

THE DEATH OF THE CHAMELEON

Perspectives on employee experience and employer image



10
articles

23
interviewees

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Perspectives on employee experience and employer image



miltton

Helsinki, 2017

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Milton's sustainability survey, also covering employer branding
themes, was conducted in April 2017.

THE MILTON GROUP is Finland's leading communications agency group offering a complete range of marketing, communications and development services to its clients. The Milton Group consists of Milton Oy, Milton Networks, Milton Creative, Milton Nordics, Milton Labs, Milton Brussels, Milton Markets, Milton Purpose, Milton Sparks, and Nordic West Office.

Our mission is simple: we want to be the best agency for Nordic companies and brands as well as for international brands in the Nordics. Currently, this mission is being pursued by some 200 staff members. We are a Finnish company, independent of international chains. This enables us to pursue a growth-oriented strategy and develop business that responds to the needs of our customers.

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Introduction

EMPLOYER BRANDING IS ON THE RISE. From an area primarily associated with talent acquisition, employer branding has become highly relevant for business operations, leadership, and people development, as well as corporate communications and marketing. This is why we have devoted Milton's sixth Insights report to employer branding and its two cornerstones; employee experience and employer image.

The efforts on developing employer branding are also visible among the organizations interviewed for this report, many of whom are forerunners in the field in Finland and therefore singled out for inclusion in this report. Almost all of the companies interviewed have an employer value proposition or have defined key themes for their employer branding.

The companies interviewed use a broad spectrum of data and KPIs to measure success in employer branding, including both traditional people KPIs as well as communications and marketing KPIs. However, not many have an employer branding strategy in place – the focus is more on short-term plans and action. Among the companies interviewed, there is a strong wish to further develop employer branding, but the preparedness to invest money in the matter is somewhat more limited.

EMPLOYER BRANDING TARGET GROUPS have been defined as potential, current, and past employees. Interestingly enough, only a few companies in Finland, and also among the companies interviewed, have systematic and active alumni operations managed from a corporate level. Also, plans for securing consistency during the whole employee journey from recruitment to the alumni phase are not that common among the interviewees' organizations.

EMPLOYER BRANDING IS A CROSS-FUNCTIONAL FIELD. Among the organizations interviewed, some steer employer branding from HR, some from communications, some from both functions. Also, a few companies steer employer branding from management team level. The employee experience defines the credibility of the employer brand. In an increasingly transparent world a difference between the employee experience and the employer image will not be sustainable. Therefore leadership, HR practices and work climate need to be aligned with and developed alongside communications and marketing.

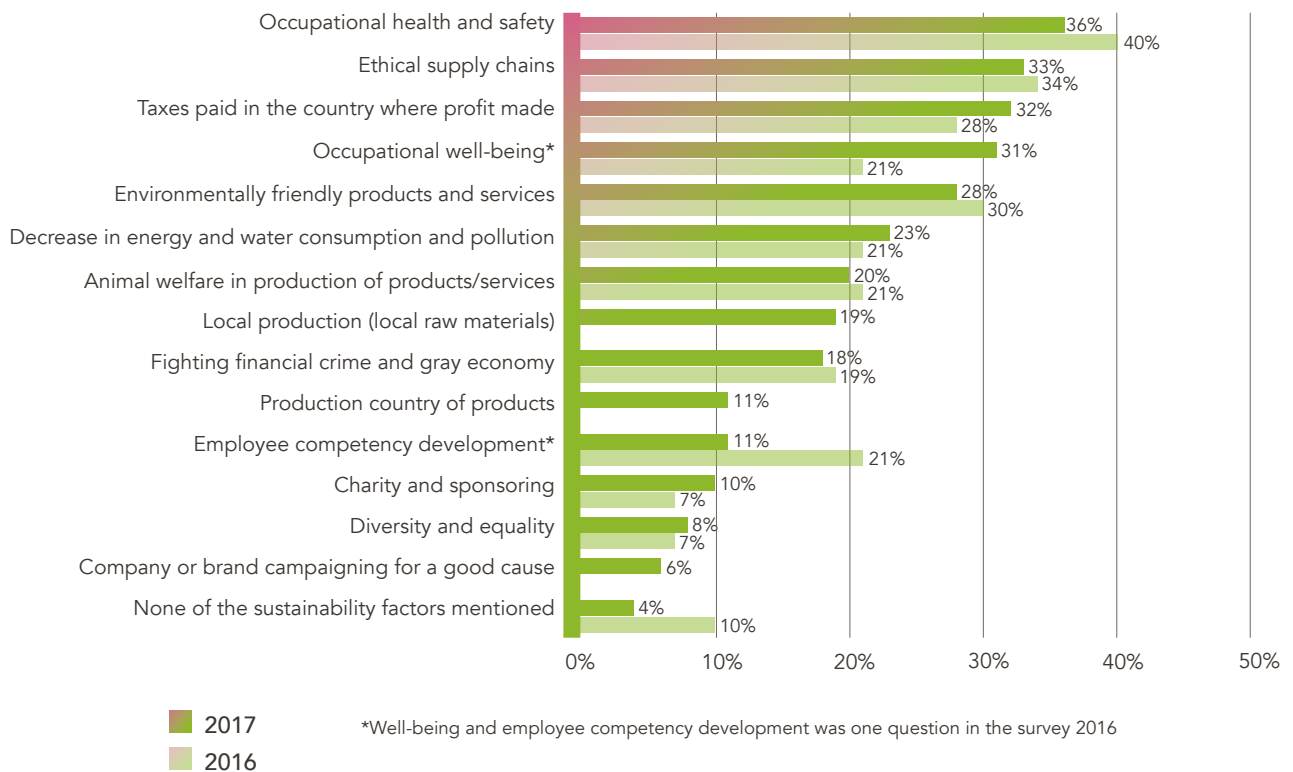
THE EMPLOYER BRAND IS AT THE CORE OF THE CORPORATE BRAND that positions the company not only against the competitors, but in society at large. Employer brand related themes also seem to be essential for a sustainable corporate brand. In April 2017, Milton conducted a sustainability survey together with the research service company Cint. Over 1,000 adults in Finland participated in the survey. When asked what factors were most relevant when evaluating a company's or a brand's sustainability, occupational health and safety was ranked as number one, followed by ethical supply chains and then taxes.

Sustainability is also considered essential when people assess companies as a current

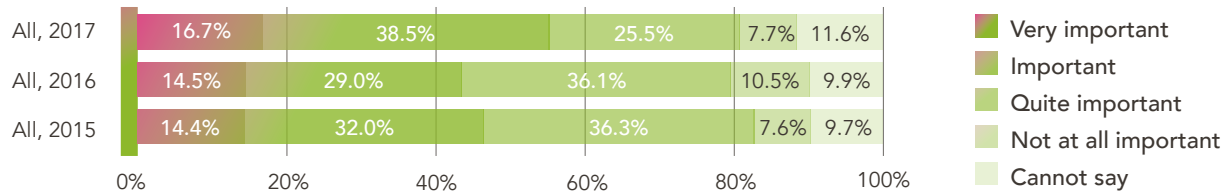
or potential employer. Women and younger people especially emphasize the importance of sustainability for the employer brand. Almost 60 percent of the women that participated in the survey found sustainability important or very important for the employer brand. Among 18–22-year-olds, more than 60 percent viewed sustainability as being important or very important when assessing an employer.

When asked what factors were most relevant for the sustainability of an employer, occupational well-being was considered the most relevant. Taxes, training and development, as well as leadership, were also seen as essential factors for a sustainable employer.

Which of the following sustainability factors are most important for you when assessing a company's or brand's sustainability?



How important is sustainability for you when assessing a company as a current or potential employer?



Which of the following factors impact most on the image of a sustainable employer?



Another survey conducted by Milton and Cint in spring 2017, on companies taking stands on societal issues, found this specific factor to be significant when surveyed on a stand-alone basis. Some 40 percent of the 1,000 respondents in Finland said it was important for them that the employer takes a stand on societal issues relevant for them when assessing a current or potential employer.

THIS INSIGHTS REPORT INCLUDES TEN ARTICLES on different employer branding related themes, which we have chosen based on the discussions we have had during the past years both with companies and organizations in the Nordics and with employer branding experts internationally. We have interviewed 23 influencers in employer branding to give nuanced perspectives on the themes covered. At the end of the report, we have included an analysis summing up Milton's view of the direction employer branding is heading.

Chapters 1–2 elaborate on the relationship between the internal and the external

employer brand as well as the relationship between the corporate, consumer and employer brand. Chapter 3 discusses the impact of employer branding. Chapters 4–5 concentrate on the beginning of the employee journey, including recruitment and onboarding. Chapters 6–9 focus on the engagement phase of the employee journey and cover areas such as agility, company culture development, diversity, and steering the employee experience through data. Finally, chapter 10 discusses networks and alumni operations.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE INTERVIEWEES for sharing both their valued insights and expert opinions and want to address our warmest thanks to them for contributing to this project. Our wish is that this report will provide inspiration for taking employer branding to the next level in the Nordics and thereby contribute to a more successful and sustainable working life. Enjoy the read!

Helsinki, August 2017

The team

THE JOURNEY



1. Perception is reality – the internal and external employer brand on display

Nina Lindqvist

A company's employer brand begins with the employees, who constitute the company's most powerful and organic brand ambassadors. In today's open society, transparency is a must, not an option, for companies wanting to stay on the forefront of employer branding and stakeholder relations more broadly.

