other delimitations regarding the focus of the study. According to the literature, employer branding can be used to attract potential employees but also to keep existing employees. This thesis focuses on employer branding from the perspective of attracting potential employees but ignores the focus of keeping existing employees. The valued attributes of a future employer may differ between potential emloyees and existing employees. The aim with employer branding is to attract employees, compiling literature of the topic one will explore the term "talent" in close relation to employees. This study focus on how to attract employees with no value put into the type of employee. The report ignores the term "talent" because the concept differs in meaning and definition, rather using the term "ideal" employee.

1.5 Outline

The outline of this paper consists of the *first chapter* presenting the introduction, problem, purpose and research questions followed by the main six chapters. The following chapters are all a part of answering the aim of the study.

The method chapter (2) provides an understanding of the underlying methodology for this paper and a clarification of the approach made during the collection of the empirical data. Presenting qualitative method with the focus on focus groups and semi-structured interviews. With an empirical study, the method is followed up by a theoretical perspective. The theories of relevance to fulfil the purpose of the study are presented in *chapter three*.

The fourth chapter complies the empirical information relevant for the purpose of the study. This chapter introduces the empirical background and a presentation of the Lantmännen group, followed by the outcome of the collected data of the case study.

Chapter five ties together chapter three and four with the results of the empirical study discussed and analyzed in relation to the literature and aims at answer the research questions.

The last chapter (6) presents the results of the study and provides answers to the given purpose with suggestions on topics for future research.

2 Method

This chapter presents the choice of methods used for the collection and analyze of data needed to draw conclusions and to fulfil the purpose of this study. Apart from explaining the selection of chosen theories this chapter also explains the research process and the procedure of gathering and analyzing the empirical data.

2.1 Qualitative research design

Several approaches can be used to carry out a research with the restriction of being classified as scientific. What is considered science can be discussed out of different viewpoints but often pins down in how the research is carried out, hence, the chosen method for the collection of data. Robson (2011, p 18) describes a scientific attitude as a research carried out *systematically, skeptically and ethically* with the aim to find the "truth". This attitude includes the author to think about her role, what, why and how the research is done allowing for subjective ideas and considering alternatives while following a code of conduct considering the participants in the study.

Maxwell and Knox (2009) emphasize that different methods are needed to study employer brand attractiveness from the perspective of potential employees. Methods used to study these perspectives must be sensitive to the unique aspects of each organization and to the manner in which applicants evaluate the employer brand. The authors stress that qualitative methods are likely to play a continuing growing role in future research. However there are several important questions likely to require a more quantitative approach (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). Due to its wide stream of applied research and the several measurements used to study perceptions of applicants, makes employer branding a complex topic and highlights the value of a more qualitative than quantitative research approach. Though, complexity may be seen as difficult for some, the qualitative researcher attempts not to communicate the reality in a simplistic form but to uncover patterns and meanings, turning chaos into knowledge (Gummesson, 2006). When handling complexity, an inductive approach of qualitative research emphasize context and to provide a holistic view of reality. Therefore a qualitative approach, which provides meanings, values and depth with potential for new perspectives, was selected to address the exploratory nature of this study (Robson, 2002).

Research is often divided into two broad categories such as quantitative and qualitative research, whereas one relies on the collection of data in numerical form and the other typically rely on wording and non-numerical data. Robson (2011) divides these categories into two main types of research with the distinction of how they are planned. A fixed design refers to a research process that includes a data collection of experiment or survey which requires planning at an early stage of the process according to clear rules. This can be compared to a more flexible type of research where the design leaves the planning details to a later stage depending on what is found in the early stage. The flexible design is appropriate for a study where the questions in the empirical data collection are dependent on the literature (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The two categories and the two types can be aligned by; the quantitative method and its numerical data described as a fixed design, while the qualitative method is more flexible using more than one methods for the collection of data (Robson, 2002). Although these two choices of methods are not essentially separated from each other, they rather entail a small

part of the data from one of the other. Using a multi strategy design entails the researcher to use the elements of both qualitative and quantitative method. Though the two methods may by some be seen as opponents, a more fair view is to regard both of them as equally scientific as long as the scientific attitude is considered (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The multi strategy design is used in this paper to provide an in-depth knowledge of the respondents' answers but also to give a more detailed view easier to measure by the questionnaire.

2.1.1 Case study

Case study is one of several approaches to qualitative research design and concerned with the complexity and nature of the particular case as a social phenomenon (Robson, 2002; Gummesson, 2006; Yin, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Referred to as an established research strategy with the focus on a case, such as an individual, group or an organization (Robson, 2002). A case study research design distinguish by its focus on a restricted situation where the aim of the researcher is to provide in-depth clarification (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A case study often includes multiple methods of both qualitative and quantitative data collection (Robson, 2002). The qualitative or quantitative evidence can be provided by either reports, observations, interviews or a merge of all of them (Yin, 2009). Case studies with the main research being qualitative, such as the study in this paper, tend to take on an inductive approach.

This study investigates agricultural university students' perceptions of a future employer and is thus a fit of the case study approach. The aim of this paper is to provide the reader with in-depth knowledge of what university students prefer in a future employer, given by the discussion in the focus groups. In accordance with Robson (2002) the methods used in this paper is of multiple characteristics, though focusing on a qualitative collection of data. The evidence in this paper is provided by qualitative method of focus groups and interviews while the questionnaire used after the focus group discussions provide more quantitative evidence.

When considering the choice of research approach it is first important to consider the type of research question and the unit of analysis in the study (Robson, 2002). A case study is a preferable approach to answer research questions of "how" and "when" about a current phenomenon that the researcher has little or no control of (Yin, 2009). Due to the matching of these conditions, the research questions of this paper are preferable for a case study approach. A case study may include either single or multiple cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). This paper focus on the single-case of the focus group of agricultural university students and the employer brand of the company Lantmännen.

A case study approach allows the researcher to stay holistic and provide important characteristics of real-life situations (Yin, 2009). The strengths of a case study consist of its variety of evidence, dealing with questionnaires, interviews and observation that is not to be found in history (Eisenhardt, 1989). With a case study approach presumed links in real-life events can be explained, that may be too complex to grasp in a survey (Yin, 2009). As a research approach, case study keeps the researcher less distant to the object of study and provides details that are important to develop a nuanced view of the real-life situation (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The case company Lantmännen was chosen because of personal interests of getting to know more about the company and how it markets itself in front of students. Lantmännen was also chosen because it is a large employer within the agricultural industry. Furthermore, the case company has been successful with its employer branding work and attracting students. Not

said they were satisfied rather have high ambitions to broaden their attraction to reach other student groups. With four main business divisions Lantmännen is a diversified company when it comes to competence and therefore a general employee value proposition attractive to all types of educational background might be needed to be customized to the different target groups.

2.1.2 Literature review, theoretical framework and breakdown structure

An early step in the research process involves finding relevant information for the project, looking at what is already written in a systematic way. *Relevance* rather than comprehensiveness is an important aspect when conducting the literature review, especially with a complex concept broadly used in several research fields such as employer branding. Therefore, reviewing literature dealing with the topic would have been a simple task though not given important implications for the design of the study. Relevant literature was chosen starting broad with employer branding then narrow the search down to university students and employer brand attractiveness. In this study relevant documents mainly consist of articles, books and some electronic sources found at the SLU and Uppsala university library and electronic databases such as Google, Google scholar and Primo. The search for literature has been carried out during the time period of February to April. A summary of prior research can be found in appendix 5. Literature of employer branding is growing and and updated search may give another result than shown in the table below. The specific search words and number of hits in each database is shown in figure 1 below. This material has been helpful to design the study and form the research questions.

Table 1. Specific search words and number of hits in each database

	NUMBER OF HITS	NUMBER OF HITS	NUMBER OF HITS
	Google Scholar	**Primo**	**Uppsala University library´s database**
SEARCH WORDS			
”employer brand+employer branding”	38 200	2037	2 815
”employer attractiveness+university students”	34 800	9682	11492
”employee value proposition”	269 000	1282	16094
”employer brand+organization+ culture”	23 500	3373	6553
”students perceptions+future employer”	139 000	9727	21357

During the process of compiling literature for this study, it has come clear that the different concepts of employer branding are difficult to encapsulate without interfering of one of the other. The purpose of this study was broken down into manageable constituents to create a comprehensive picture in order to answer the purpose. Figure 1 below illustrates the theoretical breakdown structure.

Figure 1. Theoretical breakdown structure (Own processing).

Employer branding serves as the first branch of research, followed by organizational culture, employee value proposition and employer attractiveness. In the same order the subchapters are found in chapter 3. Compiling literature has been useful for the creation of the interview questions for focus groups and in-depth interviews, found in appendix 1 and 4. The interview questions are based on the literature and created to answer the purpose of the studied phenomenon.

2.2 Collection of data

Focus group is a well-used method but not desirable for all purposes. An interview can be advantageous when there is a certain topic that interests the researcher more than another (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Choosing interviews as a method the researcher need to address whether individual interviews or group interviews act to fulfill the purpose of the study, which is a question of depth or a more wide perspective. Discussing a topic in a group provide group dynamic aspects as well as a broad scale of ideas compared to individual interviews where individual detail are important (Robson, 2002).

Focus groups can be used in an anthropological meaning where the shared understanding of culture is studied but rather not in research striving for detailed knowledge of how the individuals differ from each other, which is more appropriate for individual interviews. Data from individual interviews can be easier to transcribe and analyze than with focus groups and also easier to arrange in question of time and place. Focus groups is a preferred method when the interest lays in how the participants in a certain group together think about a phenomena rather than what individuals belief (Wibeck, 2000). The results from the focus group is not statistical generalizable for a larger part of a population but creates an understanding of how agricultural students chose their future employer. Further focus groups should be used for

collecting data for research where discussion is possible and where the topic is suitable for all participants.

The collection of data in this study consists of two types of interviews; focus groups with university students and semi structured interviews with employees at Lantmännen. The purpose of the focus groups is to provide a wide picture and share understanding of what the students prefer in a future employer. While the interviews at Lantmännen strive to provide information of the corporate culture where the individual details such as the role of the respondent becomes important.

2.2.1 Focus groups

The use of focus groups is a long established method which was primarily used in market research to test products and advertisement. The growing interest of the use of focus groups has recently developed the use of the method more widely, in academia and for example in politics to shape the image of a political party (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A focus group can be explained by a type of a group interview with several participant, and a moderator who leads the discussion, on a defined topic with the focus on the interaction within the group on a shared construct of meaning (Robson, 2002). The focus group can be divided into two elements 1) *the group interview where a group of people discuss a topic and* 2) *participants in the group are selected due to there involvement with the discussed topic* (Wibeck, 2000). Unlike individual interviews, focusing on an interviewer and an interviewee, focus groups is a method that involves more than one interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Although discussed in close relationship with group interviews, focus groups distinct by focusing on a specific theme explored in depth and the interest in how individuals as a group discuss a topic (Robson, 2002). Focus groups are often used within qualitative research with the aim to reveal how the participant in the group views the issue. The group is led by a moderator who steers the discussion. The discussion is documented by video, recording, documentation and sometimes observations. The strengths of using focus groups are its providing of broad and depth knowledge about a topic that includes associations and thoughts and new influences. Focus groups can also be an easy and fast way of collecting data (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

During the focus group session the moderator use an interview guide which is formed in a structured or unstructured way. The questions discussed in the focus groups of this report can be found in appendix 1 – Discussion themes focus group. A number of specific questions is used when the moderator wish to steer the interview. According to Kreuger (1998) there are five type of questions to include in a structured interview guide regarding; opening, introduction, transition, key questions and closure. Together they fill the purpose of group dynamics, individual reflection and provide a greater perspective.

The number of groups needed for the interviews depends on the complexity of the studied phenomena and the time and resource access (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The number of groups can include groups until the theoretical saturation is reached and less new information is revealed (Wibeck, 2000). Every focus group discussion were summarized and included pages of transcribing, though a large number of groups can result in an unmanageable amount of material. On the other side, few groups with small amount of material can be hard to discover patterns and tendencies. Although, three focus groups is considered as a minimum. In this report five focus groups contributed to the result of the empirical data.

Several theories discuss the desired number of participants in a focus group (Morgan, 2004; Verner & Gilbert, 2006). A group with a smaller number of participants increases the involvement and belongingness while it is easier being anonymous in a large group which can lead to lack of commitment. The physical distant in a large group can result in an unpersonal communication and the moderator is responsible for the structure in the group. According to Wibeck (2000) a focus group should not be fewer than four and not more than six participants. This is supported by the theory that with three people, one can stay out of the conversation and a group with more than six people risk the cohesion of subgroups and that withdrawn characteristics never get to express themselves. Whereas Morgan (1998) suggest six to ten people as a desired number of members in a focus group.

The outcome of the data collected in the focus group depends on the participants feeling of sharing thoughts, several factors can affect these feelings (Wibeck, 2000). To achieve a well-functioning focus group a suitable mix of participants is required (Krueger, 1998). Different factors can affect this mix, such as demographic variables (age, gender, education). Although, the interaction within the group is enhanced somewhat by similar educational background. The moderator needs to be aware of personal characteristics and ensure the whole group can express their thoughts even if there is a dominant person in the group.

When considering focus groups one needs to look at the possibility to recruit desired participants and if the research problem is suitable for the method (Morgan, 2004). The recruitment of participants can be a problem when using focus groups which was an experienced problem in this report. Approximatley 600 emails resulting in 25 participants can be considered as a low number. Video conference or phone interviews are alternatives that can solve the problem of not being able to meet physically, although it may affect the quality negative. Phone interviews has been used in this report to solve long distance hinders. When recruiting participants for the focus group the researcher should avoid randomized selection, rather choosing a small and broad target group by an active choice (Robson, 2002). There are different strategies for recruiting participants to a focus group, such as existing lists, random sampling, referrals, intercepts or open solicitation. Existing lists are preferable when the researcher are aware of what kind of group is suitable for the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Such a list can be a class list or a list of members in an organization. Groups where the participants never have met before risk that withdrawn people get even more withdrawn. Groups that are familiar with each other are positive for sharing thoughts in the discussion and is easier to recruit (Verner & Gilbert, 2006).

When conducting a thesis the researcher is put up to selections regarding both method and the use of theories. The chapter above explains the choice of the qualitative choice of focus groups. Although, there are other methods that could have been used within the qualitative approach such as Delphi groups. A group of experts on the subject could have been found within the field of employer branding managers. How the Delphi group would have contributed to reach the aim of this thesis is unsure. The Delphi group could have contributed with input on how companies within the agricultural sector engage in employer branding activities. Two possible problems may have occurred with the Delphi group. Firstly, collection of the participants may have been hindered by the sharing of confidential information of their employer branding strategy. Secondly, agriculture is a small industry in Sweden and still only a few of the largest actors engage in employer branding today.

2.2.2 Environment and material

It is important for the researcher to pay attention to the choice of environment where the focus group takes place, since the physical surrounding is important for the development of the group discussion (Wibeck, 2000). The group interaction can be advanced in a small room. The researcher should be flexible when choosing the environment, considering a place where the participants feel comfortable, since, a strange environment where participants feel uncomfortable can inhibit the discussion. Choosing an environment which is comfortable for the moderator but not for the participants can result in a discussion depend on the moderator. Rather desirable for the researcher to let the participants choose an environment and to meet the group in a place where the feel comfortable (Robson, 2002). When the environment is chosen the researcher should make the room available for discussion and avoid conflicts (Krueger, 1998). This can be done by arranging chairs in a circle with a desired distant from each other, where no seating has more power of status and where all participants can see each other. Video recording the focus group can be advantageous to catch nonverbal communication such as eye contact and body language. There are different technical equipment to be used for documentation of a semi-structured or focus group interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A recorder is advantageous due to its anonymity, though, the researcher may struggle with separating the different voices. Taking notes of who is speaking can avoid this problem.

2.2.3 Conducting semi-structured interviews

The first step in the process of collecting data was to invite students to participate in the focus groups. An email was sent to all students in the later year of their agronomy program at the University of Agricultural Sciences. Out of approximately 600 email invitations 25 students subscribed to participate in the focus groups. The 25 participants were to choose a date and time that was suitable for them and were then divided into five groups of 2-6 members per group and two telephone interviews. The group with only two students was due to rebooking of other participants. Two members in a focus group is not a desired number and may have given a different discussion than in the larger groups. It is easier for the two members to agree with eachother and less influences in the discussion. The total number of participants were 8 men and 15 women with the majority of the students within agricultural business but animal science and food science were also represented. All the groups except one were evenly mixed by gender. This could be due to the majority of female students at SLU. Each focus group took around one hour to conduct. As a part of the validity process, all the discussions were recorded and transcribed followed by a summary that was sent to the participants giving them the opportunity to comment on what was said during the focus group. Out of the 23 participants one responded with comments. Due to the participants anonymities the transcriptions are not attached. The reason for guaranteeing the participants anonymity was to extract more exact information (Lekvall & Wahlbin, 2011). According to Pratt (2009), to increase validity general information of the participants and the formation of the five focus groups are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2. The constellation of focus groups

Focus groups	Group 1 **2014-05-19** **10-11.30 am**	Group 2 **2014-05-19** **13-14.30 pm**	Group 3 **2014-05-19** **15-16.30 pm**	Group 4 **2014-05-21** **10-11.30 am**	Group 5 **2014-05-21** **13-14.30 pm**
	Students	Students	Students	Students	Students
Women	3	1	3	5	4
Men	2	1	4	0	1
	Programme				
Business year 4	2	1	4	0	1
Business year 5	3	1	2	4	2
Animal science	0	0	0	1	1
Food science	0	0	0	0	1
Totalt	5	2	6	5	5
Totalt	**5**	**2**	**6**	**5**	**5**

Table 2 illustrates the constellation of the five focus groups with the number of participants, gender, date and educational program. SLU is divided into many campuses which of two participated in the study, Ultuna and Alnarp. The two campuses were chosen due to the relevance of the educational program matching the target group of the case company. Two students from the campus Alnarp were interviewed by phone and their answers are conducted together with the other students.

Interviewing as a research method is widely used in a qualitative approach and can be divided into several types (Robson, 2002). Distinguished by the two main type's structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews depending on the depth in the sought response. With semi-structured interviews the interviewer rely on a guide and order of topics to be covered. Hence, the interviewer is free to modify both the wording and the order of the questions with the ability to follow up on the respondents' answers. In this paper semi-structured interviews has been conducted with two of the employees at Lantmännen. Open-ended questions has been used to provide depth and flexibility. The two interviews with the two students at campus Alnarp and the two interviews with Lantmännen occurred after the focus groups and the validations process can be found in table 3 below. The interview with Carin Ritter, HR-consultant, took place at the office in Malmö and the interview with Daniel Aglöv was conducted by phone. Both interviews lasted for about 40 minutes and the questions can be found in appendix 4 – Interview questions.

Table 3. The interview process

Interviewee	Position	City	Interview date	Validation type	Validation date
Daniel Aglöv	Employer branding manager	Stockholm	2014-05-28	Transcript	2014-07-29
Carin Ritter	HR-consultant	Malmö	2014-05-27	Transcript	2014-07-29
Student A		Alnarp	2014-06-01	Transcript	2014-06-01
Student B		Alnarp	2014- 06-01	Transcript	2014-06-01

There is a distinction between structured and unstructured focus group interviews. The more control the moderator has, the more structured is the interview (Robson, 2002). An unstructured interview allows the participants to openly discuss a topic without structured questions and where the moderator has minor participation. The goal of an unstructured interview is to capture interaction and argumentation within the group. The discussion within an unstructured focus group can be unorganized and hard to analyze and some topics may never be discussed due to lack of interest by the group. Structured focus groups, which was chosen for this report, can be defined by two grounds; strong control of the moderator steering the questions and steering the group dynamic ensuring every participants gets to speak (Wibeck, 2000). During a structured focus group the moderator is allowed to direct the discussion to stay with the topic. Although, too much control of the moderator can steer the group and risk that the moderators' personal assumptions can be reproduced in the group. The structured focus group interview allows the moderator to steer the discussion depending on how homogenous the group is, making different participants feel comfortable and encourage a discussion in a group where the majority is already sharing the same perspective (Verner & Gilbert, 2006). The role of the moderator differs depending on the type of focus group. The moderators' role in an unstructured focus group is to introduce the topic and then only intervene when the discussion is taken out of its topic. In a structured focus group the role of the moderator is more likely a traditional interviewer, keeping with prepared questions. There is a balance of encouraging the group to conversation while avoid a high level of agreeability (Morgan, 2004).

2.3 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data collected by interviews typically consist of a large amount of unstructured text material and therefore not always clear to analyze (Robson, 2002). One of the most common ways to analyze qualitative data is by conducting thematic analysis. Coding is the starting point in many forms of qualitative data analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2000). By sorting the answers from the interviews into categories of what the data represent the researcher facilitates the analysis of the material.

2.3.1 Analytical strategy

The need for analyze depends on the aim with the focus groups, either analyzing *how* the participants discuss a topic or *what* they are saying about the topic (Wibeck, 2000). To fully open up for discussion the researcher does not have to specifically explain the aim of the study and have broad and open questions to avoid missing out on aspect by steering the discussion too much. The most time consuming but also the greatest base for the analysis is to transcribe the discussions, yet a principle for academic research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Transcription can be done in different levels, from documenting every single word to translate

the discussion into written language. The transcription method used in this research is based on the tape recording and written notes, which is preferable for structured interviews.

The analysis is dependent on coding and themes in the material to be able to detect trends and patterns (Yin, 2009). The analysis is a disciplined process that assumes a systematic approach, defined protocol and verifiable results. There are several computer based programs to facilitate the researcher with sorting and categorizing the transcription. The analysis provides an overview over the material while discovering patterns and recurrent themes and with structured interviews the researcher gets the answers on her questions. The task of the researcher is to find patterns, contrasts and draw a conclusion of what is found in the material (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

2.3.2 Analyzing the interviews

Hycner (1985) proposes a few simple steps that can structure and ease the process of compiling and reviewing several qualitative interviews. These steps were customized and a compressed version was used. Summarized, the steps that were followed:

1. Transcribe each interview.
2. Bracket, which means to only keep the parts that provide meaning.
3. Delete the parts without meaning and relevance for the purpose.
4. Cluster the units of applicable meaning.
5. Determine themes for the clusters.
6. Verify the information with external contributors.

Further, Hycner (1985) suggest to delete redundancies, this step was neglected because the number of time of each statement was interesting for the creation of a customized employee value proposition (EVP) and to analyze the most important attributes of an employer. A visualization of the most attracting attributes can be found in Appendix 2 – Visualization of the focus group interviews. After the focus group the participants were asked to rank the attributes of a future employer by filling in a survey. The survey is found in appendix 3 – Survey. The answers of the survey were compared to the visualization of the dicussions in the focus groups to see if there were differences in what was actually discussed freely and what was answered in a closed questionnaire. The survey was calculated by the following strategy. There were five different options in the survey on a scale from 1-5. The total points for each attribute is calculated by the number of votes times the number in the scale. For example organizational values is calculated by 5 votes in scale 2 (5x2=10), 3 votes in scale 3 (3x3=9), 10 votes in scale 4 (10x4=40) and 5 votes in scale 5 (5x5=25) which all adds up to 88.

2.3.3 Ethical considerations

The basis for ethical principles the researcher needs to be aware of is whether the participants can be harmed and whether or not dishonesty is involved (Bryman & Bell, 2011). An ethical question with focus groups is how the participants will be rewarded (Wibeck, 2000). Some may need to take time of their work or offered a reward. Suggested reward is money, movie tickets, donation or simply nothing at all. Although, the quality of the research is questioned if the individuals participates only due to economic reward (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To avoid this, the researcher can choose to not mention the reward until the person has confirmed their participation. Full anonymity is hard to promise but confidentially can still be reached by protecting the data and changing the names of the participants in the transcription (Robson, 2002). In this thesis the participants in the focus groups were rewarded with fika during the discussions. Anonymity was promised and no names are mentioned in the thesis.

3 Literature review and theoretical perspectives

This chapter is structured by the introduction of a theoretical overview where the chosen theories are summarized, followed by an explanation of the concept of employer branding which functions as a theoretical umbrella. The chapter is further structured in order of how the theories were broken down during the process. When studying employer branding the first step is to analyze the organizational culture and values, which leads to the creation of an employee value proposition, *EVP*. Through communication of the EVP prospective form an image of the organization as an employer which determines employer attractiveness.

3.1 A theoretical overview

To create a more comprehensive picture of how the different theories benefit the study, a set of theories that are relevant to conclude the purpose of this study is presented. In table 4 below, theories, key concepts, descriptions and references are summarized to provide an overview of how chapter 3 is organized.

Table 4. Summary of theories and concepts

THEORY	CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION	KEY REFERENCES
Employer branding	- Brand alignment - Communication - Definition	Promotion of what makes a firm desirable & distinctive as an employer.	Ambler & Barrow (1996) Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) Barrow & Mosley (2006) Parment & Dyhre (2013)
Organizational culture	- Meaning and symbols - Values	Refers to what is central and distinctive about an organization. Assumptions, values and policies that form behavior of members in the organization.	Alvesson (2002) Mosley (2007) Schein (1990)
Employee value proposition (EVP)	- The five elements - Employer attractiveness	Based on organizational values and attributes. Form applicants' employer brand image through different communication channels.	Botha (2011) Kunkle & Sorensen (2007) Moroko & Uncles (2008) Sochart (2009)

The employer branding theories serves a theoretical umbrella with the concepts of employer brand, brand portfolio alignment, definition and communication of employer brand. The theory of organizational culture and the corporate values is the basis to create a true and convincing employer brand. To connect the valued attributes by the student to a corporate perspective the theory of EVP provides information. The five elements of of EVP provide structure on how to connect the target group to the employer brand. Employer attractiveness is the corporate aim and desired benefits of having an attractive EVP.

3.2 Core concept of employer branding

Branding has a traditional role of differentiation, applied to differentiate firms, people and places (Peters, 1999). Kotler (1997, p 443) defines a brand as "*a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors*". Hence, the definition stresses the various uses of a brand and its key aspect to be used as a distinction between competitors. The most common brand activity may relate to the firms products but

can in the same way be used in human resource management. Branding principles applied on human resource management is termed "employer branding" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer branding, as the term suggests, relates to organizational branding through differentiation. The firms' unique aspects and employment offerings are highlighted in the employment brand. The employer brand can be explained by the benefits of economical, psychological and functional areas of an employment and which are identified with the employing company brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). The employer brand and the corporate brand are closely linked but the employer brand distinguishes in two key areas; it is employment specific and directed at both internal and external audience. As the consumer market and the labor market are becoming more similar companies will struggle to be competitive in one market without succeeding in the other (Parment & Dyhre, 2009).

The employer brand involves a firm´s value system, policies and behavior of attracting, motivating and retaining the current and potential employees of the firm. According to these definitions employer branding encompasses promoting a view of how a firm differentiate from another and what makes it desirable as an employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The authors divide employer branding and employer brand into two definitions. Employer branding is defined as "*the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity"* whereas employer brand is defined as "*a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors*" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p 552). According to the definitions employer branding refers to all activities of promoting the employer brand. An employer brand is established to be consistent with the product and corporate brand of the firm. The product and corporate brand are similar to the employer brand but differ in two key factors. At first, the employer brand of a firm characterizes the identity as an employer and is employment specific. As a second, employer brand is directed to both internal and external audience which differs from the product and corporate brand that is directed at the external audience (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Figure 2 illustrates how the different brands align, where the employer brand is marked with a dashed line.

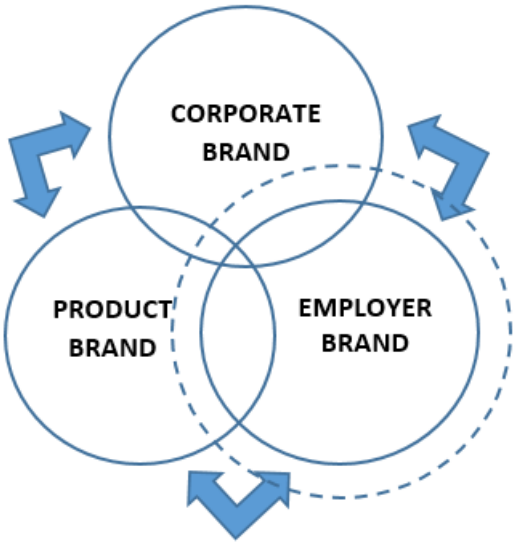

Figure 2. The alignment of the different brands (Jönsson and Nissfeldt, 2007, p 24).

As the connected circles in figure 2 illustrates, none of the brands are independent from each other rather they all are affected by the other as the arrows demonstrates. A firm's brand portfolio exists of brand levels such as corporate brand, employer brand or product and service brands (Keller, 1993). Corporate brands are designed to provide a consistent brand

image and to support the other brands within the portfolio (Burmann *et al.*, 2008). Employer brand is a part of the corporate brand since the corporation itself is the referred object in the labor market (Christiaans, 2012). Since potential employees at the same time receive information about the company as potential customers, the employer brand cannot be separated from the product or service brand of the company. Hence, employees can be a part of all stakeholder groups affected by the associations of the brand. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) stresses that the employer brand is designed not only to attract the target group, but to support and enhance the corporate brand, product or service brands. Although employer branding is targeted at the needs and expectations of both current and potential employees (internal and external employer branding) corporate branding take into account all groups of stakeholders of a company.

3.2.1 The definition of employer branding

Employer branding was first defined as "*the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company*" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p 187). This can be described as the package of functional, economical and psychological advantages that the employment brings and differ it from its competitors, identified with the employer. The concept represents the efforts of a firm concerning promotion of being a desirable employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The objective with employer branding is to give a clear view, both within and outside the company, of what makes the firm desirable as an employer out of different aspects such as; salary, status, experiences and career development (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

The aim of employer branding is to communicate the organization as a favorable working place with a long term strategy to manage perceptions of related stakeholders regarding a particual firm (Sullivan, 2004). Despite these varying definitions and different approaches to employer branding, they align in the fact that the concept includes thoughts and ideas from brand management transferred to human resource management (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding goes beyond human resources (HRM) hence applied with brand management it considers how to become an "employer of choice". The process to become an employer of choice refers to communicating an image of the of the corporation as a desirable working place (Berthon *et al.*, 2005)

3.2.2 The use and objectives of employer branding

The corporate brand is a useful tool to distinguish from competitors. During the last years, the concept of employer branding has gained popularity among managers (Dyhre & Parment, 2013; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). One underlying reason is that the brand of a company is one of the most valuable assets and hence a key activity in many companies (Agrawal & Swaroop, 2011). Employer branding is used to attract potential employees and to engage and maintain current employees. The aim of the employer brand is to demonstrate the organization as a desirable workplace and to provide grounds for differentiation (Christiaans, 2012). According to Dyhre and Parment (2013) attractive employers get the first dibs on competent employees and can keep them within the business for a longer period of time.