"Employees seek to work for organizations just as customers seek to do business with them: when they feel that the organization offers what they desire." Uttered by renowned management scholars, **Edward Lawler** and **Christopher Worley**, these words perfectly encapsulate the necessity of a genuine and attractive employer brand.

The employer brand is usually considered to be twofold, consisting of the internal employer brand and the external employer brand. Traditionally thought of as closely aligned, if not inseparable, a distinction is often made in terms of the organic nature, or conversely, the communicational aspect, of the employer brand. The internal employer brand is considered to truly stem from within the corporate culture, whereas the external employer brand includes more of a marketing dimension.

Facing both sides of the employer brand are the challenges and opportunities brought on by a more transparent society. Companies navigating this operating environment find themselves in the spotlight more than ever before, thanks to a wide spectrum of social media platforms and channels.

Internal vs. external – can the two be separated?

Erja Vilja, HR Manager, Recruitment and Employer Branding, OP Group, says the company's employer brand is owned by all of its 12,000 employees.

"Our employer brand is important to us and an integral part of our whole company brand as an entity. It's very much on the strategic agenda, especially now when we are transforming from a financial service provider to an omnichannel service provider," Vilja says.

Vilja emphasizes that the internal employer brand is all about the personal experiences of the employees.

“The internal brand is very much about the employee experience; do we function internally according to the value base we have set for ourselves, is the management leading by example in a transparent and genuine way and are we delivering our promise of a great OP experience also to our own employees?”



Internal brand as a catalyst for positive business encounters

Vilja sees the external employer brand both as a strategic and organic extension of the internal employer brand.

“We have put emphasis on opening up our business more to existing and potential collaboration partners. In their interaction with partners, employees carry a significant role as ambassadors for the company. If employees are feeling satisfied at work through a positive employee experience, they can channel that message in different interactions and genuinely promote OP as an attractive collaboration partner, service provider, and employer,” Vilja states.

Pia Friberg is Director of Consultancy & Brand Communications, Wärtsilä. Friberg’s view of the internal and external employer brand goes hand in hand with Vilja’s interpretation: they need to be aligned closely for a company to succeed in its overall employer branding efforts.

“It’s not possible nowadays to really separate the two; it would be like living a double life. Trying to convey an external employer image without it having genuine proof points inside the organization simply wouldn’t work; our transparent world would burst a hole in that illusion very quickly,” Friberg says.

For Friberg, a company’s internal employer brand very much reflects the internal well-being of a company.

“It’s really our core; who we are, the feeling that we create within the organization.”

Friberg views a positive employer brand as a catalyst or positive influence on a company’s overall interaction in business relations and media relations.

“A positive employer brand, both internal and external, makes us desirable for external partners and stakeholders. With the pace of change so rapid in today’s society, we also need to stay up-to-date when it comes to our skills, and be able to attract the best talents and expertise. A good employer brand also builds internal pride within a company,” Friberg reflects.

A positive employer brand, both internal and external, makes us desirable for external partners and stakeholders. With the pace of change so rapid in today’s society, we also need to stay up-to-date when it comes to our skills, and be able to attract the best talents and expertise.
-Pia Friberg, Wärtsilä

PIA FRIBERG is the Director of Consultancy & Brand Communications at Wärtsilä Corporation. The global leader in advanced technologies and lifecycle solutions for the marine and energy markets has operations in over 200 locations in more than 70 countries around the world.

ERJA VILJA is the HR Manager of Recruitment and Employer Branding at the OP Financial Group. With around 3.9 million private customers and 440,000 corporate customers, OP Financial Group is Finland’s largest financial services group.



Transparency is something we have to adapt to in everyday operations, whilst also remembering that making mistakes is part of human nature; it's how we communicate about those errors that makes all the difference.

-Erja Vilja, OP

Transparency as a prerequisite

"Transparency is important for a company to succeed, be authentic and attract the best talent. It's not a choice anymore, it's a must," says Friberg.

Vilja concurs. The risk of exposure also sets today's standards of transparency.

"Transparency is something we have to adapt to in everyday operations, whilst also remembering that making mistakes is part of human nature; it's how we communicate about those errors that makes all the difference."

One example of OP's efforts to increase transparency and dive deeper into the company's employer brand, was the company's 'Value Roadshow', set up to reassess company values and test whether they were still viewed as valid and relevant cornerstones by employees.

"This was a way for us to engage our employees throughout the whole country and truly put our values to the test," explains Vilja. "What we found was that our values are very much still alive and considered important by our employees. It's all about being able to walk the talk; if we say that we are value-based, it's crucial that those values are thriving and vital also in our employees' minds."

Wärtsilä also has several functions in place to advance the transparency of their employer brand.

"We create a lot of content, for example for our internal online magazine, which nowadays is actually also open to external parties. Our content highlights different teams we have at Wärtsilä around the world and brings out the employee voice and unifies us as one company," Friberg reasons.

However, by being transparent, companies also expose themselves to a new level of scrutiny and public criticism.

"The positive aspect is that, by being transparent, we encourage instant and direct feedback, and can respond to criticism head on," Vilja notes.

From caution to craze: social media as a platform for employer branding

In terms of opening up the employee experience and internal employer brand, social media provides the ultimate tools for such exposure. Today, many companies encourage employees to share content from their daily work life. Companies enabling sharing amongst employees have also surfaced as a consequence, one example being Smarp, a Finnish company that has developed a tool to make sharing, and the rewarding of sharing, easy.

Vilja, however, remembers a time when the tone was the opposite, especially in the financial sector; new to the corporate scene, social media was considered more of a hindrance than an opportunity, met with great caution and skepticism.

“It’s only in the past 3–4 years that attitudes have really changed and taken a turn for the positive. We’ve taken huge steps in social media and corporate transparency,” she recalls.

Friberg concurs. *“I also remember the time when restrictions were the rule, rather than the exception. Going back maybe seven years, social media was met with great caution and you couldn’t even access certain sites from all our computers. Looking back, the change has been rapid; a couple of years later it became normal to utilize social media as a tool, as employers started to recognize the benefits of social media.”*

Both Vilja and Friberg emphasize the role of social media as an active venue for employer branding.

Vilja refers to OP’s Twitter account and the hashtag #pankielämä (the daily life of banking) as an example of such transparency. With over 23,000 followers and with daily tweets, the account provides insight into the everyday life of employees. OP has also given summer trainees the possibility to act as social media ambassadors, sharing their daily trainee life on Twitter and Snapchat.

“This way, our trainees with an interest in social media can share stories from their daily work. It’s also a platform for us to showcase that our trainees get to work with interesting cases and projects at OP,” Vilja stresses.

These days, OP has a free and lenient social media policy. Employees are free to share anything besides customer, or business-confidential, information.

Enhancing employee engagement with Wärtsilä 180° Radio

Wärtsilä’s most unconventional project to reach its employees around the globe is Wärtsilä 180° Radio, which rethinks old media formats and combines them in innovative corporate communications. With 90 percent employee-generated content, the broadcasts highlight Wärtsilä’s people, history, technology and news across the many disciplines and departments of the company. The radio website hosts broadcasts and contains interactive elements that enable employees to share content and get involved.

*“It’s a platform where we share interesting stories and both in-house and external expertise. We’ve had, for example, former President of Finland, **Martti Ahtisaari**, as a guest, since we work with his conflict resolution organization CMI. I view the radio as a way of building our employer brand both internally as well as externally,”* Friberg says.

Wärtsilä Radio is also presented in **Brett Minchington’s** book ‘Employer Brand Excellence, a case study approach, volume I’ together with many other international employer branding benchmarks.

“The biggest challenge we have faced in terms of transparency is the mindset change; this refers to the change in transparency within the corporate world, especially in terms of social media. How do we encourage employees a bit wary of social media to embrace using it as a tool to share their experiences at OP?” considers Vilja.

Wärtsilä has had a social media policy in place for many years. The policy emphasizes trusting employees and a common sense use of different platforms in line with company policies and client confidentiality.

“We use our channels to share different learning cases and open up the global Wärtsilä culture. Many of the photos we use on social media are employee-generated. We also use social media in our recruitment, now more actively than ever before.”

One example of Wärtsilä’s social media transparency, when it comes to employer branding, is Wärtsilä Voice, an initiative offering insight into Wärtsilä as an employer. The ‘Wärtsilä Voices’, all former summer trainees and current students at different schools around Finland, maintain an active Instagram account, as well as a blog, as part of the campaign. They also act as Wärtsilä ambassadors, through their social media presence and participation at recruitment fairs and other Wärtsilä events.

“Wärtsilä Voice is a way for our ‘Wärtsilä Voices’ to share their experience at Wärtsilä in a genuine, unfiltered way, and on platforms they feel comfortable using. The feedback we have received has been solely positive,” says Friberg.

Leaders, are you online already?

Brett Minchington, one of the world’s leading authorities on employer branding, views involving and engaging leaders in employer branding efforts as the key behind a successful employer brand strategy, stating; *“If you can’t engage leaders across the business in your strategy, it is likely to become a stand-alone project that receives little interest or investment by senior leadership.”*

OP’s CEO, **Reijo Karhinen**, is certainly a prime example of leadership embracing social media transparency as a platform for employer branding. Karhinen has become a social media presence to be reckoned with, with Vilja calling him ‘our biggest social media success story’.