According to Ewing *et al*. (1999) employer branding is useful in the current knowledge-based economy, where a short supply of skilled employees is evident. When more jobs become available an attractive employer brand can enhance the firm to attract the employees. Being an attractive employer saves money on both a short time and longtime perspective (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) approve to this and state that effective employer branding leads to competitive advantage. Barrow and Mosley (2006, p 69) reasons the

benefits with that a stronger employer brand such as "*lowering costs, increasing customer satisfaction and delivering higher than average return on investment and profitability*". Hence, the benefits of a successful employer brand can lower costs by lower employee turnover and satisfied employees increse customer satisfaction resulting in profits for the company. Berthon *et al.,* (2005) stress that in the modern economy human capital is the source for competitive advantage.

"*While the primary role of employer brands is generally to add value, strong employer brands can also help to reduce costs*" (Barrow & Mosley, 2011, p 69). Parment and Dyhre (2009) adds benefits with employer branding as less absenteeism, greater staff satisfaction and engagement and higher profitability. Enhanced employee relations is another competitive advantage employer branding may result in (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). Prior research also states the business opportunities enhanced by investing in employer branding, showing that employer branding can increase both productivity and open new business opportunities (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Berthon *et al.*, 2005). While internal employer branding is aimed at activities considering current employees the external employer brand aims at marketing the corporate brand towards potential employees. The concept employer brand is grounded on considering people as the ground for competitive advantage. Foster *et al.,* (2010) provides a conceptual framework (figure 3) that illustrates the inter-relationship between corporate branding, employer branding and internal branding. The figure illustrates the synergy between internal branding and employer branding and the different stakeholder groups tha

Figure 3. The relationship between internal, employer and corporate branding (Foster et al., 2010, p 405).

The model suggests how the different types of branding can be supported and enhanced by one another (Foster *et al.*, 2010). By integrating employer branding and internal branding the corporate brand promise can be supported from different perspectives. While internal branding is focused internally on existing employees, employer branding focus on the external target group such as potential employees which also could be the customers of an organization. The customers or potential employees form a perception of the company as a

place to work by interaction with customer-facing employees. The employer brand which is shaped out of these perceptions will decide if to join the employer or not. As a new customer-facing employee you will be exposed to internal branding. The employer and internal branding should articulate the offers to its employees and customers based on the organizations values and culture.

Up to 80% of the value of service companies consist of their staff, also known as human capital (Dyhre & Parment, 2013, p 89). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p 503) stress that employer branding is grounded on the perspective that "*human capital brings value to the firm, and through skilful investment in human capital, firm performance can be enhanced*". The individual performance affects the profit of the firm and investments in employer branding enhance the attraction of human capital. In 1991 Barney *et al.,* introduced a conceptual framework that suggests that company value correlates with human resource management; this perspective is known as a resource-based view (Barney *et al.*, 2001). Barney *et al.,* (2001) argued that the competitive advantage for a company is the assets that are hard to substitute and which cannot be imitated by others, such as knowledge. The new perspective introduced people, employees, as a strategic importance to business success. Human resource literature describes employer branding as a process where the company values needs to be embodied in the brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). For a company to distinguish them self from competitors they need to express the value that they offer employees grounded on corporate culture, image of current employees, management style and impression of products (Sullivan, 2004). When developed, the brand is targeted to potential employees. Employer branding can be used for internal marketing where the current employees are the target population. The purpose of external marketing of the brand is to attract the target population but also to support the product brand. To create a successful employer brand the understanding of the next workforce generation will be essential (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Barrow & Mosley, 2006; Parment & Dyhre, 2009).

3.2.3 Communicating the employer brand

Employer branding refers to the promise between a firm and its key stakeholder groups and is targeted at external stakeholders (Balmer & Gray, 2003). In order to influence stakeholders and enhance the brand the attributes of the organization's identity must be communicated in the branding proposition. Hence, "*employer branding concerns the management behavior, communication and symbolism in order to attain a favorable and positive reputation with target audiences of an organization*" (Foster *et al.*, 2010, p 401). The employer brand is not only communicated by the brand as it self but by the behaviours of managers and by employees within the organization which shape the perception of the brand. Therefore effective communication of the brand and alignment between the firm's vision and the employees' values is a key to successful corporate brand management. Representing the firms' identity, the corporate brand should function as the overall umbrella of a company's' brand portfolio. The outcome of investments in the employer brand has been investigated by Wilden *et al*. (2010). The authors found the most successful employer branding activities to be investments in employee development, participation in labor fairs, career website, advertisement in newspapers, offer internship, engage in alumni networks and participate in employer of choice awards.

Communication plays an important role in in shaping people's perceptions and understanding of the employer brand (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). When communicating the employer brand it is desired that the core value and identity of the organization is communicated and not to introduce additional branding specific for the employer brand. A successful employer brand

messages focus on existing benefits found whitin the organization. Since current employees "live the brand" the external brand should be ensured by the members of the organization to ensure that the brand message is credible and to avoid over-promise to stakeholders. Hence, credibility, trustworthiness and consistency is essential to successful employer brand communication, so is also managing the communication in a long-term perspective and not view the employer brand as a campaign (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). Ambler and Barrow (1996, p 63) argues "*for the brand to be relevant and motivating to employees it needs to be positioned to meet these needs and aspirations*". Hence, information about the valued attributes of the target group decides how successful the brand communication will be.

3.3 Organizational culture

Organizational culture is a main issue in both academic research and management practice, due to culture as a central part in all aspects of the organization (Mosley, 2007). Culture is significant to the corporate function, strategic change, leadership and relationships among managers and employees. Organizational culture refers to how people within the organization think, feel, value and act guided by the ideas, meanings and beliefs of the culture they are a part of (Schein, 1990). The concept does not refer to one individual, rather giving a meaning to the shared form of beliefs, ideas, meanings, symbols, values, ideologies, rules, norms and behavior patterns between members of an organization that are expressed to these factors (Alvesson, 2002). Culture creates an understanding of life within the organization and the shared meaning of management actions. Culture is a system of shared rules of governing aspects of membership in an organization and how these are shaped and expressed. Culture is central to the understanding of behavior and social events, rather putting these actions into meaning. Organizational culture refers to how knowledge is created, shared, maintained within the firm (*Ibid.*). To understand organizational culture, concepts such as meaning and symbolism is essential to study. A symbol is a word, statement or a material that stands for something else, the concept is rich in meaning and something more than the object itself. Culture is a system of meanings and symbols where social interaction takes place, such as a work place. By the social interaction culture creates meaning through which humans understand their experiences and guide their actions (*Ibid.*). In the employer branding context, the first step to create an employer brand is to answer the question "*who are we as an organization*" and for a convincing employer brand the promise should be grounded on what can be truly delivered (Dyhre and Parment, 2013). Prior research by Lievens *et al.* (2007) stress that factors relating to the organizational identity and the employer image predict attraction to the organization. The study also showed that not only the applicants image of the organization matter but the valuation of outsiders image of the organization.

Managers have great power to create an organizational culture in the way they prioritize their actions (Mosley, 2007). An example of how culture can be developed by managers, is by encouraging certain behaviors while neglecting others. A powerful tool to express culture is the behavior of leaders within the organization, and that their behavior align with the culture, values and beliefs of the organization (Schein, 1990). Culture also take into account a wide range of other factors that shape the employee experience. Hence, organizational culture is a complex phenomenon and not a quick fix for managers. Put in the context as a factor that contribute to business advantages, the interest of managing organizational culture grew. The shift in focus from technology and production towards managing people connect knowledge as a crucial factor linked to culture (*Ibid.*). Even if managers neglect to engage in the culture, the ignorance as a sign shapes the culture in itself. Hence, the culture needs to be consistently

and continuously managed; in order to attract employees the employer brand needs to be reinforced in the desired culture (Mosley, 2007).

3.4 EVP – employee value proposition

Many companies has a formulated customer value proposition (CVP) that consist of a promise of benefits that describes why a customer should buy a product (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). In brand positioning each product has its own target group of customers. The equivalent in the context of the labor market and employer branding is EVP – employee value proposition. EVP can be seen as a targeted marketing tool for employer branding that emphasize to establish a differentiated position in relation to other competing employers (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Successful employer brands are characterized by having a value proposition that is relevant to their potential and current employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). EVP is a crucial first step when developing a convincing employer brand and defines the offer communicated through the employer brand activities (Sochart, 2009). EVP is closely related to the employer brand and is not performed by one single unit within the organization. Figure 4 below illustrates how an EVP functions in relation to the overall corporate brand and how the EVP functions throughout the organizations activities.

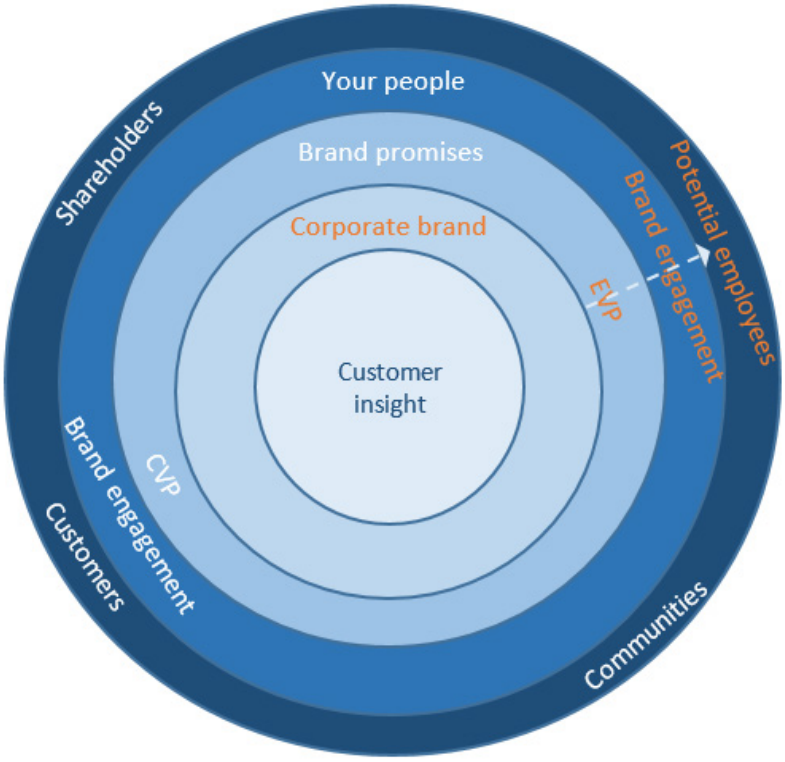

Figure 4. The inter-relationship of employee value proposition (Sochart, 2009, p 2).

Based on Sochart (2009, p 2), figure 4 illustrates the inter-relationship between the positioning of the corporate brand and its promises such as customer value proposition (CVP). The corporate brand positioning emphasizes the promise to specific target groups such as customers, employees and shareholders. To deliver these promises coherent to the brand experience the employees need to be engaged. The employee experience of the corporate brand is delivered by the employees and the EVP and must link to and be grounded on the elements of the corporate brand idea such as values and beliefs. EVP contains similar elements as brand positioning. A strategic positioning with a defined market and target

candidates, insight based on understanding of target candidate and the needs and motivations of employees, a differentiated promise supported by tangible facts and expression of the EVP across external and internal communication channels (Socart, 2009).

An EVP capture how a company wants to be seen in the minds of applicants and employees relative to their competitors (Sochart, 2009). The EVP is defined by Minchington (2010, p 33) as "*a set of functional and emotive associations and offerings provided by an organization in return for the skills, capabilities and experiences an employee brings to the organization*". Hence, EVP can be explained as a promise of the total employment experience between two parts where the individual perform given the provided offer. The offer to employees can consist of a combination of both financial and nonfinancial parts (Dyhre and Parment, 2013). Summarized, EVP is the benefits offered by the firm that relates to future and current employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). To develop an EVP that attracts the target group requires insights about the different needs of the target group (Minchington, 2005). EVP describes the mix of characteristics of an employment for an organization and is based on five key elements illustrated in the model below (figure 5). The framework determines how the employer can engage, retain and attract employees by enable understanding of the most valuable attributes and rewards. With that knowledge employers can develop a customized employee value proposition.

Figure 5. The five elements of the employee value proposition model (Kunkle and Sorensen, 2008, p 16).

The model is created to measure employee attitudes and perceptions toward financial and non-financial rewards of the five elements. The elements summarize the benefits applicants will get from joining an organization (Botha *et al*., 2011; Browne, 2012). Each of the five elements and its aspects are important and influence employee motivation, retention and attraction (Kunkle & Sorensen, 2008). The aspects are more or less important depending on the individual employee, who may accept substitution of one reward in order to get more of another. The work environment and affiliation refers to the feeling of belongingness with the organization including, values, culture, colleagues, managers and leaders. Work content motivates the employee to do her work task, not only to have a challenging work but also includes work life balance. Career includes the development possibilities such as provided

training to reach another title or personal growth. Pay refers to the monetary compensation for the work while benefits refer to the nonfinancial rewards such as vacation and health care. The EVP model serves as the theoretical basis for the themes discussed in the focus groups, found in appendix 1, and also the formation of the interview questions found in appendix 4.

An EVP is based on attributes that attract, engage and retain the workforce the company is seeking. An EVP demonstrates its uniqueness in the same time being consistent with the strategic objectives of the firm, consisting of real elements actual at the time as well as what the organization strive towards (James & Bibb, 2010). With an EVP companies can get deeper into the labor market and reach passive candidates. Given the literature the needs of the target group include functional, economic and psychological preferences, hence applicants are attracted to a firm that fit their needs, market segmentation can be used to target the different needs of each stakeholder (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). A differentiated EVP is unique to each target group and their specific needs. Botha *et al*. (2011, p 3) defines a differentiated EVP as "*the unique set of attributes and benefits that will motivate target candidates to join a company and current employees to stay*". With a differentiated EVP the organization target and adapt the message towards the needs of different stakeholders. To deliver an authentic message the EVP needs to reflect the actual employment experience (Minchington, 2010). The first step of EVP communication is through recruitment advertisement, career website and social media. The next step is to ensure the EVP is delivered by the behaviors and actions of employees. If the message that is exposed in an employment situation conflicts with the first message, conflict can arise. The EVP offered to potential employees forms the organizations' image of being an attractive employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

3.4.1 Employer attractiveness

Employer attractiveness is determined by the correlation of the attributes desired by the target group and the offer given in the EVP. Concepts as employer image and employer attractiveness are frequently studied in combination with employer branding (Christiaans, 2012). The author stress factors that determine employer attractiveness differ between gender, educational program and country. According to Gatewood *et al*. (1993) and Turban and Greening (1997) employer image is one of the main factors that affects the attractiveness of the organization. Since applicants have minor information about the company at the early stage of the decision process when choosing a future employer, the perceived image of the organization decides whether or not it can be an attractive employer. Potential employees' application decisions are often based on the impression of organizational attractiveness, which is commonly described in relation to the concept employer attractiveness (Rynes *et al.*, 1991). Employer attractiveness is defined by Berthon *et al* (2005, p 151) as "*the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization",* regarded as a foundation to the general concept of employer brand equity (Christiaans, 2012). A study by Lievens and Highhouse (2003) stress that interfering traits between the potential employee and the organization affect the organizational attractiveness. Hence, the more potential employees perceive an employer as attractive, the stronger employer brand equity of that particular organization (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). A study by Lemmink *et al.* (2003) shows that employment image has positively affects the application intentions and that applicants who are familiar with a company are more likely to apply than with an unfamiliar company. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) have developed a conceptual framework for understanding the different concepts of employer branding, illustrated in figure 6 below.

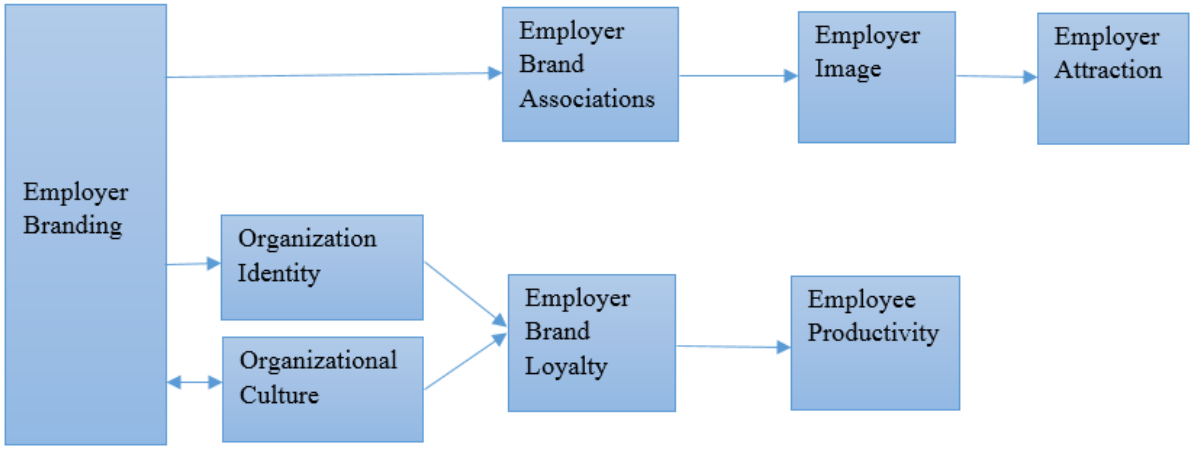

Figure 6. The different concepts of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p 505).

Employer brand associations are the "*thoughts and ideas that a brand evokes in the minds of consumers*", explained as the emotion and feeling given by the brand and everything mentally or emotionally linked to the brand (Aaker, 2009). Brand associations determine the brand image. Employer brand image can be explained as how the various stakeholders experience the organization out of the benefits of the employment. The image determines the employer attraction towards the organization (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Organization identity refers to the level of identification the employees feel with the organization. A positive identity leads to higher level of identification with the company which increases organizational commitment. Organizational culture is evidence by how people behave in their workplace, the culture is related to commitments and loyalty between the employee and the organization. Committed and loyal employees are more satisfied with their work and therefore a higher level of performance and a positive attitude towards their work. This explains how employer branding can result in higher profits due to satisfied employees that affects the satisfaction of customers (*Ibid.*).

Attractiveness is determined by different characteristics of the organization that makes it desirable for their target audience. In prior research the characteristics that determines attractiveness has been found by questioning graduates using both qualitative method (Berthon *et al.*, 2005) and quantitative method (Trank *et al.*, 2002; Lemmink *et al.*, 2003; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens *et al.*, 2007). However, the findings of what makes an organization attractive is widely spread due to the reason that individuals attraction to an organization differs because it is based on a function of interest, needs, preferences and personality (Lievens *et al.*, 2001). Hence, Rynes (1991) points out specific criteria to decide organizational characteristics that influence applicants. The criteria refer to a) the characteristics to be visible early in the decision process b) signaling the culture and values of the organization and c) differing across organizations. Such visible characteristics are for example size of the organization, international opportunities, level of centralization, salary and benefits. Hence, all these characteristics signals culture, value and norms of the organization and is visible to the applicant early in the process (Lievens *et al.*, 2001).

3.5 A conceptual framework

In the light of the above points in this chapter, it can be posited that employer branding requires input from different perspectives and can be studied out of different perspectives. Analysis of the organizations' values and culture is the first step when studying employer branding (Dyhre and Parment, 2013). Converting the organizational attributes leads to the creation of an EVP which leads to the formulation of the employer branding strategies. The last step is to choose communication channels which position the brand in the minds of potential employees, resulting in employer attractiveness. The knowledge about EVP result in development of employer brand image, given a positive image the corporation will be seen as an attractive employer (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

The above figure 6 by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p 505) will serve as the conceptual framework in this thesis. The concept of employer branding serves as the theoretical umbrella while the theory of organizational culture will be used in the corporate context of the empirical data. The organizational attributes are converted to the EVP, hence the illustration of the five elements of EVP is used for the analyze of the empirical results. To develop the EVP insight about the preferences of the target group is determined which is determined by the results of the focus groups. An EVP based on the preferences of the target group may enhance brand associations and employer image and result in employer attraction (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

4 The empirical study

This chapter offers a presentation of the empirical data. It is based on primary empirics, which refers to focus groups with the students and a survey (4.1). It also contains a case presentation of the corporation, Lantmännen, based on primary and secondary empirical sources (4.2- 4.5).

4.1 Preferences of a future employer

The five focus group discussions and the interviews with agricultural students in the later part of their university program contributed with a great amount of data. The empirical findings are structured and presented by themes which summarize similar discussions in the different groups. Since the majority of the results were discussions about the same topics the data from all the focus groups and interviews are aggregated. The themes are summarized and named in the same categories as the EVP of Lantmännen to provide structure for the reader. This chapter presents the data from the focus group discussions and the survey filled in by the students in the end of the meeting. Figure 7 below illustrates the results of the survey with the number of points for each organizational attribute.

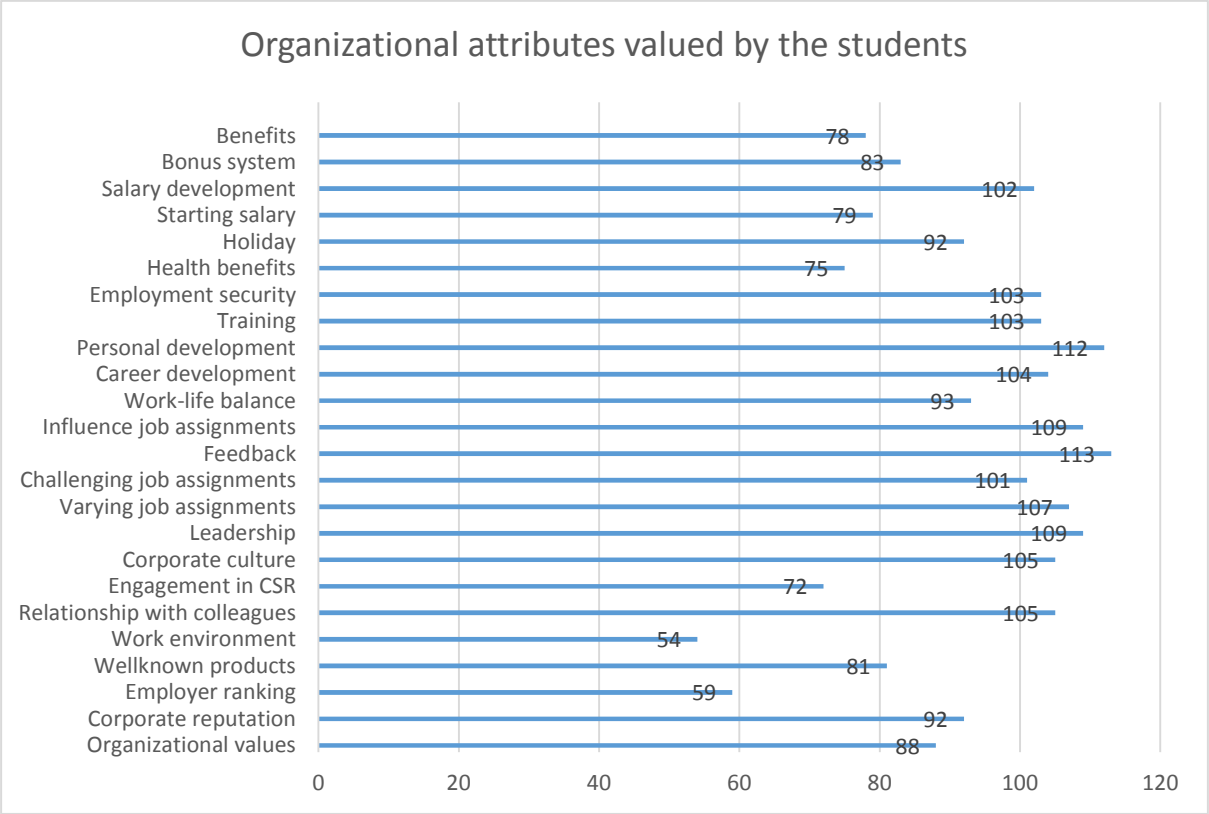

Figure 7. The results of the survey of valued organizational attributes (Own processing).

The table shows that the most valuable attributes of a future employer is feedback and personal development followed by possibility to influence job assignments and leadership. More information about how the score of the survey is calculated can be found in chapter 2 methods. The following subheadings explain the empirical findings of each theme.

4.1.1 Employer branding activities - personal network and a day at the office

According to the students employer branding is about bringing students and companies closer to each other, at the university to some, at the office to others. It appears mentoring programs and labor fair is a valuable way to enhance the relationship between students and companies. Although the students' stress having a representative with connections to their education when meeting students at the university otherwise the activity will have the reverse result and spread negative rumors of the company. To enhance the cooperation companies need to be more visible, also at other activities than the labor fair, and some students' experience the relationship with companies is focused in the later year of their programs and wish for an earlier connection with the companies. The majority of the students believe study visits at the offices are important with many inputs. Study visit gives a good insight into the organizational culture and job assignments. Although the students wish for more opportunities to see what actual job assignments mean practically since many of them experience the job advertisement to be unclear and hard to grasp. Some students wish for more than a visit to the office and ask for an exchange in experiences such as a case competition which would enable the company to see the students' competence.

"*To communicate one thing and to do another affects the trust in the company, it is important to live up to what is said and to be clear and transparent is important to me, my trust is let down when a company says "we want agricultural students" but never have a job offers that suits me*"

- Member of group 2

The students have all been exposed to different kinds of employer branding activities. Many of the students indicate that they use personal connections to shape an image of the company. The agricultural students are studying at a small university with close relationships to each other which gives them a broad personal network within the agricultural industry. When looking for a job and to get a sense of the work environment many of the students use their personal network. The students create an opinion of the organization by the impression at the interview but also by word of mouth by others who have experience of the company.

"*The impression of the company as a whole is shaped by personal contacts, interview, how I am being approached, the manager and the organizational culture, which all affects how long I will choose to stay within the company*"

- Member of group 3

Lantmännen is owned by farmers which many of them are in the family of the students which, according to the students, also gives them an insight in the company from another perspective. Having an interest in agriculture the students read agricultural newspapers and, according to the students, media can affect the image of the company and its organizational culture.

4.1.2 Affiliation and culture - shared values

Values were a topic discussed during every focus group discussion but were perceived in different ways by the participants. The discussion of values summarized the congruence of personal values and the values of the organization. One participant said "*I believe values are more important to me as an agronomist than what it is to other program students*" (Group 4) a participant in another group stressed that "*values are a part of our education and interest for the agricultural industry which means that we already have made a choice by value when taking a standpoint*" (Group 3). According to the students, values are also a part of trust. One participant had lost belief in organizational values describing them as meaningless drawing

the example of corporations' state they are working with CSR and then revealed child labor (Group 1).

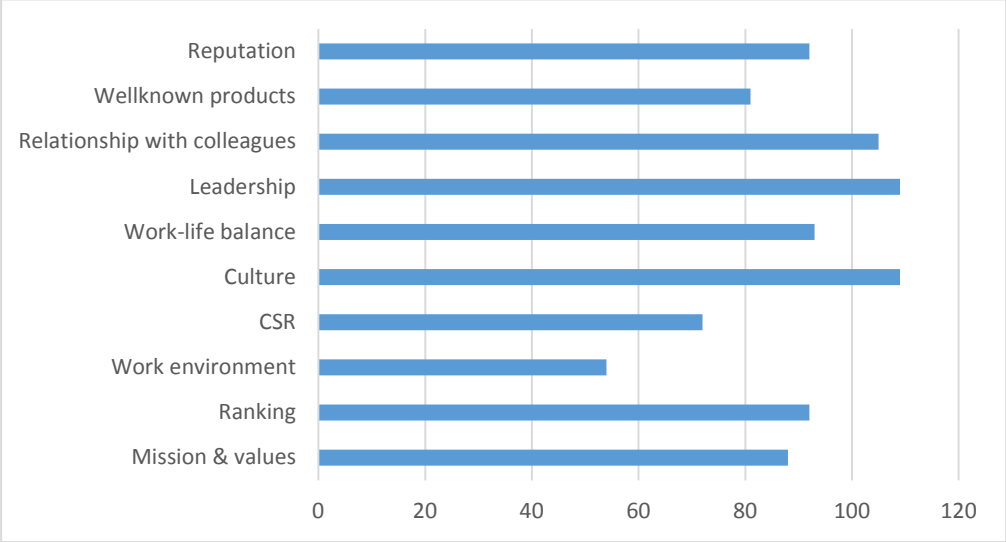

Figure 8. The result of the survey within the theme affiliation (Own processing).

As shown in figure 8 the score on mission and values were not among the highest scores even though they were frequently discussed. Some of the students belive organizational values are hard to grasp, and one participant experience mistrust in the accuracy of the value. The student expresses this mistrust as "*the corporations hire a communication firm to make the values for them and one knows that these values are not fulfilled*" (Group 2). To make the values apparent during the interview appeared to be more important to the students than being ble to read them in a document. Values were also discussed along with performance were the participants most often agreed on it being easier to make a good performance when personal values and corporate values congrue and hard to perform if one oppose the personal values. The majority of the groups agreed on the balance of agreed personal values and the values of the company.

4.1.3 Career - to be appreciated

Organization was discussed out of different perspectives where career advancement was the basis for the majority of the discussions. Some students were looking for a smaller company with a flat organization, while others believed the flatter organization, the fewer possibilities to make a career. The career opportunities were more important to the students than the size of the company. A large company was associated with more and easier career possibilities which was also discussed about a smaller company were it can be easier to do a career and to reach a higher position since your performance is more apparent. The majority of the students asked for a hierarchy were it is easy to reach the manager. For most of the students hierarchy was associated with something positive as long as there is a clear position of power roles and structure. Figure 9 on the next page illustrates the result of the survey from the questions regarding career.

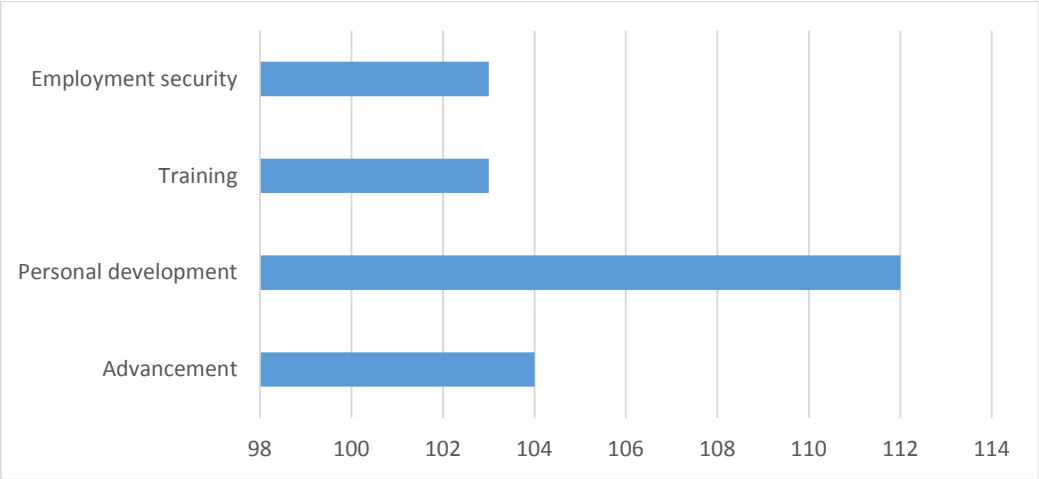

Figure 9. The result of the survey within the theme career (Own processing).