“He is himself, and that is the secret behind his social media success. By communicating openly, personally, and transparently on social media, he encourages all our employees to do so as well.”

Friberg also considers Karhinen an encouraging presence on social media.

“As a manager, you need to be true to your word, and communicate as clearly and openly as possible. OP’s Karhinen is very active, and not afraid to take on difficult discussions and be vulnerable. The challenge for many seems to be how to strike the balance of being yourself and interesting without baring your entire soul and personal life,” reflects Friberg.



Internally, leadership will prevail as an important focus point in developing and improving internal well-being. Happy employees are likely to organically share their positive experiences to an outside audience, which again enhances the external employer brand.

-Pia Friberg, Wärtsilä

Future of employer branding: transparency and leadership

Companies today are removing layers to help deliver greater transparency and fluency.

“We’re moving more into a matrix style of leading and management and we have set out to make our leadership style a competitive advantage. Our leadership values need to be in line with our company values,” Vilja says.

According to her, an even more transparent future is on the horizon.

“It’s about a cultural evolution as well. Finns are more open in sharing these days, even if we are also a bit more cautious when it comes to which channel we use and why, since there are so many channels to choose from.”

Friberg foresees that leadership will continue to be central for employer branding.

“Internally, leadership will prevail as an important focus point in developing and improving internal well-being. Happy employees are likely to organically share their positive experiences to an outside audience, which again enhances the external employer brand,” she concludes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A company’s internal and external employer brand are tightly connected, if not the same; with transparency in the corporate limelight, the outside has to match the inside
- A successful internal employer brand, consisting of happy and satisfied employees, will organically lead to an improvement of the external brand, through genuine recommendations made by employees
- Transparent communications provides opportunities for building the employer brand and internal pride
- Social media can be a very useful and effective tool for a company wanting to showcase their employer brand and experiences
- In order to work properly, social media testimonials and employee-generated content needs to be authentic and organic. Employees may need encouragement and role models within the organization to find their own natural voice in the hectic space that is social media

2. The fading lines between corporate, consumer and employer brands

Petra Mursu

Corporate brand, consumer brand, employer brand, what's the difference? Branding professionals are getting ready to move the prefixes aside and focus on building just one common brand. But is the reality really that simple for all companies?

At the World Employer Branding Day 2017, **Lindsay Ross**, Head of Talent, Varova Group, challenged companies to rethink their employer branding and to stop separating branding into silos. She stated that as the consumer, employee and investor are all one and the same, there should be only one brand, one story – one seamless journey for that person going through all touch points.

A central driver in the merger of corporate, employer and consumer brands has been the increased transparency brought on by megatrends such as social media use. Maintaining an external brand that is different from the internal brand has become increasingly difficult as the control of messages has moved from companies to employees, consumers and media.

Eija Hakakari, Senior Vice President of People and Culture, Finnair, agrees. She sees that everyone flying with Finnair is also a potential employee, and vice versa. As target groups intertwine, so too do the different aspects of the Finnair brand.

“In my mind, an employer brand is something that is internally true and shows outside as the consumer brand,” states Hakakari.

During the past few years, Finnair has shifted its mindset from being a logistics company to that of a service company. The new company brand and strategy increased the need to also integrate employer and consumer brand management.

“If we want a certain type of customer experience, it has to be built internally. Our customer experience is based on a good people experience. How we work with our employees shows directly to our customers, as half of our employees – 2,500 people – are in customer contact every day,” Hakakari explains.

“The beauty of our company is that it is easy to get feedback from the customers. We should utilize it to determine what kind of training, coaching or leadership is needed to develop our services,” she continues.

Multi-brand companies looking for the common denominator

One integrated brand experience should indeed be the goal for service companies like Finnair, where all functions are under one brand name. But where does that leave companies with multiple consumer brands?

Nina Ariluoma, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Fiskars, does not see that their corporate, employer and consumer brands need to be equal.

“The way we see it, is that the Fiskars Group provides a platform that allows our brands to take the center stage and shine. The corporate branding focuses on the common denominators that bind us together,” Ariluoma says.

Fiskars’ brand portfolio includes six core brands, such as Fiskars, Iittala, Gerber and Wedgwood, along with additional regional brands. *“Our consumer brands are well known and loved, while the corporate brand is more relevant with other stakeholders, such as potential employees, and the finance community,”* explains Ariluoma.

According to Ariluoma, the reason behind this is Fiskars’ competitor field; small companies with premium or luxury products. These companies direct their resources towards building consumer brands that also spark the interest of potential employees. On the other hand, global giants of fast-moving consumer goods often choose to also emphasize the corporate brand. With hundreds of different daily consumer brands, it is more effective to build an attractive employer brand through the corporate brand.

From consumer to employee

Fiskars employees strongly relate to their consumer brands.

“That is our strength and we need to build on that. Because that awakes passion. That is one of the reasons why our employees have a high engagement. Our mission is to build iconic lifestyle brands, which is where our focus lies,” argues Ariluoma.



Consumer brands
create passion.
That emotion you
also want to spark
among employees.

-Nina Ariluoma,
Fiskars

NINA ARILUOMA is the Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Fiskars, a leading Finnish consumer goods company established in 1649. Today, Fiskars has around 8,500 employees around the world and holds a brand portfolio of internationally renowned brands including Fiskars, Gerber, Iittala, Royal Copenhagen, Waterford, and Wedgwood.

EIJA HAKAKARI is the Senior Vice President, People and Culture at Finnair, the flag carrier and largest airline of Finland. Finnair is one of Finland’s most recognized brands with nearly 11 million customers and 5,000 employees in 2016. The company doubled its turnover in 2016, and recruited hundreds of new employees.

For Finnair and Fiskars, the consumer brand is often the first touchpoint for potential employees. Ariluoma stresses that the link between the different consumer brands and the employing company has to be clear for consumers evolving into potential employees. The notion of one brand, one journey is therefore by no means obsolete in the world of Fiskars either.

Also, the company's consumer brands all represent similar values, such as high quality, innovation, and longevity. Fiskars has identified a need to also highlight the common ground internally; Fiskars has grown organically and through acquisitions. The employee experience has varied depending on the background and the brand. Recently, the company has been focusing on strengthening their internal employer brand.

"The question is: Why are all these brands in the same company? What is it that unites us?" Ariluoma asks.

The answers to these questions have been combined into a joint company story, values and ways of working.

"A common purpose, joint vision and values are fundamentally important as the basis for our employer brand. The purpose unites our brands, regardless of how different they may appear."

These fundamentals are only the first steps in the process, emphasizes Ariluoma. An employer value proposition, a strategy for employer brand development, and a road map for putting them into practice will be defined next. She explains that the focus is strongly on the internal actions before proceeding to external brand marketing.

"We need to be genuine when speaking to our existing employees or new people joining our team. We have started first with the Fiskars team."

Inside out, outside in

Both Ariluoma and Hakakari follow an inside-out approach in developing the employer brand. However, both maintain that a strong consumer brand helps build an inspiring employer brand.

"If they tell the same story, the consumer brand can strengthen the employer brand. I feel that our employees are proud to be working at Finnair, and our consumer brand and positive public image enforce that feeling," Hakakari says.

"Consumer brands create passion. That emotion you also want to spark among employees," Ariluoma agrees.

Using the momentum – case Finnair A350 fleet introduction

The introduction of the new Airbus A350 fleet was an important milestone for Finnair. Reaching a point where an investment of that size was possible had required a lot of sacrifices which had taken their toll on the company image. Media coverage had included mostly negatively themed stories for a long period of time. However, the arrival of the new fleet created a positive buzz in the media and was welcomed with excitement by the consumers.

Finnair employees soaked in the positive feedback.

"Getting feedback is like a gift – it helps you either to realize where you need to improve or to know that now you are on the right track. In this case, we saw we were doing something very right. That strengthened our self-esteem and was a huge boost to our culture."

Finnair further utilized the momentum with internal acts. Around 18 months before the arrival of the fleet, the company started to refine their values and build a new strategy. *"It had been a tough time for everybody in the company, and we needed something to bring us together for a new start. We utilized the time before the new planes to build our culture to set the base for growth,"* recalls Hakakari.

The positive developments were enforced by putting a lot of effort into trainings and discussion related to the A350s. Prior to launching the planes for commercial use, Finnair also introduced the fleet exclusively to its employees by flying a thousand of them to Rovaniemi to meet Santa Claus.

"I was flying with our CEO on all these four flights. It was instantly very visible that people were proud of what we had accomplished," Hakakari remembers. "It was a real party on a plane."

Fiskars enforces and amplifies that very emotion by furnishing their office spaces with company products to represent the local consumer brands and culture.

Externally, consumer marketing campaigns also impact the employer brand. As mentioned, the target groups cannot be fully separated. Fiskars utilizes the visibility and interest brought on by consumer brand marketing campaigns and synchronizes open recruitments to start at the same time.

“Interesting consumer brands bring content into your employer value proposition. At Fiskars, you get to work with around twenty different brands. This huge variety is a clear benefit and generates interest among professionals looking for global roles where they can grow,” Ariluoma points out.

A strong company or consumer brand can pose challenges for employer branding

Having a strong consumer or company brand also has its downsides with regards to employer branding. Strong brands are long-lasting, for better and for worse. For Finnair, the history of the company has seen its share of negative publicity, which is not easily lifted.

“People feel strongly about our brand. The challenge is that it requires long and systematic work to be able to change such an iconic brand,” Hakakari admits.

Well-known brands are also under public scrutiny. No piece of news is too small to cover.

“This kind of a brand is very vulnerable. If you don’t make the right calls when building your brand, it can be harmed very easily,” posits Hakakari.

Hakakari offers openness as a solution for also getting external stakeholders in on the journey and to accept the positive developments inside the company.

“We have a good story to tell. The change has been quite dramatic. We are now trying to be more explicit in also telling our internal story outside the company.”

The variety of strong consumer brands also contain challenges for Fiskars’ employer branding efforts.

“It is not easy to find the alignment across different brands and geographies. Finding the right balance between consumer brands and one common company and employer brand is the challenge,” considers Ariluoma.

For both companies, the keyword for successful employer branding, or purely branding, is *together*. Fiskars started their employer branding path by identifying what everyone at the company had in common. Likewise, at Finnair, the starting point for building the service culture and growth was to bring everyone together.

The new brands build from within, but collaboration is not limited to inside the company walls.

“I would like to build the brand more visible by working more with consumers and potential employees and invite them to develop our services. Bring people together,” envisions Hakakari.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- What is true internally will show externally, so focus firstly on securing a good employee experience
- Make sure to bring what unites your company into the company story, relevant and true to all internal stakeholders
- Every consumer is a potential employee and vice versa, so build all brand touch points to tell the same story
- Utilize strong consumer brands in fueling passion inside the company
- Prepare a systematic plan and reserve time and patience for developing your brand

3. Employer branding and the bottom line

Saara Bange

A solid employer brand is necessary to attract, recruit and retain the right people. Investing in the employer brand will help a company to attract the best talent, lower costs, and increase company revenue.

Both world leading authorities in employer brand management, **Brett Minchington** and **Richard Mosley** argue heavily for the employer brand's impact on the bottom line. Mosley maintains that the gains from investments in employer branding are cumulative, and seldom immediate. However, consistent and coherent employer branding initiatives will most definitely add up to a higher performance in the long term.

Minchington concurs and states that employer branding is much bigger than a stand-alone recruiting function. According to him, when implemented effectively, it can lead to transformational results. Minchington names companies such as L'Oréal, Sodexo, and UnitedHealth Group, who are now seeing the benefits of their investments in employer branding over the past 5–10 years.

Eija Hakakari, Senior Vice President, People and Culture, Finnair, offers a case in point:

“If we don't put effort into building the people experience and putting the right people in the right positions, we are not able to deliver a great customer experience, and if we are not able to do that, we won't see a positive impact on the bottom line. So, based on the evidence, making an effort internally and building a good customer experience from within, also leads to increased productivity.”

Yet, as Mosley argues, relatively few companies have systematically established business cases out of their employer branding initiatives.

A bad reputation increases recruitment costs

A recent study, published in the Harvard Business Review in 2016, found that companies with poor employer brands needed to offer at least a 10 per cent pay increase to convince a candidate to accept a job offer. In Milton's

sustainability survey, conducted in 2017 among 1,002 adults in Finland, over 37 percent of the interviewees said they would not take a job offer from an employer who was not acting responsibly, and an additional 21 percent said they would demand higher pay to work for such a company.

The biggest drawback of poor employer branding is the difficulty in recruiting a talented workforce. It is more expensive to recruit new people than to invest in developing the capabilities of the current ones.

“It is similar to customer relations: acquiring a new customer is costlier than making additional sales to an existing customer,” says **Berit Virtanen-Thewlis**, an experienced communication and HRD professional, and currently working as the Chief Marketing Officer at Claned, a company that offers cloud-based learning and collaboration platforms.

Companies perceived to be attractive employers will have an easier time recruiting talent that possess the right skills and attitude for the organization. According to Virtanen-Thewlis, the impact of employer branding investments is significant: it increases jobseeker consideration, reduces recruiting costs, and lowers employee turnover. Virtanen-Thewlis noticed this in her previous work as Senior Vice President, People & Culture at Kiosked, an international digital advertising company:

“The employees at Kiosked felt pride in working in the dynamic and growing company. And the message about the dynamic company culture had clearly also reached the people outside the company we wanted to reach. I noticed this in applications and when interviewing candidates. I even noticed that our message had reached the recruitment consultants that approached us. We really managed to find and recruit the experts most fitting our company, and that obviously was crucial for the success of the business.”

Kiosked invested primarily in the company culture. Recruitment messaging and other communication was based on word-of-mouth and referrals by current employees, Virtanen-Thewlis adds.



If we don't put effort into building the people experience and putting the right people in the right positions, we are not able to deliver a great customer experience, and if we are not able to do that, we won't see a positive impact on the bottom line.

-Eija Hakakari, Finnair

MERJA FISCHER is the Director of Robotics and Shared Service Centers at Staria Oyj, a software and financial service company that also offers a variety of Business Intelligence and Human Resource solutions. Fischer, a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering and Management, has a wide background in leadership development in several global companies.

EIJA HAKAKARI is the Senior Vice President, People and Culture at Finnair, the flag carrier of Finland. Finnair is one of Finland's most recognized brands with nearly 11 million customers and 5,000 employees in 2016. The company doubled its turnover in 2016, and recruited hundreds of new employees. Hakakari has a background in Human Resource Development (HRD) in local and global companies.

MATHIAS HÖGLUND is the Vice President, Organization and Talent Development at Cargotec Corporation, a leading global provider of cargo and load handling solutions. A Ph.D. in Economics, Höglund has an international background in both HR practice and research.

BERIT VIRTANEN-THEWLIS currently works as the Chief Marketing Officer at Claned Group. Claned is a Finnish company that has developed an innovative personalized online learning solution utilizing artificial intelligence and machine learning. Residing in the United States, Virtanen-Thewlis has a global career in both people and culture development, as well as in strategic communications and branding.

Unleashing the human potential

Merja Fischer, the Director of Robotics and Shared Service Centers at Staria Oyj, often works with many start-up companies that have a strong shareholder-oriented thinking. She wants companies to recognize how important employees are for increasing revenue and building a profitable business.

"People are not a cost, but an asset," she says.

In her PhD thesis, Fischer elaborates on the linkages between employee and customer experiences in B2B services. She claims that leaders have an important role in building an employee experience that has a positive impact on the customer experience.

"There is plenty of research on human potential," she says. "We underestimate our own potential. If leaders trust that their people have more potential, they can really unleash it by their own positive and encouraging behavior. And unleashing this potential that is hidden in every employee is the way to create a competitive advantage."

Fischer also emphasizes that leaders need to help their people to find their purpose at work. According to Fischer, it is vital to cultivate an emotional culture that fosters trust. The changes in the business performance might not be immediate, but they will follow. "The organizational climate and culture impact people's wellbeing and performance, and that really impacts the bottom line," says Fischer. "There is solid evidence to back this up, and I think this is a wake-up call to owners and leaders."



The organizational climate and culture impact people's well-being and performance, and that really impacts the bottom line.
-Merja Fischer, Staria

Moreover, if the external employer image does not match the actual employee experience, you might end up 'losing a lot of time and money', states **Mathias Höglund**, Vice President, Organization and Talent Development, Cargotec.

"If you hire someone and they have a bad experience, you probably did something wrong. It is visible both in how these people perform, and how they feel. To some extent, these usually go hand in hand. Losing or letting people go within the first year is obviously never ideal."

Data provides for measuring employer brand ROI

Minchington points out that data helps answer questions about the expected return on investment (ROI) of employer branding. ROI is also critical for getting company leaders to see the strategic nature and value of employer branding. Minchington also points out that cross-linking and merging data can highlight interesting relationships between, e.g., engagement, tenure and sales performance.

"An engagement score of 60 percent is only one number. Understanding that employee engagement has been shown to correlate with customer satisfaction and sales, and knowing which employer branding strategies to implement to drive employee engagement (to increase customer satisfaction and sales) is more likely to engage leadership to invest in employer branding than simply

reporting a set of disconnected metrics that have very little business impact or correlation with the bottom line or organizational objectives,” Minchington writes.

Cargotec tracks perceived business performance in terms of what teams themselves think about their own performance. Höglund adds that measuring performance by sales can be tough due to different market conditions and team roles.

“On the frontline, performance is easiest to link to customer service. If you want to link it straight to business performance, sales would be a good case in point. In that case, you might have to do a bit more work and choose your sample. And make sure you measure the performance against a standard, such as the budget, to be able to standardize it across the company,” says Höglund.

Make a business case

What kind of an argument has to be made for investing in strategic employer brand development? Justifying the investments internally becomes easier, if they link to company strategy and take the organization in the right direction: *“Make the investments reflect your plan and strategy, and make a business case out of them,”* advises Höglund.

Taken alone, metrics such as employee engagement, do not say much about the business impacts of employer branding investments.

“If you go out and buy a standard engagement survey just because you want to have it done, and are unable to link it to what you are doing internally in terms of strategy or business plan, then it becomes more difficult to justify it,” says Höglund. *“From a data perspective, I don’t think it is wasted, because you can use the data for a lot of things. But you always need to think of how things are perceived.”*

Establishing a causal link

Finnair has been able to establish a causal link between the employer branding investments and the financial success of the company.