Figure 9 illustrates that personal development scored the highest within the theme followed by personal development.

4.1.4 Work content - to make a difference and to get a foothold

Many of the students are more flexible when it comes to their first job and they are prepared to accept a lower salary in exchange for career possibilities. One student argued "*It is okay with lower salary in the first job, as long as there is a clear goal for my future within the company*" (Group 1). This is confirmed in the overall survey results in figure 7 where payment scored less than career opportunities. Figure 10 below illustrates the results of the survey within the theme pay and compensation.

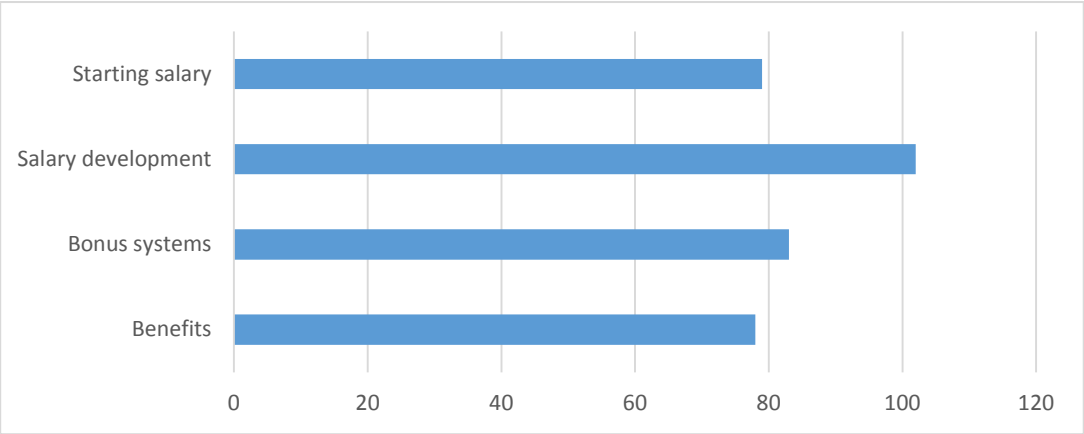

Figure 10. The result of the survey within the theme payment (Own processing).

Figure 10 shows that salary development scored higher than the starting salary according to the survey results. Other students were willing to accept simpler job assignments with their first job as long as there was an exchange for career opportunities. "*I can agree on uninteresting job assignments if the company offers career opportunities*" (Group 3). This was not confirmed by the overall results where job assignments scored higher than career opportunities. The reason for the students willing to give up some important attributes in exchange for another less important is due to the aim of the first job to get a foothold within

the company. One student explained it as "*The first job is less important, there is a lot that I am not qualified for as a graduate, then it becomes more important to get a foothold of the company and to have good development possibilities*" (Group 3). The importance of development can also be seen among the highest scores in the overall results in figure 7.

A challenging job where the students can make a difference in what they do and that is connected to their education was discussed in most of the groups. What appears to be most important with the first job is a development plan, career opportunities and a good reference for the future to be able to later reach a higher career goal. One participant expressed "*you apply to the first job based on your education, you apply to the second job based on your first job*" (Group 2). A job that includes varying job assignments with an opportunity to develop is important for the majority of the students. One student clarified that development is not only to reach a higher position within the company but also to get new responsibilities.

"I want to do something that affects the world, to feel that I am making a difference, what I do shall help someone in 20 years. I want to feel that I am contributing, both to the company's profitability but also to making the world better. Varying job assignments where I am visible and get treated as unique rather than an input".

-Member of group 5

According to the member in group 5 and many other of the students, job assignments are connected to the personal values and beliefs. It is not as simple as having varying tasks rather the purpose of these tasks. Figure 11 below illustrates the survey results within the theme work content.

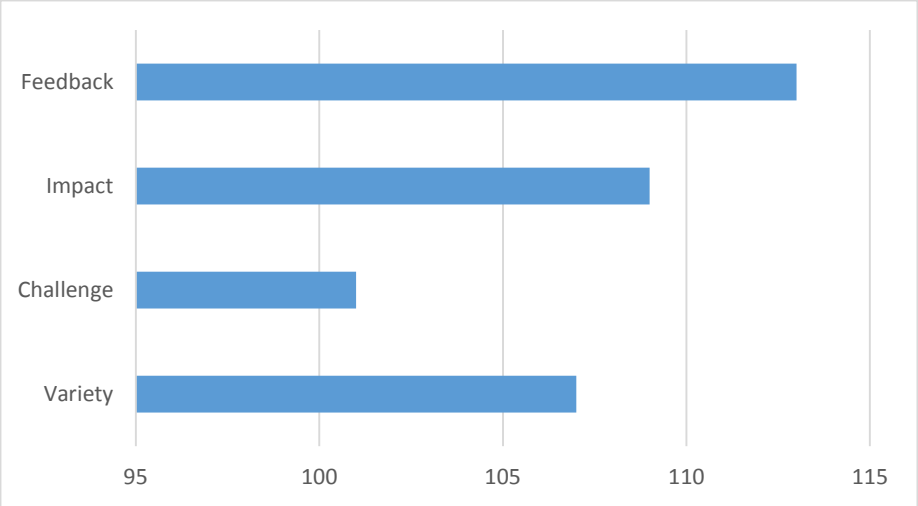

Figure 11. The result of the survey within the theme work content (Own processing).

The figure shows that the students value feedback on their performance as the highest attribute, followed by the ability to impact job assignments and having varying tasks. Closeness to the manger and colleagues was important to many of the students. The participants in the study are all in their later years of study programs and the insecurity with the first job is evident where having someone to ask is important. The majority of the students have had jobs before and experienced different types of leadership. According to the students a mangers role is to give the right tools for development and to create a positive work environment. "*I want to feel that I make a difference in what I do, leadership is important so that I can get the right tools to fulfill that*" (Group 5). Having a good manager is important to

the students. The characteristics of a manger are a clear leader who sees the individual and who puts effort into personal development and career path. Feedback is according to the student's one of the most important tasks of a manger. To be visible was discussed during the majority of the focus groups and to get feedback from a manager approves that the manager see the individual performance. A manager who sees the individual enhances motivation and personal development. Work is a great part of our lives and it is important for the students to feel appreciated at work. Having a good relationship with the manager enhance loyalty to the work which in the long run enhance the business, "*A manager who are not there and who doesn't say hi makes me feel less valuable and creates a bad work environment*" (Group 3). Also discussed were that the colleagues plays an important role for the work environment and well-being at work. A good relationship makes the personal relationship easier and creates an environment where it is acceptable to make a mistake, "*A manager who doesn't appreciate my work and doesn't acknowledge my performance leads to demotivation*" (Group 1). According to the students, good relationship with colleagues can make work more fun and affect the well-being positively.

4.1.5 Organizationaul culture - openness

The students discussed how organizational culture is evident and what type of organizational culture is valued. Organizational culture can be visible through the type of people the company recruits where a company that recruits young people signals career possibilities. According to the students a pleasant work environment is a friendly atmosphere, close relationship with colleagues and manager and a feeling of belongingness with someone to address with questions. To feel appreciated and needed and to get responsibilities is important for the students. It appears "to be a part of the team" and "to be challenged to try new things", are important to some students. Benefits of work such as health and holiday was not mentioned many times during the discussion. This could be due to as one student expressed "*benefits is something you take for granted"* (Group 4). Since the discussions focused on the first job the students appear to value holiday and health as less important than culture and job assignments for example. Figure 12 below illustrates the overall results of the theme within benefits.

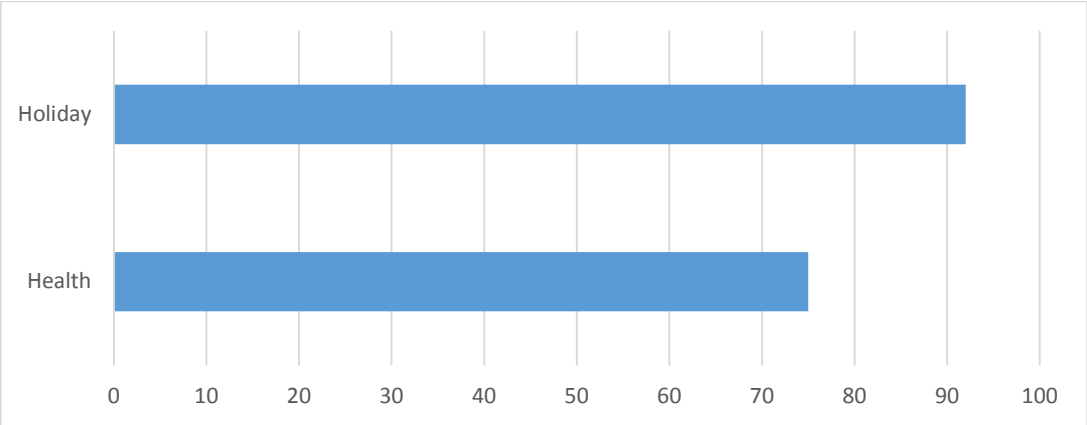

Figure 12. The result of the survey within the theme benefits (Own processing).

As shown in the figure holiday was more valued than health benefits such as being able to workout during working hours. The students discussed the benefits of an enjoyable work environment that offers development and own initiatives with clear goals and expectations. Openness, honesty and transparency and an organizational culture that shares the individual values were mentioned by the students as important attributes. According to the discussions

corporate culture influence the well-being at work. The students ask for a welcoming atmosphere where one becomes a part of the team, that kind of corporate culture drives development. "*The best kind of jobs is where you get a feeling of being trusted and that they believe in me, a work place where it is okay to make mistakes*" (Group 5). An open organizational culture with feedback that drives development appears to be the most important to the students. Some of the students express a positive attitude towards performance measurement and values a culture where results will give career advancements, as long as clear goals of expectations are the basis for measuring performance. A bad work environment is described as having a high grade of control of working hours and demanding rules that would wash out all own initiatives. The students anticipate freedom of being able to prioritize the job assignments individually and a manager who appreciate new ideas.

4.2 Case company introduction

Lantmännen is one of the greatest groups within food, agriculture, machinery and energy in Scandinavia. The cooperation is owned by farmers who also are their 33 500 members and are available in 22 countries with 8500 employees and a turnover of 33 billion SEK. The core purpose of the mission of Lantmännen is to "*contribute to the profitability of the owners farms and maximize return on investments for the owners*". Lantmännen is operated by the group board of directors which are responsible for the organization of the cooperation and their overall business strategy. The group board of directors appoints the CEO and the policies for which she will act. The CEO is responsible for the business development of the organization and to run the daily operations. The CEO is a part of the group executive among with the managers of each division and the managers for the each joint function. The purpose of the group executive is to have the overall responsibility to coordinate Lantmännen. The business idea of Lantmännen is to "*with the customer in focus, develop and refine the resources of the cropland in a responsible way. We act on an international market where Sweden act as the base for our business*" (www, Lantmännen, 2014).

The organization of Lantmännen is divided into four different business divisions; agriculture, machinery, energy and foods illustrated in figure 9. Within the agricultural division are the operations concerning developing products and services contributing to agriculture.

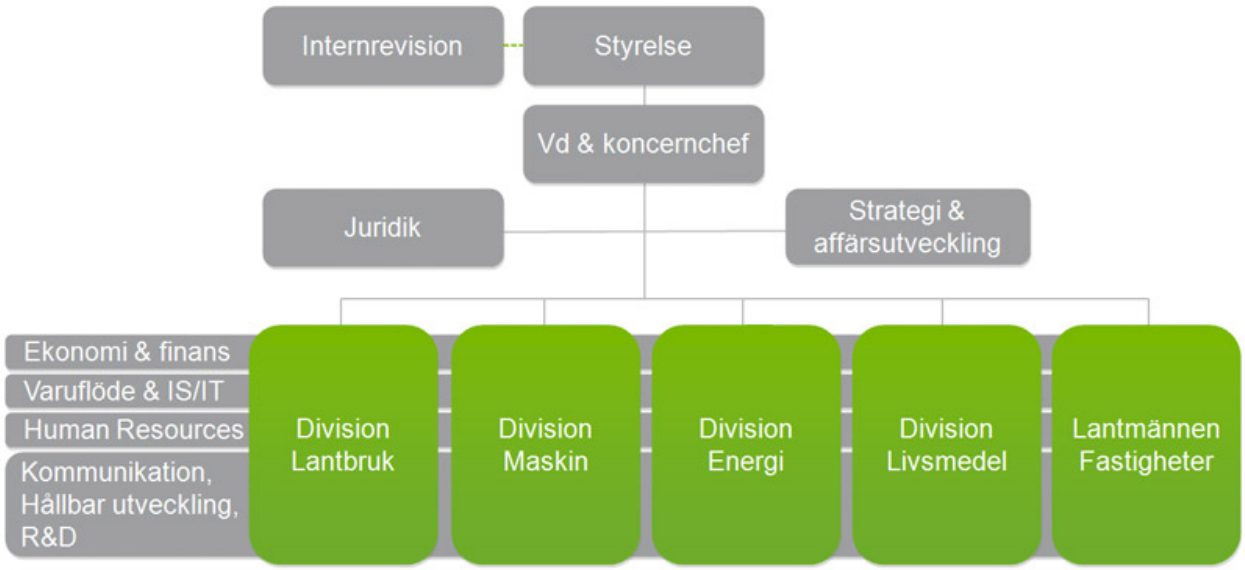

Figure 13. The business structure of Lantmännen (www, Lantmännen, 2014).

Lantmännen operates out of their joint functions such as finance, communication, supply chain and human resources. The mission of the joint functions is to support the group executive and the business areas concerning group related business issues. The human resource (HR) department is responsible for the employer branding activities at Lantmännen. The joint function HR has the overall responsibility for questions at Lantmännen concerning human resources, such as recruitment, work environment and health, employer responsibility, development within leadership and competence and internal communication. The function aims at providing "*Lantmännen to be an attractive employer with satisfied employees – which will contribute to satisfied customers and a profitable business*"

4.3 Recruitment needs – future employees

Due to the large size of the company and the broad business operations the people working within Lantmännen has a wide competence background to fill positions in all divisions spread out at all levels in the corporation in the whole food supply chain. In the agricultural department, located in the southern part of Sweden, are people working with general joint functions such as business controlling and HR and positions towards the agricultural sector such as customer service, sales, specialist, machinery, production and livestock feed (pers. com., Ritter, 2014). Lantmännen experience a rise in applications but salesmen with agricultural competence and vehicle technicians are positions that are more difficult to fill (pers. com., Aglöv, 2014).

The type of person Lantmännen recruits is dependent on the type of position and demanded skills for the specific job. Drive and commitment can be summarized as important attributes of candidates applying to a position within the organization. As an agricultural student general knowledge about the agricultural business is requested (per. com., Ritter, 2014). Being down to earth with an interest for the agricultural industry are other attributes that are shared among the employees at Lantmännen.