“We measure the people experience every six months, and the results have been improving in all aspects. We are clearly taking positive steps. We have also witnessed better than ever results from our customer experience surveys,” Hakakari states. After a few difficult years, the airline company has yielded positive results and has also recruited hundreds of new employees. *“But the work together with our employees has to continue every day. This is just the beginning of our journey and the work should be strengthened continuously.”*

“The beauty of the journey is that while we have been concentrating on the people experience, we have been able to improve the customer experience, and increase our revenue,” adds Hakakari. *“It’s all about people and now, it starts to be visible. We can see signs of the efforts actually paying off!”*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A strong employer brand is built gradually, and the ROI will be built up cumulatively from different streams
- Employer brand investments support attracting the right talent to the company and decreasing recruitment costs
- Recruiting new people is usually more expensive than developing the capabilities of the current ones
- A strong employer brand has proven effects on the customer satisfaction and can increase sales
- If the external employer image is not in line with the internal employee experience, there is a risk that the company attracts the wrong types of candidate profiles, and the company might end up losing money



POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES

4. Recruiting and retaining expert level professionals

Salla Matilainen

Digitalization is a game-changer in employer branding. It completely changes recruitment as a process, and opens up an entirely new segment of employees who are harder to attract due to fierce competition and global access to candidates. Meanwhile, some argue that the role of traditional experts is also changing fast, and nearing that of leaders. The key to attracting the best talent is offering individual learning paths and building a collective company culture with a distinctive voice in society.

It has been predicted that in the next 10 years, the primary employer brand focus will shift from recruitment marketing to employee engagement and cultural competitive advantage. Current employees are seen as an even more vital part of recruitment marketing and for them to act as ambassadors, the employee experience is key.

As **Johanna Kurki**, F-Secure's Global Cyber Talent Acquisition & Employer Branding Lead puts it, *"When it comes to employer branding, the company culture needs to be in such a good shape internally that employer branding just happens, as employees want to tell the story forward."*

Recruitment is tough when talent is scarce

However, first you need to attract the right talent for your organization. While graduates are somewhat easy to recruit and the C-level professional recruits are primarily done through headhunters, what companies struggle with – if they indeed struggle – are the expert level professionals.

At KONE, a global leader in the elevator and escalator industry, recruiting experts, fortunately, has not generally been an issue.

"To attract experts, the key is to clearly define and lay out the potential learning paths. While many do not wish to become leaders of people, they are eager to become leaders of things," says **Kaija Bridger**, Head of Talent Management, KONE.

Bridger underlines that whether we are talking about traditional blue-collar or white-collar jobs, laying out learning paths and opportunities is equally essential.

“We need to do a better job at highlighting examples of climbing up the company ladder in our internal and external communication. In short, it is important to invest in people and build their expertise,” says Bridger.

At KONE, recruiting experts is particularly difficult when talking about relatively new fields, such as those now emerging as a result of digitalization. The competition for the often scarcely available best talent is fierce.

The global cyber security company F-Secure struggles with the same issue: while most positions in Finland are relatively easy to fill, technical positions pose a challenge everywhere, as the truly qualified expert hackers can globally be counted only in the hundreds. Kurki sees a clear correlation between brand recognition and how easy it is for companies to find the right talent.

“Recruiting success can be seen to vary almost geographically depending on brand value. A sales position may be difficult to fill in Germany, but easy in Finland, because we have a strong brand in Finland,” Kurki states.



Recruiting success can be seen to vary almost geographically depending on brand value. A sales position may be difficult to fill in Germany, but easy in Finland, because we have a strong brand in Finland.

-Johanna Kurki,
F-Secure

Good people talk to good people

When it comes to the best channels for reaching expert-level professionals, the usual suspects rule the game: career sites, targeted LinkedIn, and job boards. For KONE, job boards play a particularly important role and rival in popularity and use with social media in China and Asia in general. Bridger predicts social media and referrals will both increase their significance in the future. KONE already heavily relies on a well-honed referral system.

“The referral system has worked very well, and we use referrals very systematically in all target groups. We have gotten particularly positive experiences from using referrals in the field when hiring operatives. The system has an intrinsically positive charge to it, and the referee is in a perfect position to evaluate the match between the company and the person being referred,” Bridger reflects.

Aside from the positive charge, referrals also have another trait, which makes them nearly bullet-proof.

KAIJA BRIDGER is the Head of Talent Management at KONE. The global leader in the elevator and escalator industry operates in over 60 countries. The company's recruiting campaigns are often worldwide.

JOHANNA KURKI is the Global Cyber Talent Acquisition & Employer Branding Lead at F-Secure. The global cyber security company has over 25 offices and employs over 1,000 employees worldwide.

BERIT VIRTANEN-THEWLIS currently works as the Chief Marketing Officer at Claned Group. Claned is a Finnish company that has developed an innovative personalized online learning solution utilizing artificial intelligence and machine learning. Residing in the United States, Virtanen-Thewlis has a global career in both people and culture development, as well as in strategic communications and branding.

“The system puts one’s own reputation at risk in a way, which means the people referred are generally a very good fit with the requirements,” Bridger explains.

KONE has also extended the best referral practices to expert recruitments, which further marks the shift from conventional ad-reliant recruitment marketing to increasingly recruiting in networks and among peers.

F-Secure also keenly uses a referral system, which is technically made very easy.

“Talented people talk among their network. Employees can send an open referral or direct them to a specific position. The referred applications also receive a VIP treatment in terms of a quicker application process,” Kurki says.

At F-Secure, referrals are encouraged in different ways.

“The interesting thing we’ve found with referrals is that money as an incentive tends to not work as well as softer incentives. We are appealing to an employees’ emotional side by asking them to refer their network to help out a friend and the entire company; getting a colleague you already know; and being able to affect our hiring decision. To offer variety in the incentives, F-Secure employees are able to choose between a monetary bonus, an extra training budget, or extra annual leave,” Kurki states.

Focus on individual learning paths

After an expert-level employee has been hired, what matters is retaining them. According to Bridger and Kurki, well-being is essential when it comes to retention. Well-being is a broad concept and includes flexible working arrangements, as well as physical and mental health. At F-Secure, the corporate culture is internally defined as a fellowship – a sparring and caring attitude among peers.

As for benefits, Kurki would like to see a catalogue-like list of employee benefits from which the employees could choose what best supports their individual coping with working life.

“Conventional gym vouchers only cater to those already going to the gym. Ideally, people could choose between things like nutrition counselling, physical exercise or emotional support – something that truly helps them maintain their drive, because in our line of work, the brain isn’t switched off after office hours,” says Kurki.

Berit Virtanen-Thewlis, Partner and CMO of Claned, a company identified among the Top 10 Companies to Disrupt Edtech in 2017, goes on to state that the conventional pay per performance model has come to an end. Virtanen-Thewlis predicts a shift from annual pay to packaged benefit concepts.

Interestingly, and nearly paradoxically, while the sense of belonging to a community is key to retaining expert level professionals, they also want



If your focus as an employer is
not on individual learning paths
and corporate learning culture,
you will become obsolete.
-Berit Virtanen-Thewlis, Claned

to create their own individual career path much like they value individual consumer experiences.

The industry is responding to this arising paradox. One change underway is the proliferation of CLOs, a new title for Chief Learning Officers. They mark a new era in company cultures and investing in employees, who are now viewed as adaptive assets.

“Employees need to be lured, challenged, and motivated by blended learning paths that prepare the employee with a 21st century skillset. Employers are now under scrutiny to train their employees and they are now eagerly looking for tools for just that. This means employer branding today is increasingly about the ability to recognize the potential achieved through learning and utilizing that potential,” says Virtanen-Thewlis.

“There is no such thing as one-size-fits-all. That kind of learning is designed for the administration, not the individual. If your focus as an employer is not on individual learning paths and corporate learning culture, you will become obsolete.”

Being part of something bigger

A shared purpose is also essential for retaining the right people. At F-Secure, the company believes its greater purpose of helping people and businesses be protected in the digital world, without having to worry about cyber security, will help retain people. KONE, in turn, sees itself as an enabler of smoother, more livable cities. Both agree that the greatest chance for an employee to find meaning – and thus deepen commitment to the company – is to make clear how one’s position links back to the overall company strategy and mission both on a concrete and ideological level.

“It’s extremely important to communicate the role the individual has in executing the company strategy,” Kurki says.

Bridger emphasizes the importance of sustainability in retaining talent.

“The long-term trend is that values, sustainability, and social responsibility are increasingly important for success in recruiting and retaining talent. It has almost become expected of companies these days,” Bridger maintains.

Does long retention equal institutionalization?

In today’s job market, many consider diverse experience a virtue. This begs the question: Is retention a valid HR metric these days? KONE’s Bridger votes yes – with one caveat.

“Long retention is still a sign of success on the employer’s part, if the employee has undergone an in-house rotation and experienced varied roles. In that case, both the individual and the company have succeeded in commitment and development. A successful rotation also tells of the company’s ability to renew and build competence. KONE definitely values a certain turnover, but often through rotation.”

Johanna Kurki from F-Secure offers another view on the matter.

“I maintain that retention alone as an indicator is not enough. Long retention in the same role might make it difficult to avoid becoming institutionalized, and our minds tend to become lazy and stay in the comfort zone. Long retention might prove the employer is doing its job well, but is the same true for the employee? Could it be that it means they are doing the job just well enough and losing the out-of-the box view? But this is only my personal opinion.”

The intertwined roles of experts and chiefs

According to Bridger, looking back 15 years ago, the role of the expert was different to what it is today and this also has a great impact on recruitment. In the past, experts were supposed to demonstrate skills and aptitude relevant to the job, and now the focus is much larger – what companies look for, in fact, is the potential of competence. This translates to the ability to learn, be flexible, manage stress and cooperate with others, which are many of the same skills required from all recruits.

“In some regard, this means the requirements for different roles have become more alike. Companies no longer want to hire the most qualified person, if they don’t also have interpersonal skills, which enable them to learn from others, solve problems, and create solutions together. This means recruiting experts is effectively very much like any other recruiting,” Bridger points out.

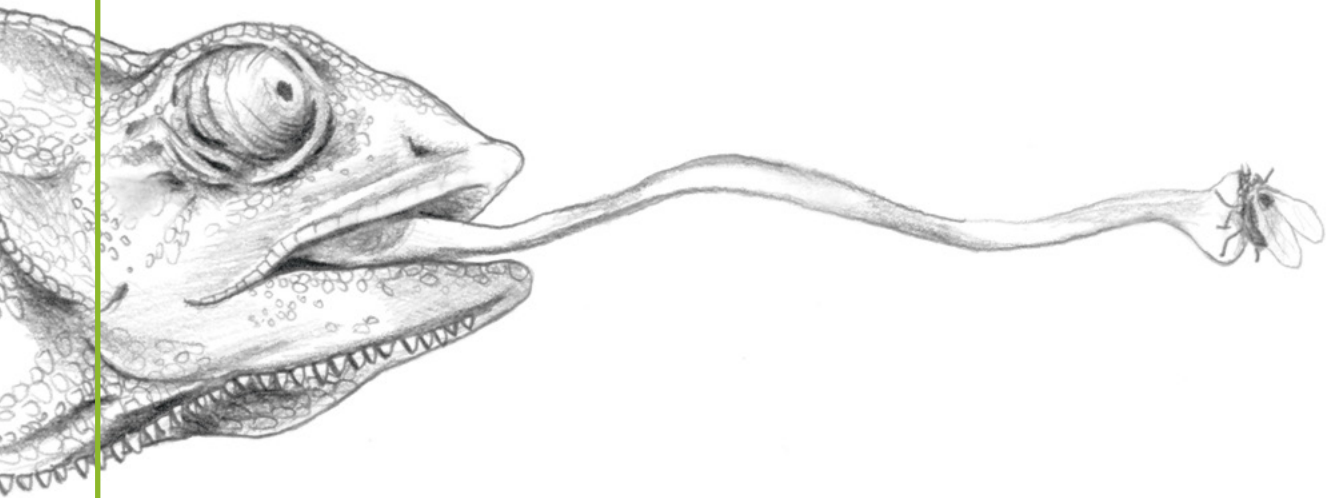
On evolving roles, Virtanen-Thewlis goes one step further.

“Digitalization will change everything for both employees and employers. Technologies evolve, most of us will act as entrepreneurs, and the lines between the roles of employee and employer will blur. This goes to the heart of how we see ourselves.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Expert level professionals are best attracted by a commitment to foster their growth and development
- Expert level professionals are also increasingly expected to demonstrate their aptitude for continuous learning and their interpersonal skills ability to learn throughout their careers and work with others
- Retaining professionals requires focusing on values and standing for a shared purpose
- While the sense of belonging to a community is key to retaining expert level professionals, they also want to create their own individual career path (much like they value individual consumer experiences)

CURRENT EMPLOYEES



5. From onboarding of the masses to starting a customizable employee journey

Salla Matilainen

Onboarding is a crucial phase, as it sets the tone of the entire relationship between the employee and the employer. As work life goes through fundamental changes, the process of onboarding is also at a crossroads. Even after a successful onboarding, how can we ensure the crucial consistency between the company's employer value proposition and the employee experience. In other words, are we as good as our word?

Onboarding is the first phase of a new relationship – it gives an indication of aligning or non-aligning values, the company's ways of treating employees, and to what extent expectations of the new employee will be met. Organizations who invest thought and effort in securing consistency in recruitment communications and the employee experience will reap the benefits in employee satisfaction, and ultimately, also in customer satisfaction.

In employee experience, consistency is key

At Wise Group, a Finnish company in building construction design and consultancy, employer branding is seen as something that is built into every encounter.

“Many say, even in exit interviews, that we treat people as people, not as mere numbers. Development discussions happen once a year, but we as employers need to be available on 364 other days of the year, as well,” says **Erica Kraufvelin-Lämsä**, HR Manager, Wise Group.

The recruitment advertisement, phone calls and interviews make up encounters, as does onboarding during the first weeks. Important encounters to follow during the employee journey are development discussions, succession, and days of exit. To follow-up on how the company performs



Development discussions happen once a year,
but we as employers need to be available on
364 other days of the year, as well.
-Erica Kraufvelin-Lämsä, Wise Group

in employer branding, even among those only considering applying, Wise Group is now conducting an outsourced employer image survey to study its image among potential employees alongside personnel surveys.

Posti Group's main challenge in consistency is the vast range of positions. The employees represent 85 nationalities, different geographical locations, and different functions. There are also independent entrepreneurs who provide Posti's services. All of them feed into the company's employer image. This poses a challenge in terms of maintaining consistency.

"We have tackled the challenge head-on by conducting development discussions twice a year and by actively making sure the dialogue on achieving goals and professional development is ongoing all year round," states

Appu Haapio, Head of Sustainability, Posti Group.

Wise Group has the same challenges when securing consistency. With 15 locations and independently operating units, complete consistency in onboarding, for example, is difficult to ensure, and the process inevitably varies depending on the implementing unit – with the same being true for the entire employee experience. There is one common denominator, however.

"We emphasize interaction and face-to-face communication, as it is simply unsurpassable in both onboarding and the entire employee experience from beginning to end. Though, obviously, smart ways of using electronic platforms might actually give us more time for one-on-one encounters," admits Kraufvelin-Lämsä.

APPU HAAPIO is the Head of Sustainability at Posti Group. Posti Group's employees represent 85 nationalities, different geographical locations, and different functions. The company places special focus on personnel training and professional development.

MINNA KOISTI is the HR Director at Ramboll Finland. The engineering, design, and consultancy company has over 13,000 employees globally, 2,200 of them located in Finland. Ramboll has put a special effort on their onboarding process for both acquired and organically hired personnel.

ERICA KRAUFVELIN-LÄMSÄ is the HR Manager at Wise Group, a Finnish company in building construction design and consultancy. At Wise Group, many new employees have come into the company through acquisitions in recent years.

You had me at hello

“Upon arrival, I was lucky enough to be able to work side-by-side with my predecessor for three weeks, but this is not the standard. In general, a successful onboarding starts with the simplest of things, like communicating on a first-name basis and making the rounds to meet new colleagues during the first few days to get an overall picture of the company,” Haapio explains.

Just as important is communicating the big picture – where and why every contribution is important. The importance of meaning and a sense of purpose is on the rise and the younger generations especially are increasingly purpose-driven in their work. A sense of purpose depends on clear and engaging communication regarding the big picture – how are my daily tasks linked to something bigger?

“Contextualization brings a sense of purpose,” adds Haapio.

At Posti, onboarding consists of eLearning basic training, including a course on the Code of Conduct. Recently, the company has invested in leadership training for supervisors.

At Wise Group, many new employees come through acquisitions. This requires thoughtful communication about the change itself and the kind of company the employees are entering. Wise Group has managed to turn these delicate merger situations into successful onboardings through informative theme sessions about employer policy and benefits, for example. The sessions are always attended in large numbers by Wise Group employees to demonstrate Wise Group’s ‘human touch’ approach.

Individual paths

At its best, a successful onboarding entails mapping out an individual learning path at an early stage. This applies particularly in situations where the newly-recruited are young professionals at the beginning of their careers.

According to Haapio, what generally does not work very well are outdated forms of self-learning, such as checklists for the employee to go through individually. Even in the era of cost-efficient eLearning platforms, nothing still compares to time spent face-to-face.

A common blunder in onboarding is the notion that the experienced hires do not need it, Kraufvelin-Lämsä posits.

“A person might have all the know-how in the world, but job-specific requirements, such as familiarizing oneself with projects and processes or identifying the right collaborators in the new organization, require orientation.”

Onboarding is also bound to be affected by the turmoil in work life destined to be experienced in the future – the signs of which are already becoming visible.



An employee might soon have multiple projects and more than one employer. This requires HR units with well-established routines to acquaint the employee with the corporate culture.
-Appu Haapio, Posti

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Onboarding is evolving from a fixed process to a more customizable one which better matches individual needs
- To ensure a sense of purpose, communicate the big picture at onboarding; what is the context, where is the organization aiming at and what is the shared purpose
- Smart ways of using eLearning tools might give more time for one-on-one encounters
- Even experienced professionals need onboarding to learn to navigate the new company
- Make sure the onboarding is in line with your employer value proposition and consistent with recruitment communications

“Communication should reflect the changes we are about to undergo in work life. Onboarding needs to be more interactive, less by-the-book and more personalized. Companies need to start to engage employees at an earlier stage and pay attention to the importance of aligning the employee and company values,” maintains Kraufvelin-Lämsä.