Lantmännen has designed three core values to guide their employees in their actions; openness, holistic view and drive. According to Aglöv (2014) openness is the value that reflects the organization culture at the most and is acknowledged by the prestige less attitude among colleagues. Ritter (2014) means that the performance measurement Lantmännen is using is also what drives decisiveness. The holistic view gives the opportunity to see how the individual effort provides to the context and can be linked to the extensive production chain at Lantmännen and their responsibility from farm to fork. Both Aglöv and Ritter (2014) agree on that the values are not just made up rather established on the ground by a wide project that mapped the existing values pervaded at Lantmännen.

4.4 Employer branding activities

"*The most successful employer branding work should be managed by itself without having to work for it*" (per. com., Aglöv, 2014). Aglöv stresses the difference between employer brand and employer branding. The employer brand is all attribute that describes Lantmännen as an employer and is created by customers and employees who name these attributes. Employer branding is all communicative things that affect the employer brand and is created by all employees, constantly, to affect the attributes. The role of Aglöv as the employer branding manager is to hold these attributes together and to niche towards specific target groups and competences. The aim with the employer branding of Lantmännen is to ensure the supply of

competence in the organization and to get the right person at the right position (per. com., Ritter, 2014). In order to ensure the supply of skills means that when one employee at Lantmännen quit there should be a competent successor. The process of employer branding can be explained by what the company need in terms of skills and competence and what attributes the target group demand and is attracted by which determine the communicated message. Hence, the values at Lantmännen are always communicated in the same way no matter what target group. To know what attracts the specific target group Aglöv use two reports that presents the most attractive attributes of Lantmännen valued by students. The niche in the communicated message depends on the target group on the basis that Lantmännen can ensure that the message can be truly delivered within the organization (per. com., Aglöv, 2014). The most important is to communicate a true image and not to promote something that does not exist (per. com., Ritter, 2014). With recruitment it is not only the employer who chose an employee but also the new employee choosing a new employer and it is important that the new employee is happy and feel she is in the right place. Inviting students to the office and for them to get their own image is one step in delivering this true message. Today the niche is used in direct contact with students but there is a vision of visualizing that niche on the webpage in the future.

Lantmännen use different communication channels for its employer branding activities. The graduate trainee program (held every second year) and lunch lectures are activities to show the attractive attributes of Lantmännen (per. com., Aglöv, 2014). Other activities reach the students are by guest speakers, career fairs, summer internship and the newly developed mentoring program. The mentoring program is an incentive from thee agricultural division who works more towards the agricultural students where they also give out scholarships. Lantmännen demands agricultural competence, according to Aglöv the purpose of the mentor program can be divided into 20% employer branding and 80% to ensure supply of competence while the summer internship with students in their later part of their studies is 75% employer branding and 25% supply of competence since the internship does not promise an employment. The most successful employer branding activity is according to Aglöv (2014) the internship, trainee and mentor programs since these activities provide a specific offer of an employment or assignment that both parts, student and employer, benefits from. The employer brand is also communicated by student magazines and newspaper advertisements and by cooperation with universities in career portals, job advertisements, talent networks and inviting students to the office.

In order to ensure the employer branding is delivering results is shown by ratings, quantity and quality of applicants to both trainee program and job positions. Aglöv stresses that the ratings and the quantity of applicants is less important to reach the purpose with a continuous supply och competence. Another measurement of employer branding is employee turnover. When Lantmännen succeed on delivering a message that complies with reality and the applicants have an accurate image of the organization they will stay longer within the company.

4.5 The employee value proposition of Lantmännen

The existing EVP of Lantmännen is based on the values (openness, drive and holistic view), the mission "*as a leading player in food, energy, machinery and agriculture, Lantmännen is strongly committed to building a sound and healthy society"* and the guiding stars for leadership; develop talent, will to win, drive performance, be brave, involve and inspire, develop yourself (www, Lantmännen, 2014). The EVP is expressed in a written document and

can be summarized as the guideline for the culture of the organization. The EVP explains how the business should be carried out in a long term perspective and points out the core values of the firm (EVP, Lantmännen, 2014). The EVP covers the entirety of what is communicated to the students and breaks it down to the smallest common denominator (per. com., Aglöv, 2014). The EVP is also expressed in a model where the values, mission and guiding stars for leadership are broken down into four categories divided in eight describing words.

4.5.1 The people and affiliation

"*What I appreciate the most with working at Lantmännen is to be able to stand by my work, the company, the products, the values and the personnel policy. There is a value of the feeling of being able to stand by your work and what the company delivers*" (per. com., Ritter, 2014).

At Lantmännen measuring performance and the delivered result is more visible than controlled working hours which give the employees some freedom. Lantmännen needs to ensure the employees get the right competence and provide the necessary conditions for them to be able to deliver what is required. The corporate reputation grows internally where the employees are the most important ambassadors. An upright organizational culture which is spread by mouth to mouth is fundamental for a good reputation (per. com., Ritter, 2014). Mouth to mouth is an important communication channel but is hard to control, and something which is not anticipated to control but will communicate itself by a desired organization culture. The people working at Lantmännen are described as sharing a down to earth feeling and working environment with open doors where the employees act generous to share their competence. Lantmännen put effort into developing leaders and employees and there are structured processes of performance management to drive achievements with leadership development and programs for the employees to drive their development. The development is evaluated between the employee and the manager and during appraisals.

4.5.2 Organization and leadership

The employee's opportunity to impact her work is dependent on the type of position and can vary between production, office, sales and HR (per. com., Ritter, 2014). Employees at Lantmännen have clear goals which they are paid to achieve. According to Ritter (2014) employees' value and demand feedback as a step to develop in their profession. Some feedback is given at appraisals but also dependent on the individual and the type of job.

4.5.3 Opportunities and learning and development

The guiding principles describe Lantmännens view of a successful leadership. In order to ensure these principles are acted they are measured by frequent and recurring employee surveys about leadership, work environment and job satisfaction. In order to grow talent and to follow the developing plan is a shared responsibility between the manager and the employee (per. com., Ritter, 2014). Both the short-term and the long-term goal for development is discussed during the appraisals where goals and activities to reach the goals are pointed out to encourage internal mobility and take advantage of the existing competence.

4.5.4 Compensation, benefits and work

Lantmännen offer benefits according to average standards where most of the employees can control their own working hours and get wellness contributions (per. com., Ritter, 2014). The union agreement also includes many benefits and also decides how the salary should be divided. This category also includes job assignments and how work should be experienced at Lantmännen. According to the EVP work should be meaningful and challenging. The salary

development and system for rewards is based on performance and the payment policy stresses that salary should drive performance.

5 Analysis and discussion

This chapter presents the empirical findings compared with the theories found in the third chapter *Theoretical Framework* as visualized in the theoretical framework. The chapter is structured by the themes from the theoretical chapter. Initially the analysis of the focus groups and the survey is presented and applied on the concepts of employer branding. Thereafter organizational culture and the empirical findings of the interviews are analyzed. The third section analyze the five elements of the EVP compared with the results of the focus group and the survey, and the fourth section aims at a summary of the empirical findings related to the theories. Through the discussion, each of the two research questions are answered; *How is employer attractiveness determined in the eyes of agricultural university students. Followed by how a company within the agricultural industry engages in employer branding activities.*

5.1 Employer branding activities

In this section the findings of the focus group discussions and the empirical data of the interviews at the case company are compared with the theories of employer branding, illustrated in the first box of the conceptual framework in 3.5. As the various definitions in 3.2.1 states employer branding concerns all activities promoting the benefits of a company as a desirable employer (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Barrow and Ambler, 1996). According to the theories the concept employer brand is grounded on the perspective of considering people as the key for competitive advantage and that human capital brings value to the firm (Berthon *et al*., 2005; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The theory is confirmed by the case company with the aim of the employer branding work to ensure the supply of competence in the organization which also agrees with the long term strategy of Christiaans (2012). Barney *et al.,* (1991) argued that the competitive advantage for a company is the assets that are hard to substitute and which cannot be imitated by others, such as knowledge.

The communication channels for employer branding are widespread through activities such as; the graduate trainee program, lunch lectures, guest speakers, career fairs, summer internship and mentoring program. The employer brand is also communicated by student magazines, newspaper advertisements, career portals, job advertisements, talent networks and inviting students to the office. By engaging in all of the above activities the six recommendations by Wilden *et al*., (2010) in 3.2.2 are fulfilled. The students and the case company seems to agree on the mentor program being the most successful employer branding activity although the students also value visits at the office and labor fair as preferred communication channels. To meet the preferences of the students the case company should continue to be visible in more than one communication channel and continuous contact with the students in all years of their program. Both the students and the case company aim for an offer that both parts benefit from, such as a case solution, which the case company offer but the students are still missing. Having representatives with connection to the agricultural education or career are agreed by both parts.

As Foster et al., (2010) states the employer brand is not only communicated by the brand as it self but by employees within the organization. According to the empirical findings the case company is dependent on its current employees to deliver the employer brand message. Communication plays an important role in in shaping applicants perceptions and understanding of the employer brand (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). Many of the students express media as shaping an image of the employer. Although, the major communication channel

students use to shape an image of an employer is by their personal network, many of them current or prior employees at the company. According to Barrow and Mosley (2011) credibility and trustworthiness are key concepts to successful employer brand communication. The result of the interviews states that the case company accounts for delivering a true and credible message delivered within the organization to avoid a promise that does not exist. Inviting students to the office is one part of delivering a true message but also, as stated in the interview, having the corporate values established by what represents the existing culture. This confirm further statements by Barrow and Mosley (2011); that the core value and identity of the organization is communicated, the employer brand message is focused on already existing benefits, avoidance of over exaggerated message and the brand credibility is ensured by the members within the organization. Communicate a true and transparent message is also confirmed to enhance trust with students. As expressed by the case company delivering a message that complies with reality and provides the applicants an accurate image of the organization result in that they will stay longer within the company.

As described in section 4.5 it is evident that the case company invests in its employer brand and is successful with reaching the benefits of such a work resulting in higher ranking, more applications with higher quality. According to the theories there are many benefits with a successful employer branding work such as less absenteeism, enhanced employee relations, higher profitability and lowering staff turnover (Barrow and Mosley, 2006; Parment and Dyhre, 2009; Berthon *et al*., 2005). One of the measurements used by the case company to ensure the employer branding work is delivering results is by employee turnover.

A firm's brand portfolio exists of brand levels such as corporate brand, employer brand or product and service brands (Keller, 1993). The case company has a broad brand portfolio due to wide business divisions and several product brands. To unite the brands the case company has put effort into a strategy of uniting the corporate brand with all of the product brands. According to Burmann *et al*. (2008) corporate brands are designed to provide a consistent brand image and to support the other brands within the portfolio. According to the empirical findings it is evident that the corporate brand, the product brand and the employer brand of the case company share characteristics such as down to earth and health.

For a company to distinguish they need to express the value that they offer employees grounded on corporate culture, image of current employees, management style and impression of products (Sullivan, 2002). One part of the employer branding process of the case company is to communicate a customized message based on reports of the attributes that attracts the target group. Although, the values, which are established on the corporate culture, are always communicated in the same way. To include information about the target group is according to the theories one step of successful employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Barrow & Mosley, 2006; Parment & Dyhre, 2009).

5.2 Organizational culture

According to the result of the survey organizational culture scored as one of the most attractive attributes of an employer. The EVP and employer brand is based on the corporate culture (Dyhre and Parment, 2013). According to the empirical findings the case company did extensive work when creating the organizational values established in the actual behavior within the organization. Organizational culture refers to how people within the organization think, feel, value and act guided by the ideas, meanings and beliefs of the culture they are a part of (Schein, 1990). The theory confirms the empirical finding with the aim of the EVP and

the guiding stars of the case company are to guide the behavior of the employees. The guiding stars explain the organizations vision of leadership while the EVP explain the meanings and values of work. Clearly stated in the EVP are the typical characteristics of employees which also lines with the theory of Schein, (1990). Organizational culture also refers to how knowledge is shared within the organization. The interviews at the case company revealed a culture with open doors where employees share knowledge with each other.

According to Dyhre and Parment (2013), a convincing employer brand should be grounded on what can truly be delivered. This is confirmed by the case company who emphasize during the interviews that not to promise something that cannot be found within the organization. Schein (1990) stress that the behavior of leaders is a powerful tool to express culture. This is also expressed by some of the students who described the managers' role as determining wellbeing at work but also influence the corporate culture. The values at the case company where not just empty words on a paper rather explained in a context relevant in the everyday life at work within the organization. Openness was an attribute highly valued by the students and also reflecting the actual culture according to the employees at the case company. Another attribute attractive to the students were a meaningful business which was closely linked to the value holistic view that aimed at the responsibility from farm to fork.

5.3 The five elements of employee value proposition

The result from the empirical material of the case company and the attributes valued by students are in this chapter compared with the theory of EVP. Successful employer brands are characterized by having a value proposition that is relevant to their potential and current employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). For the EVP to be attractive knowledge of the desired attributes of the target group is essential. The focus group interviews and the survey revealed the most attractive attributes valued by agricultural students. To be true is one of the main attributes of an EVP, the interviews at the case company are truths from the employees within the organization and many of these answers correlates with the statements in the EVP of the case company (Parment and Dyhre, 2009; Wilden *et al*., 2010; James and Bibb, 2010). The empirical results will be analyzed according to the theories states that an EVP contains five elements (Botha et al., 2010; Browne, 2012). Figure 14 on the next page illustrates an adapted EVP applied with the attributes valued by the students. The attributes from the survey are implemented in each theme of the traditional EVP model. Each attribute is numbered with the score from the survey.

Figure 14. Adapted employee value proposition (based on Kunkle and Sorensen, 2009, p 16).

Figure 14 illustrates the Kunkle and Sorensens (2009) EVP model implemented with the attributes valued by the students in the focus groups. The figure shows the attributes valued by students within the EVP theme. The survey score of each attribute is shown in numbers. This section of the report is structured by the five elements of an EVP. The empirical findings from the prior chapter are analyzed and themed by the same categories as shown in the figure. The framework determines how the employer can engage, retain and attract employees by enable understanding of the most valuable attributes and rewards. With that knowledge employers can develop a customized employee value proposition. As explained in chapter 3, the elements summarize the benefits applicants will get from joining an organization (Botha *et al*., 2011; Browne, 2012).

5.3.1 Affiliation

The work environment and affiliation refers to the feeling of belongingness with the organization including, values, culture, colleagues, managers and leaders. Figure 11 illustrates the result of the survey within the theme affiliation. The results of the survey show the most important attributes regarding affiliation in the EVP model by (Kunkle and Sorensen, 2009) are; leadership, organizational culture and relationship with colleagues. The result of the survey confirm the discussions in the focus groups were all these attributes were most discussed, although reputation and ranking have a higher score in the survey than what was discussed during the focus groups where values took a larger space in the discussions.

Michaels *et al*. (2001) states that a good relationship with co-workers who share knowledge is a valuable asset for the company. Having a good relationship with colleagues were emphasized by the majority of the students and also confirmed by the survey results.

According to the students the reason for a good relationship with colleagues is not only for well-being but also for having someone to address with questions. The relationship with colleagues were also confirmed by the interviews at Lantmännen were colleagues were describes as sharing an interest in the business and also sharing knowledge with each other. Learning and development between colleagues is confirmed to be an important part of the organization (Wilden *et al*., 2010; Botha *et al*., 2011). In the employee value proposition of the case company several of the characteristics that described the employees at Lantmännen were found such as; down to earth, interest in the business and proudness of the brand.