The big question for companies is how to come up with a way to reinvent mass onboardings to include and allow for individuality and customization.

Even in the digital age, personal meetings are important

At Ramboll Finland, an engineering and consulting company, the onboarding process has proven to be a good mix of both individuality and customization. It includes online material and video clips, local onboarding mentors, a full-day event at the headquarters, a follow-up of the process some six months after the first day, and trainings which certify working on sites. HR provides guidance to supervisors, and a virtual learning management system is also underway.

“The full-day gathering makes all the difference. It may sound old-fashioned, but convening at the HQ and meeting the CEO, CFO, HR Director, Communications, and IT, is the most important moment for many,” states **Minna Koisti**, HR Director, Ramboll.

Reinventing HR

Onboarding is often led or coordinated by HR, but left on the shoulders of immediate supervisors. Haapio calls for HR to play a more active role.

“The role of HR will increase in the future, as the nature of work and the ways we are employed change. An employee might soon have multiple projects and more than one employer. This requires HR units with well-established routines to acquaint the employee with the corporate culture. HR also needs to accommodate and support people moving agilely from one job to the next and recognize and harness the new talent these people bring into the company,” says Haapio.

Active and contributing – the attributes of a successful onboarding?

According to Haapio, one undeniable sign of a successful onboarding remains – a rule of thumb that has hardly ever failed.

“When a person actively participates and contributes, you can rest easy – mission accomplished,” Haapio says, smiling.

6. Agility enables a culture of trust

Nina Lindqvist

Agility, essentially the capability of a company to react rapidly and efficiently to changes, has gone from being a valuable competitive advantage, to a prerequisite for companies in many industries to sustain their forerunner position. But how does an agile mindset benefit businesses and employers in today's fast-changing society?

Speed, flexibility, innovation, and proactivity, mixed with quality and profitability. These fruitful advantages, and more, are all obtainable for businesses opting for agile processes, according to agility advocates.

Pirita Karlsson, Head of HR at Finnish legal firm Fondia (at the time of the interview), is more than familiar with the concept of agility; in fact, one could say the company's entire philosophy borrows traits closely connected to the agile methodology. In 2015, the Financial Times proclaimed Fondia as a European "Game Changer" for the firm's disruptive legal service model.

"Agility for us means to embrace novel or unconventional ideas and approaches, to create new services, and to regularly examine policies and processes to ensure we as a company are conducting our business in the best way possible," Karlsson explains.

However, Karlsson uses the word agile almost reluctantly to describe Fondia's working environment and processes. Agility, she argues, has become somewhat of a corporate buzzword, and has been adopted by businesses who, arguably, are not genuinely agile in their processes. Instead, she prefers to talk about a culture of trust, where things run effortlessly without constant interference.

"It's about letting go of an excessive need to control everything in a top-down manner and trusting employees to handle matters independently and in a way natural and comfortable to them," Karlsson reflects.

Riina Hellström agrees that the true denotation of agility is sometimes lost along the way. Hellström is the Founder and Director of Peoplegeeks, a Helsinki-based consultancy specializing in modernizing and digitalizing people operations and leadership. Her area of expertise lies in digital and agile organizational development.

“What I see are a lot of companies trying to implement agile processes without having a holistic understanding of the philosophy and the human view behind it, which is that people as knowledgeable creatures can be entrusted to do their work without unnecessary and intrusive structures of interference.”

Because of its buzzword status, misconceptions about agility are bound to arise. On this point, Hellström is quick to deliver the best misinterpretation she has encountered about agility.

“I’ve heard people say that it is this thing that hat-headed hipster development guys have come up with to do whatever they want to,” says Hellström, laughing.

An emphasis on trust, experimentation, and flexibility

Hand in hand with both Karlsson’s and Fondia’s notion of a culture of trust, goes the notion of a culture of experimentation, where new ideas are embraced at every level and failure is not something to fear.

“We want to ensure that our employees feel that they work in an environment with an open-minded and encouraging discussion climate,” Karlsson emphasizes.

The trainee program at the firm is one example of an agile mindset. The program is continuously improved based on direct feedback given by former trainees.

“We also want to break boundaries, whether it comes to the services we provide and to the way we interact with customers, or the ways our expert employees can go about their daily work in a manner they feel works for them,” continues Karlsson.

According to Hellström, the benefits of agile processes for a company are manifold. The concrete benefits include less risks because of rapid feedback loops and quicker deliveries of bits of work. Agility is a natural reaction or product of a society, where changes are more rapid and unpredictable than ever.

“You cannot always stick to plan A, because we are living in a complex world, where changes are frequent and unpredictability is the new norm. This means you have to move step-by-step and be able to reassess quickly when needed,” Hellström notes.

Flat is the new tall

Fondia is a company with a flat hierarchy, a feature often thought to be part of the agile mindset. What exactly does it mean for them?

“Our flat hierarchy, along with our open-plan office, enables and encourages employees to give feedback and enhances agility. It also goes hand in hand



You cannot always stick to plan A, because we are living in a complex world, where changes are frequent and unpredictability is the new norm. This means you have to move step-by-step and be able to reassess quickly when needed.
-Riina Hellström, Peoplegeeks

RIINA HELLSTRÖM is the Founder and Director of Peoplegeeks, a Helsinki-based consultancy specializing in modernizing and digitalizing people operations and leadership. The company describes itself as “an architect with the experience of a hands-on craftsman and with the network of the local hardware store owner.”

PIRTA KARLSSON was the Head of HR at Finnish legal firm Fondia. The company has seen great success in best-place-to-work-surveys year after year. Currently, Karlsson is HR Manager at the Finnish Tax Administration.

with our fundamental value of treating everyone equally, irrespective of their experience or position at the company,” Karlsson explains.

This also means fewer managers and supervisors, allowing independent work and direct contact with clients, not solely through partners.

“Our flat hierarchy is also visible in the way we engage with our employees; there are very few cases where we don’t involve employees in our processes,” Karlsson says.

Fondia’s transparent way of conducting business is reflected in how the firm interacts with clients. The client is able to view and comment on drafts of contracts while still ‘works in progress’ at Fondia, which enables work to be implemented quicker and in closer collaboration with the client.

“By opening up our ways of working, we provide clients with a transparent and collaborative approach, which speeds up decision-making,” states Karlsson.

Connecting agility and satisfaction

Employee satisfaction seems to indeed correlate with agile methodologies, with many of the companies mentioned by Hellström also ranking highly on the best place to work list in Finland. Hellström thinks she knows why:

“Agile methodologies bring employee engagement on scale, because they encourage both innovation and creativity, as well as accountability and great customer interaction. However, a vital prerequisite for this is trust from leadership and managers who do not micromanage and who allow this sort of way of working to really flourish,” posits Hellström.

“The iterative way of working brings quick cycles of feedback into the company, which leads to better learning. The agile way of working is also a team-focused way of working, which builds stronger internal relationships. Finally, agile organizations are generally conducive to greater employee autonomy, as unnecessary middle-structures are eliminated,” Hellström continues.

However, with freedom comes responsibility and accountability. Hellström finds most employees embrace these open-heartedly. That said, as one group enjoys more freedom, it also means other groups’ (usually the mid-managers’) need to control and report decreases, and expectations with regards to their work change drastically. Hellström sees this role evolving more towards focusing on eliminating unnecessary structures within the company which hinder growth and efficient teamwork.

Fondia has done extremely well in employer satisfaction surveys and competitions. In 2014, Fondia was voted Finland’s third best workplace and the number one employer in the legal industry throughout Europe. Pirta Karlsson believes it all has to do with the founding principles of the firm.

Fondia’s organizational structure leans heavily on the firm’s founding values, which highlight innovativeness, the ability to offer legal services in a smart way, and lastly but perhaps most importantly; sharing and caring, along with pride and passion – not far from the agile principles described by Hellström. Karlsson describes this as *“working together ambitiously to alter traditional ways of working in the legal field, always with a touch of rock ‘n’ roll.”*

Ultimately just a new way of conducting business

An agile workplace or organization is not about being better, suggests Hellström; it's just a different organizational structure and a different way of communicating and leading.

Although perceived differently by some people, agility is very much about structure, but structure in a gradual sense. It's also not only about fancy new open offices and flexible working hours. Hellström uses her 'Five F' model to explain the most common misconceptions; Faster, Flexible (no rules or structures), Fun, Facilities (modern), and For IT only.

"Agility includes planning but it is done in sprints. It's absolutely structured and very disciplined, which I, as an engineer, enjoy immensely. Agility includes double-loop learning, with built-in cycles of feedback and self-reflection on how collaboration can be developed and improved. It's a beautiful structure," Hellström explains.

Hellström suggests that there is no universal and easily implementable approach when it comes to agility. The evidence of agility, however, lies in the customer interface.

"Agile companies are able to release value to their clients with quick cycles. They also have a way of constantly keeping clients in the loop and getting feedback on how their innovations are working. Their governance structure is not about command and control, but rather about ensuring a conducive environment for teams to deliver value very quickly without the extra layers."

According to Hellström, the Nordics are quite far progressed in terms of implementing agile processes.

"I think the Nordics have a really good chance to be a true forerunner in how organizations are designed and managed in an agile way," she says.