Many of the students make a perception of the company by personal network. This confirms James and Bibb (2010) statement that colleagues are a valuable part of an EVP. Moreover, the students shape an image of the employer by their experience at the interview. This confirms the statement by Parment and Dyhre (2009) to ensure the EVP is delivered by the behaviors and actions of employees. Some students have a misbelief in corporate values although the interviews at the case company revealed the corporate values to be grounded on the actual behavior within the organization. According to the students a good relationship with managers and colleagues determine how long they will stay within the company and also enhance work motivation. Another benefit of good work relationship discussed by the students is enhanced loyalty. This agrees with the theory by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004). According to the students leadership shape the organization culture.

5.3.2 Work content

Work content motivates the employee to do her work task, not only to have a challenging work but also includes work life balance. According to the survey feedback, impact on job assignments and variety in job assignments were the most valuable attributes by the students. The result of the survey confirms what was frequently discussed in the focus groups of feedback being an important part of personal development and the characteristics of a successful manager. Varying work assignments were also mentioned as one of the most important job attributes by one of the interviewee. This agrees to the statement by Michael *et al.* (2010) of interesting, challenging and freedom in job assignments being an important part of the EVP. Feedback was also shown in the empirical findings of being a part of the organization culture at the case company.

Discussed by most of the focus groups were the freedom of work and high grade of control of job assignments were experienced as something negative. The students anticipate freedom of being able to prioritize the job assignments individually. This confirms the statement by Michael *et al*. (2010) and was also shown in the empirical findings of the case company. At Lantmännen the freedom of work assignments are experienced by many colleagues but depend on the type of position. According to the EVP of the case company most of all work at Lantmännen should feel meaningful and challenging. This is agreed by the students where "making a difference" was an important part of work and was discussed in many of the focus groups and that work is considered to be a great part of life and it is important for the students to feel appreciated at work. Proudness of the products is expressed at the interviews and in the EVP of the case company. This is in line with the students considering congruence of values as important and meaningful job assignments.

5.3.3 Career

Career includes the development possibilities such as provided training to reach another title or personal growth. According to the survey personal development and career advancement are the most desired attributes regarding career. The result of the survey is confirmed by the

empirical findings of the focus group discussions. The majority of the students' value career opportunities and a plan for personal development as the most important attribute of an employer. This confirms the theory stating one of the most important aspects of an EVP being career development (Browne, 2012). A good reference for future career was also discussed. Career was not only experienced as reaching a higher position, rather new responsibilities within the company. The opportunity to change business areas without changing employer is expressed in the EVP of the case company.

According to the empirical findings of the case company individual development and career opportunities are valued within the organization. The case company invests in learning and development for its employees by several competences development programs. The importance of employee development is also shown in the EVP by the guiding stars for leadership. Each employee gets a development plan discussed with the manager. This confirms the demand by the students of personal development plan and close relationship with manager. The case company encourages internal movement which could affect the recruitment possibilities demanded by the students. The online educational portal provides the employees with training which is also valued by the students.

5.3.4 Benefits

Benefits refer to the nonfinancial rewards such as vacation and health care. The result of the survey reveals holiday as the most valuable attribute regarding benefits followed by health benefits. The benefits were not a highly discussed topic during the focus groups. One reason for the subject being less discussed is the statement by one participant that benefits were taken for granted. Health benefits such as being able to work out during working hours were mentioned by a couple of participants. The empirical findings of the case company revealed health is promoted by the organization with health initiatives, healthcare contributions and gym at some locations. Some of the students valued social activities with colleagues as an attractive attribute, according to Browne (2012) social activities at work may correlate with lower absence leave.

5.3.5 Pay

Pay refers to the monetary compensation for the work such as salary. According to the results of the survey salary development and bonus systems are the most attractive attributes for the students. Having a salary development is also considered to be more important than the level of the starting salary. The salary development at the case company depends on performance. A system of rewards based on performance is considered to be positive for many of the students. According to the empirical findings, the pay benefits at the case company are considered to be at average standards and also include the benefits from the union agreement. The market based compensation and benefits are stated in the EVP of the case company. Average compensation agrees with the theories arguing above average salary does not enhance perception of the company (Pfeffer, 1998; Chambers *et al*., 1998; Michaels *et al*., 2001; Browne 2012). Some students were willing to accept a lower salary in exchange for other attributes such as career possibilities. This confirms the theory by James and Bibb (2010) that applicants will accept a lower salary with an attractive employer. Moreover this can confirm the statement by Browne (2012) and James and Bibb (2010) that successful employer branding work may reduce the cost of new hire.

5.4 Employer attractiveness

According to the theory employer attractiveness is determined by the correlation of the attributes desired by the target group and the offer given in the EVP (Christiaans, 2012). As seen in the prior section employer attractiveness is achieved in areas where the students' value attributes that are offered in the case company's EVP. According to Gatewood *et al*. (1993) and Turban and Greening (1997) employer image affects the attractiveness of the organization and at the early stage of the decision process the perceived image of the organization decides whether or not it can be an attractive employer. This approves with the statements by the students who get the perceived image by their personal network and the impression at the interview.

According to the conceptual framework by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) illustrated in figure 15 the different concepts of employer branding all connects to each other. The theory behind the conceptual framework can be put in the context of the empirical findings of the case company.

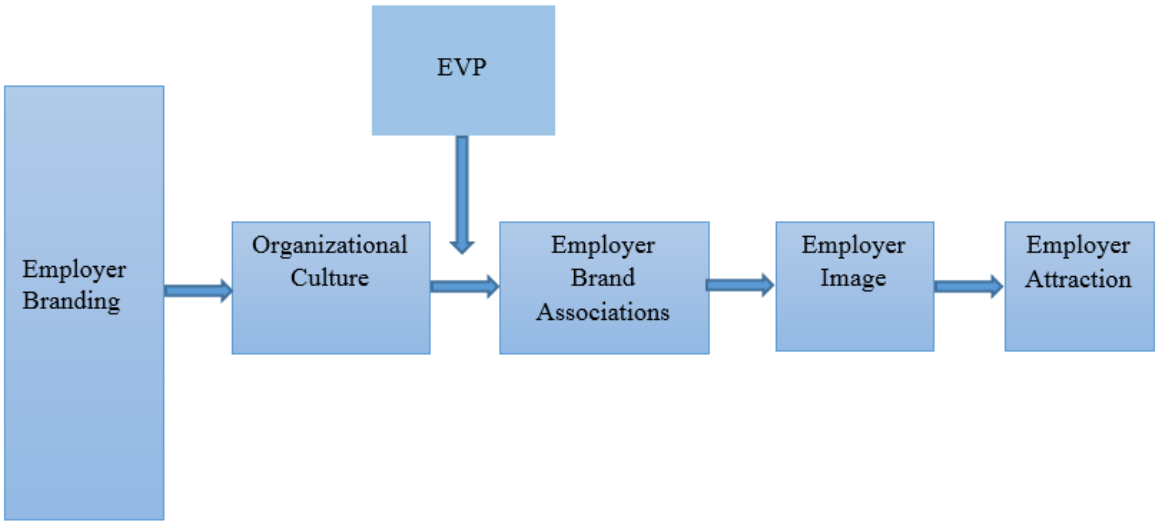

Figure 15. Adapted conceptual framework of employer branding (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p 505).

Employer branding concern all activities performed by the case company to communicate its employer brand. The EVP of the case company is based on the existing values within the organizational culture to be true and realistic to the stakeholders. Analysis of the organizations' values and culture and then converting the organizational attributes approves with the recommended first step to create an EVP by Dyhre and Parment (2013). Further on the authors recommend these attributes to decide the employer branding strategies which can be compared to the action by the employer branding manager of the case company customizing the communicated attributes depending on the target group. The knowledge about the EVP result in development of employer brand associations and employer brand image, given a positive image the corporation will be seen as an attractive employer (Chhabra & Sharma 2014).

As recommended by Rynes (1991) and Lievens *et al*. (2001) organizational criteria that influence applicants should be visible early in the decision process. This is also valued by the students who value contact with the employer early in the educational program. The second criteria by the authors concerns these attributes to signal the culture and values of the

organization which can be compared to the empirical findings in the focus group discussions where culture and congruence of values were frequently discussed. The third criterion recommended by the authors refers to differing the value from competitors. Differentiating the employer brand within the agricultural industry can be challenging, hence according to the empirical findings the case company use some organizational attributes to differ from its competitors.

6 Conclusions and future research

The last chapter of this study addresses the aim of the report; *to identify factors that determine the attractiveness of a company as a future employer in the eyes of students at the Swedish University of Agricultural Science, SLU.* The creation of this report begins with the theoretical field of brands and the theory that companies have increased interest in investing in their brand portfolio due to insight to the value added by the brand. Applying the theory of using brands to differentiate products onto differentiates people and firms gave birth to the concept of employer branding (Barrow and Mosley, 2011). The key concept of *employer branding* is based on the idea of *resource-based view* of valuing people as the competitive advantage of a firm (Berthon *et al*., 2005). These ideas suggest that firms can benefit competitive advantages such as greater employee motivation and production, less retention and enhanced employee attraction by investing in an employer brand (Parment and Dyhre, 2013).

The empirical result of this report show that the company within the agricultural industry, such as Lantmännen, is aware of the competitive advantage of the *resource-based view* (viewing people as a competitive advantage) and the benefits that can be reached by having an attractive employer brand. Furthermore, it is accepted that an *employee value proposition* is a key step to be successful with employer branding. The motive for Lantmännen to engage in employer branding is to ensure the supply of competence within the organization. However, the representatives from the case company have realized that in order for the EVP to be successful it had to be true and attractive (Berthon *et al*., 2005). In order to be able to communicate the truth, the EVP is based on the *organizational values* and the attraction is reached by exploring the *valued attributes* by the target group (Barrow and Mosley, 2011).

The strategy of engaging in employer branding activities is to reach the students by different communication channels. To enhance the relationship with students the case company invite students to the office, visit them at the university and offer internship, mentor program and trainee. Knowledge of that students with different educational background are attracted by different organizational attributes made it clear to reach information about the attributes valued by each target group to be able to customize the communicated message in the EVP (Dyhre and Parment, 2009). Although, the case company was aware of the added value by having a customized message and therefore used reports to get information about each target group, the attributes valued by agricultural students was something that not yet had been found.

The two research questions of this thesis were raised in order to clarify the aim. The first question was; *how is employer attractiveness determined in the eyes of agricultural university students.* The result of the focus group discussions and the survey revealed the valued attributes in a future employer that were most desired by the students. Shown in the figure 17 on the next page are the attributes that determine employer attractiveness in the eyes of agricultural students.

Figure 16. Result: Attributes valued by agricultural students that determines employer attractiveness (Own processing).

The figure shows that the most valued attributes to determine employer attractiveness are: development possibilities, job assignments, salary and culture. When looking at these preferred attributes it is important to have in mind that even if this is valued by the majority of the target group every person is unique and there is no general solution to attract all types of agricultural students. Hence, the EVP has to be differentiated and true and each company has to create and communicate its message based upon what can actually be delivered within the organizational culture.

The analysis and the discussion in the prior chapter have contributed with ideas for further research regarding the ideal future employer for students and how a company can engage in employer branding. The second research question regards *how does a company within the agricultural industry engage in employer branding.* The case company invests in its employer brand and engage in several employer branding activities such as lunch lectures, career fairs and guest speakers. The graduate trainee program, summer internship and the new initiative mentor program are all activities that gives the students a concrete offer and an opportunity to experience the corporate culture although some students experience a lack of junior job offers from the case company. Evaluation of these programs would be an interesting case for further research, such as the development and follow up of prior trainees with an analysis of the contract theory of the congruence of the communicated message and the real life experience. The employer branding activities are to some point manifested within the EVP of Lantmännens and apparent during the interviews with the representatives from the organization. To get a complete answer to this question a suggestion for further research would be to investigate in the internal employer branding to compare the EVP to the existing culture and the values of existing employees. An investigation of internal employer branding can be valuable since the existing employees act as ambassadeurs for the organization.

The customized message of the EVP depends on the different preferred attributes of students with different educational backgrounds. This report focus only on the attributes preferred by agricultural students and contributes with information a new target group. Hence an in-depth study of how the values differ between all educational backgrounds could be of interest. While this report focus on the external employer branding an EVP can be of use for internal employer branding with a focus on existing employees. A future study of the internal employer branding of the case company could be of future interest. The case company of this

report acts within the agricultural industry where other companies within the same industry might have similar messages in their EVP. One part of the EVP is to differentiate from competitors therefore a comparison of different employee value propositions by companies within the agricultural industry could be interesting. During this thesis project it has come to my knowledge that a governmental report about actions to strengthen the position for the agricultural industry as a competitive actor on the job market. The governemental report would be a highly interesting topic to look into for further research.

Bibliography

Literature and publications

Aaker, D. A. (2009). *Managing Brand Equity*. Simon and Schuster. ISBN 9781439188385.

Agrawal, R. K. & Swaroop, P. (2011). Building Employer Brand Image through Early Recruitment Practices: A Study in Indian Context. *Asia Pacific Business Review* 7(2), 160–169.

Alvesson, M. (2002). *Understanding organizational culture*. London: SAGE. ISBN 0761970053.

Ambler, T. & Barrow, S. (1996). *The Employer Brand*. London Business School, Centre for Marketing.

Backhaus, K. & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International* 9(5), 501–517.

Balmer, J. M. T. & Gray, E. R. (2003). Corporate brands: what are they? What of them? *European Journal of Marketing* 37(7/8), 972–997.

Barney, J., Wright, M. & Ketchen, D. J. (2001). The resource-based view of the firm: Ten years after 1991. *Journal of Management* 27(6), 625–641.

Barrow, S. & Mosley, R. (2011). *The Employer Brand: Bringing the Best of Brand Management to People at Work*. John Wiley & Sons. ISBN 9781119995548.

Berthon, P., Ewing, M. & Hah, L. L. (2005). Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *International journal of advertising* 24(2), 151–172.

Biswas, M. & Suar, D. (2013). Which Employees' Values Matter Most in the Creation of Employer Branding? *Journal of Marketing Development & Competitiveness* [online], 7(1). Available from: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrnl=21552843&AN=89904024&h=wJzmJWQ2x9D1tH0TVm%2BndwNlI3dVQOQBwhgz4zxyzByg0kZIQZi6e4rZT8klDKkhpP0E3ieY%2F5ucmKfOdfTkNA%3D%3D&crl=c. [Accessed 2014-02-24].

Botha, A., Bussin, M. & De Swardt, L. (2011). An employer brand predictive model for talent attraction and retention. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* [online], 9(1). Available from: http://www.sajhrm.co.za/index.php/sajhrm/article/view/388. [Accessed 2014-05-13].

Brodie, R. J., Coviello, N. E., Brookes, R. W. & Little, V. (1997). Towards a paradigm shift in marketing? An examination of current marketing practices. *Journal of Marketing Management* 13(5), 383–406.

Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2011). *Business Research Methods 3e*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780199583409.

Burmann, C., Schaefer, K. & Maloney, P. (2008). Industry image: Its impact on the brand image of potential employees. *Journal of Brand Management* 15(3), 157–176.

Cable, D. M. & Turban, D. B. (2003). The Value of Organizational Reputation in the Recruitment Context: A Brand-Equity Perspective. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 33(11), 2244–2266.

Christiaans, L. (2012). *International Employer Brand Management: A Multilevel Analysis and Segmentation of Students' Preferences*. Springer.

Dyhre, A. & Parment, A. (2013). *Employer branding: allt du behöver veta för att bli en attraktiv arbetsgivare*. 1. uppl. Malmö: Liber. ISBN 9789147111022.

Eiriz, V. & Wilson, D. (2006). Research in relationship marketing: antecedents, traditions and integration. *European Journal of Marketing* 40(3/4), 275–291.

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of management review* 14(4), 532–550.
Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(2), 219–245.
Foster, C., Punjaisri, K. & Cheng, R. (2010). Exploring the relationship between corporate, internal and employer branding. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 19(6), 401–409.
Gummesson, E. (2006). Qualitative research in management: addressing complexity, context and persona. *Management Decision* 44(2), 167–179.
James, J. & Bibb, S. (2010). Employee Value Proposition (EVP).
Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing* 57(1), 1–22.
Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. (2010). *Principles of Marketing*. Pearson Education. ISBN 9780137006694.
Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Moderating Focus Groups*. SAGE Publications. ISBN 9780761908210.
Krueger, R. A. & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. SAGE Publications. ISBN 9780761920717.
Kunkle, T. & Sorensen, A. (2008). Talking about my generation. *Employee Benefit News* 22(11), 20.
Lemmink, J., Schuijf, A. & Streukens, S. (2003). The role of corporate image and company employment image in explaining application intentions. *Journal of Economic Psychology* 24(1), 1–15.
Lievens, F., Decaesteker, C., Coetsier, P. & Geirnaert, J. (2001). Organizational attractiveness for prospective applicants: A person–organisation fit perspective. *Applied Psychology* 50(1), 30–51.
Lievens, F. & Highhouse, S. (2003). The relation of instrumental and symbolic attributes to a company's attractiveness as an employer. *Personnel Psychology* 56(1), 75–102.
Lievens, F., Van Hoye, G. & Anseel, F. (2007). Organizational Identity and Employer Image: Towards a Unifying Framework. *British Journal of Management* 18(s1), S45–S59.
Maxwell, R. & Knox, S. (2009). Motivating employees to "live the brand": a comparative case study of employer brand attractiveness within the firm. *Journal of Marketing Management* 25(9-10), 893–907.
Minchington, B. (2005). Your most important employer brand asset - your EVP.
Morgan, D. L. (2004). „Focus Groups ". *Approaches to Qualitative Research. Ed. P. Hesse-Biber, SN, Leavy* 263–285.
Moroko, L. & Uncles, M. D. (2008). Characteristics of successful employer brands. *Journal of Brand Management* 16(3), 160–175.
Mosley, R. W. (2007). Customer experience, organisational culture and the employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management* 15(2), 123–134.
Muscalu, E. & Stanit, A. (2012). Successful brands or the key to success. *Review of General Management* 16(2), 215–225.
Ng, E. S. W. & Burke, R. J. (2006). The next generation at work – business students' views, values and job search strategy: Implications for universities and employers. *Education + Training* 48(7), 478–492.
Ng, E. S. W., Schweitzer, L. & Lyons, S. T. (2010). New Generation, Great Expectations: A Field Study of the Millennial Generation. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 25(2), 281–292.
Parment, A. & Dyhre, A. (2009). *Sustainable employer branding: guidelines, worktools and best practices*. 1. [uppl.]. Malmö: Liber. ISBN 9789147090518.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. 2. ed. Oxford: Blackwell. ISBN 063121304X.
Rynes, S. L., Bretz, R. D. & Gerhart, B. (1991). The importance of recruitment in job choice: A different way of looking. *Personnel Psychology* 44(3), 487–521.
Schein, E. H. (1990). *Organizational culture.* [online]. American Psychological Association. Available from: http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/amp/45/2/109/. [Accessed 2014-03-12].
Sochart, S.Employee value propositions: a key marketing tool for talent management. *Brand learning* 2009.
Trank, C. Q., Rynes, S. L. & Bretz Jr, R. D. (2002). Attracting applicants in the war for talent: Differences in work preferences among high achievers. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 16(3), 331–345.
Turban, D. B. & Greening, D. W. (1997). Corporate Social Performance and Organizational Attractiveness to Prospective Employees. *The Academy of Management Journal* 40(3), 658–672.
Verner, M. E. & Gilbert, J. A. (2006). Focus Groups: Before Writing a Grant, Know Your Constituents' Needs and Desires. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* 77(9), 46–51.
Whitney Gibson, J., Greenwood, R. A. & Murphy Jr, E. F. (2011). Generational differences in the workplace: Personal values, behaviors, and popular beliefs. *Journal of Diversity Management (JDM)* 4(3), 1–8.
Wibeck, V. *Fokusgrupper : om fokuserade gruppintervjuer som undersökningsmetod*. [online] (2000) (Adlibris). Available from: http://www.adlibris.com/bok/fokusgrupper-om-fokuserade-gruppintervjuer-som-undersokningsmetod-9789144058566. [Accessed 2014-04-08].
Wilden, R., Gudergan, S. & Lings, I. (2010). Employer branding: strategic implications for staff recruitment. *Journal of Marketing Management* 26(1-2), 56–73.
Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. SAGE. ISBN 9781412960991.

Internet

Drivhuset, rapport; attityder till eget företagande. 2014-03-10
http://drivhuset.se/sites/default/files/news/pdf_files/drivhuset_attityd12_13__0.pdf

Lantmännen, www.lantmannen.se
1. Organisation och verksamhet, 2014-02-27
http://lantmannen.se/omlantmannen/Om-Lantmannen/organisation/

Trendence, www.trendence.com
1. Company rankings

Universum global, www.universumglobal.com
1. The world's most attractive employers in 2013, 2014-03-04
http://universumglobal.com/ideal-employer-rankings/global-results/

Rapport Arbetsförmedlingen, generationsväxlingen 2010
http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.6880a4dd130790d556980003977/generationsvaxlingen_rapport.pdf

Rapport Arbetsförmedlingen, Arbetsmarknadsrapporten 2014

http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.75050d89144b969bc3a2fe8/Arbetsmarknadsrapport_2014.pdf

Appendix 1 - Discussion themes focus group

Intervjuguide fokusgrupper

Välkomna och stort tack för att ni ställer upp!

Intro om mig och studien och upplägget för den närmsta timmen.
Jag är en ekonomagronom som skriver min masteruppsats och skulle behöva er hjälp till den empiriska delen av uppsatsen som i mitt fall är fokusgrupper (en slags gruppintervju) med agronom- och lantmästarstudenter. Uppsatsen behandlar ämnet "employer branding" och syftar till att undersöka hur ett företag inom den gröna näringen kan stärka sitt arbetsgivarvarumärken gentemot lantbruksstudenter.
För att kunna stärka sin position som arbetsgivare är det relevant att veta vad målgruppen efterfrågar hos sin framtida arbetsgivare. För att ta reda på det gör jag gruppintervjuer med agronomstudenter från olika inriktningar där vi under ca en timme i grupp om ca fem personer diskuterar några förberedda ämnen kring vad du som student förväntar dig/efterfrågar av din framtida arbetsgivare. Gruppträffen kräver ingen speciell förberedelse, utan du deltar helt enkelt genom att dela med dig av dina åsikter. Inga namn kommer att synas i arbetet. Jag kommer att spela in diskussionen men kommer även att ta anteckningar.

Jag har några förberedda frågor men det är era diskussioner som är det intressanta och det finns inga rätt eller fel svar utan mitt intresse ligger i att höra era åsikter.

Introduktionsfrågor

1. Vad betyder employer branding för er?
2. Ni är i slutet på er utbildning, hur går ni tillväga när ni söker jobb?
3. Har ni varit på en arbetsplats där ni trivdes väldigt bra? Vad berodde det på?

Kärnfrågor

4. Nämn ett företag som du kan tänkas söka jobb hos, varför just det?
5. Samma jobb annonseras på 3 olika företag, vad avgör vilket jobb du tar?
6. Hur är din ideala/dröm arbetsgivare, en organisation som du helst skulle vilja arbeta för och varför just den?
7. Hur bildar du dig en uppfattning om företaget?
8. På tavlan, vänligen skriv upp de tre viktigaste faktorerna som avgör när du söker jobb.

Avlutande
Vi har pratat om hur er drömarbetsgivare är. Vilket kan summeras som följande…
Har vi fått med allt? Något ni vill utveckla?
Hur var det att delta i en fokusgrupp?
Har ni något tips till mig för nästa fokusgrupp?

Som avslutande uppgift vill jag be er att fylla i en enkät där jag ber er rangordna de viktigaste attributen för en arbetsgivare.

TACK FÖR ER MEDVERKAN!

Appendix 2 – Visualization of valued attributes

Appendix 3 – Survey

Uppföljningsenkät Fokusgrupper

Vi har under gruppintervjun diskuterat olika teman angående vad ni som studenter efterfrågar hos en framtida arbetsgivare. I denna enkät ber jag dig att rangordna de viktigaste faktorerna vid val av arbetsgivare.
Min studieinriktning:
Jag läser sista året på min utbildning: JA NEJ
När du väljer din framtida arbetsgivare, hur viktigt är följande faktorer? Rangordna från 1 – 5, där 1 är inte alls viktigt och 5 är mycket viktigt.

	1. Inte alls viktigt	2. Mindre viktigt	3. Varken/eller	4. Ganska viktigt	5. Mycket viktigt
Företagets värderingar					
Företagets rykte					
Ranking som populär arbetsgivare					
Välkända varumärken/produkter					
Arbetsmiljön på företaget					
Engagemang i CSR frågor					
Företagskulturen					
Relation med kollegor					
Ledarskap					
Varierande arbetsuppgifter					
Utmanande arbetsuppgifter					
Feedback på utfört arbetet					
Möjlighet att påverka dina arbetsuppgifter					
Balans mellan arbete och privatliv					
Karriärutveckling					
Personlig utveckling					
Vidareutbildning					
Internationella möjligheter					
Anställningstrygghet					
Hälsoförmåner					
Ledighet					
Ingångslön över medelsnitt					
Möjlighet till löneutveckling					
Belöningssystem (bonus, provision)					
Förmåner (tex. bil & telefon)					

TACK FÖR DIN MEDVERKAN!

Appendix 4 – Interview questions

Intervjuguide med Ritter & Aglöv

Introduktionsfrågor

1. Kan du berätta lite om ditt arbete som HR-konsult/employer branding ansvarig?
2. Hur länge har du arbetat på Lantmännen? Hur har din karriärväg sett ut?
3. Varför valde du Lantmännen som arbetsgivare, vad attraherade dig söka?
4. Vad uppskattar du med att arbeta på Lantmännen?

Arbetsmiljö/företagskultur

1. Hur upplever du Lantmännen som arbetsgivare, vad skiljer er från andra företag inom den gröna näringen?
2. Hur upplever du företagskulturen på Lantmännen? Hur kommer den till uttryck?
3. På vilket sätt används företagskulturen i er marknadsföring mot studenter?
4. Kan du berätta om Lantmännens värderingar (öppenhet, helhetssyn, handlingskraft) och ledstjärnor (will to win, involve & inspire, grow talent, develop yourself, be brave)?

Rekrytering

5. Hur ser rekryteringsbehovet ut på Lantmännen Lantbruk? Vad letar ni efter vid rekrytering? Vilken person vill ni ha?
6. Hur upplever du konkurrensen om arbetskraft inom lantbruksbranschen?
7. Vilka faktorer tror du är avgörande för studenter som söker jobb? Tror du det skiljer sig mellan lantbruksstudenter och övriga programstudenter?
8. Vad är en agronom för dig? Vad kan de bidra med på Lantmännen?
9. Vilka förväntningar har ni på en anställd?
10. Hur följer ni upp utvärdering av anställda?

Employer branding

11. Vad erbjuder Lantmännen för unikt till sina anställda?
12. Hur arbetar ni för att marknadsföra Lantmännen som arbetsgivare?
13. Vad gör ni idag för att attrahera studenter och lantbrukskompetens?
14. Vilka är de viktigaste punkterna ni vill nå ut med när ni kommunicerar med studenter? Hur vill ni uppfattas av studenter? Tror du att ni uppfattas så?
15. Finns det idag någon skillnad på hur ni kommunicerar ert arbetsgivarvarumärke mot olika grupper av studenter? Anpassar ni vad ni kommunicerar gentemot olika studentgrupper?
16. Vad är målet med Lantmännens employer branding arbete, vad vill ni uppnå?
17. Vilka fördelar ser du med att aktivt jobba med employer branding?
18. Grattis! Ni vann nyligen pris för årets mest talangfulla företag, vad tror du ligger bakom er framgång?

Arbetsuppgifter

19. I vilken grad har medarbetarna möjlighet att påverka sina arbetsuppgifter?

Karriär

20. Hur arbetar Lantmännen med karriärutveckling för sina medarbetare?
21. Vilka möjligheter finns för vidareutbildning?
22. Hur gör ni för att utveckla individer?
23. Vilken ledarskapskultur finns på Lantmännen?

Förmåner

24. Vilka förmåner erbjuder ni som arbetsgivare?

Lön (grund lön, bonus, provision)

25. Hur är Lantmännens lönenivå/löneutveckling?
26. Berätta lite om ert belöningssystem?

Appendix 5 - Litterature review of prior research

Author(s)	Type of study	Key findings
Trank *et al.* (2002)	Quantitative study involving 378 students within business and liberal arts.	High achieving students prefer interesting and challenging work compared to other students. Further, results show different preferences between students with high academic achievements and students with high social achievements.
Lemmink *et al.* (2003)	Quantitative study on 54 graduate business students	Corporate image and the employment image have positive effects on application intentions. Further, familiarity with the corporation influence intentions to apply.
Lievens and Highhouse (2003)	Quantitative study involving 124 bank employees and 275 graduate students	Instrumental-symbolic framework showed interfering traits between organization and individual affects the perceived organization attractiveness. Traits were also used to differentiate between employers.
Backhaus and Tikoo (2004)	Conceptual paper	Providing a framework to study employer branding based on resource-based view and brand equity.
Berthon *et al.* (2005)	Literature review and focus-groups with graduate and undergraduate students	Development of a scale to measure and identify the components of employer attractiveness.
Knox and Freeman (2006)	Quantitative study on 862 undergraduate students and 593 recruiters	Students' and recruiters' attributes of employer brand image show significant difference.
Lievens *et al.* (2007)	Quantitative study involving 258 military applicants and 179 army employees	Factors relating to organizational identity and employer image. Both symbolic and instrumental image predict attraction to the army. Further, outsiders' valuation of the organization is important for employees.
Burmann *et al.* (2008)	Quantitative study involving 3,368 highly qualified students	Potential employees determines corporate brand image by industry image. Knowledge and involvement in the specific organization moderates the determination.
Davies (2008)	Quantitative study involving 854 commercial managers	Measurement of employer brand associations. Satisfaction is determined by level of agreeability and perceived loyalty.
Edwards (2010)	Literature review	Includes a research stream to provide better understanding of employer branding, such as; organizational attractiveness, psychological contract, organizational identity and organizational identification.
Agrawal and Swaroop (2011)	Quantitative study on 124 business students in India	Role of early recruitment practices in building the employer brand image. Result shows publicity as the only early recruitment practice with impact on employer brand image.
Christiaans (2012)	Doctoral thesis - Multilevel analysis and literature review	Factors that determine employer attractiveness for diverse target groups and the influence of potential applicants' nationality. Differences found between students field of study, gender, academic achievement, age and country.
Biswas and Suar (2013)	Quantitative study on 413 current employees and potential employees	Which employees' values affects the employer branding most. Results revealed that, in order of priority, employees' social, interest, developmental and economic values affect the employer brand.