A digital mentality often the foundation of agile companies

There are not many examples of bigger companies that have transformed, or are in the process of completely changing their processes into agile ones; most changes concern units or parts of the company. Digital music provider Spotify, software company Atlassian, and Dutch bank ING Group, are all examples of companies, which have, at least to some extent, implemented agile processes in their businesses, according to Hellström.

"What connects all the younger agile companies is that they have started with an already digital mindset through their owners. Digitalization has accelerated the transfer of data and knowledge, with demands for all other processes to become quicker and essentially more agile as well. Vincer, Reaktor, and the digital service provider Futurice, are additional examples of companies that have all been built on an agile mentality."

Younger organizations that have adopted the agile mindset as part of their founding principles, also apply agile thinking when it comes to recruitment; an agile mindset is often included in the recruitment criteria.



Agility is about letting go of an excessive need to control everything in a top-down manner and trusting employees to handle matters independently and in a way natural and comfortable to them.

-Pirta Karlsson, Fondia

“These younger startups really focus on recruiting specific personalities that fit with the agile mentality,” Hellström says.

Technology as the enabler

Many highly-acclaimed researchers have proclaimed that technology is the greatest altering force in business today. According to the three authors of ‘Leading Digital’, Westerman, Bonnet and McAfee, technology is bigger because recent progress in all things digital is removing constraints and creating exciting new possibilities that impact everyone’s lives and enterprises too.

Both Hellström and Karlsson view digitalization and digital tools as important facilitators of agile methods and processes. Digital tools can, for example, be utilized to help an agile company retain their agility when growing.

“When companies with an agile mindset start to grow, there is a greater need for processes and automated structures to help facilitate growth. This helps release time and energy to things that are actually value-bringing,” Hellström explains.

“Digitalization should be in our every thought nowadays; can we do this in a scalable way, what can be automated, what can be done face-to-face and where can omnichannel approaches be used? Agility is not only about digitalization, as human interaction is still vital, but digitalization as a tool can be massively helpful in implementing agile processes,” she continues.

The time of agile processes energized by digitalization is now, states Hellström.

“I have been waiting for this period to start. This is the biggest change in organizational history in a century,” she exclaims.

By a ‘century’, Hellström is referring to Frederick Winslow Taylor’s renowned monograph entitled ‘The scientific principles of management’, published in 1911. According to Hellström, companies have been building their businesses on the thoughts, fundamentals and principles outlined in the monograph. Until now.

“Those fundamentals are now changing. Some people might call it chaos, but I love it, because what will follow will be so much healthier,” Hellström concludes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Agility emphasizes the elimination of unnecessary bureaucracy and structures
- Agility is, however, not about a lack of structure; it’s an iterative, step-by-step, forward-oriented approach, where team responsibility is the number one priority
- Agility includes granting employees the individual freedom and trusting them to conduct their work in the best way possible for them
- Agility is simultaneously strongly based on co-creation practices and team-based creativity, innovativeness, and performance
- Agile companies and processes rely on quick feedback cycles to be able to respond to rapid changes in society and in the business environment

7. Cultivate culture, reap growth

Petra Mursu

Many successful companies pride themselves on having a company culture like no other. A dynamic culture can bring about growth, but also growth fosters cultural development. At best, they form a self-reinforcing cycle that is in alignment with the company's strategic targets. So, what kind of a culture is needed to support growth, and can it be built?

Minna Koisti, HR Director, Ramboll Finland, describes a good company culture as a group of different people with different backgrounds working together towards a common goal.

Karoliina Lehmusvirta, Marketing and Communications Director, Ramboll Finland adds, “Company culture is the essence of the organization. To a large extent, it defines whether the company will succeed or fail. In short, culture defines how things are done in a given organization.”

Koisti and Lehmusvirta also include shared values, beliefs and ways of working into their description of culture. This means that having a strategy – the joint direction in place – is not enough. Companies need to identify the kinds of cultural aspects that support their strategic targets and nurture them to bloom.

Growth through an experimental culture...

For Ramboll, a global engineering, design, and consultancy company faced with megatrends such as digitalization, openness to change has been a key cultural enabler of growth.

“To grow, you need to be able to renew the culture, that’s for sure. You have to be curious and brave and allow people to try, fail fast and try again. In a fast-developing business environment, that offers a good grounding for nurturing a highly performing culture,” explains Lehmusvirta.

To be functional, a culture based on experimentation requires a low hierarchy and a lean organization, where employees have the mandate to take their ideas into action without lengthy decision-making or implementation processes.

"At Ramboll, empowerment is one of the core values. It means that we want to cherish a culture where our experts are both trusted and equipped to make the right decisions," states Lehmusvirta.

For Gasum, a Finnish energy company, renewing their culture from a conservative perspective to endorsing new opportunities, was a prerequisite for success in going into new business areas. Courage, open-mindedness, a willingness to take risks, and speed are the cultural aspects needed to support growth, according to **Olga Väisänen**, Vice President of Communications at Gasum.

To bring about the wanted results, renewal and innovativeness need guidelines. Väisänen highlights goal-orientation as the biggest positive initiative that enforced their current culture.

"Everybody has their clearly defined targets, and an understanding of why they are working here and what we expect from them. This way everybody can work fast and focus on the things that are important. People also know that they have these targets because they are directly linked to company strategy."

... and the other way around

An experimental and target-oriented culture can support growth and, conversely, growth also enables cultural development. A sense of progress functions as a motivator in long-term processes.

"When we at Gasum introduced the new strategy and the targets for 2020 some years ago, many might have thought that they were unreachable. But when you see the steps taken and the results, it enforces the culture and people become even more eager to grow the business," Väisänen explains.

In addition, growth, be it organic or through mergers and acquisitions, keeps the company in a constant state of evolvement. As old structures are bound to break, it makes it easier to stir in seeds for cultural change as well. *"When a company is growing, it is possible to mold the culture more than in a very stagnant or declining state. New people bring in new culture and new methods of working and allow us to change our ways,"* says Koisti.

Cultural integration a matter of legwork in mergers and acquisitions

Both Ramboll and Gasum have acquired several companies during recent years. As noted, bringing in new talent is always a possibility to renew the culture, but it requires careful preparations.



When a company is growing, it is possible to mold the culture more than in a very stagnant or declining state.

*-Minna Koisti,
Ramboll Finland*

KAROLIINA LEHMUSVIRTA is the Marketing and Communications Director and **MINNA KOISTI** the HR Director at Ramboll Finland. The engineering, design, and consultancy company has achieved a nine percent increase on average in revenue per annum over the past five years through organic and acquisition growth. The company has over 13,000 employees globally, with 2,200 of them located in Finland.

OLGA VÄISÄNEN is the Vice President of Communications at Gasum, the Finnish energy company moving towards its vision of becoming the leader of the Nordic gas ecosystem. Three acquisitions in 2016 raised the number of Gasum employees by around 20 percent, to make a total of 375.

How to communicate culture?

- 1. BE HONEST:** Communicating culture is largely about consistency. The easiest way to be consistent is to be honest. Talk about your culture truthfully and through all touchpoints.
- 2. MAKE SURE TO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY:** Impactful communications rise from actions. Decide on concrete acts, which are in line with your values and relevant for your stakeholders.
- 3. DARE TO TAKE A STAND:** Companies are increasingly taking a stand on societal issues. Raise your voice for matters important for your people.
- 4. PUT YOUR PEOPLE FRONT AND CENTER:** People are more likely to believe a message from a person, your employee, than a faceless company. Arrange platforms for your people to be in contact with your stakeholder and let them tell about the company in their own words. If they are motivated and engaged, they will do it with pleasure.
- 5. SHOW DON'T TELL:** Aside from being the most efficient media for describing how it feels to work someplace, videos are also well-suited for social media. According to Facebook, videos will make up as much as 80 percent of Internet traffic by 2019.

“Prior to an acquisition, we aim to gain an understanding of the other organization’s culture. With this information, we can plan the organizational structure and better implement integration,” explains Koisti, describing Ramboll’s approach to acquisitions.

“Cultural integration, learning and understanding how others work, happens in face-to-face meetings. It demands legwork,” Koisti continues.

Väisänen concurs. The challenge for Gasum is that most of the people working in the acquired biogas companies are still working in their old environment and with quite rare contact with other Gasum people.

“The most important thing is the discussion. We need to have a very clear, common plan for the integration and have both sides working together. That way, we get to know the people and their ways of working already during the preparation process.”

In addition to legwork, a clear visual change in the environment also accelerates the integration process.

“We have been very systematic in changing all brand materials to the Gasum brand. This way the change becomes more concrete,” states Väisänen.

Väisänen also explains that whenever new businesses join them, they bring their expertise and their way of doing business to Gasum. This knowledge is much appreciated. Väisänen urges companies to remember to voice this appreciation to the newly joined employees.

Values bridge strategy into everyday actions

Besides bringing in something new, Koisti believes that new employees should also be helped to take the company’s established values to heart as guidelines with regards to their day-to-day activities. This brings us back to strategy. At Ramboll, one of the strongest links between strategy and culture are the values. The company recently crystallized their values along with the new strategy.

Ramboll has put a lot of effort into introducing the values throughout the company. Lehmusvirta identifies successful deployment of the values as one of the factors behind their strong company culture.

“We are now carrying out a strategy roadshow with value discussions in more than 20 cities in Finland with our management team present. We also help employees

to understand what the values mean in everyday work via facilitated sessions where renewed company values are linked to daily operations.”

Intangibles like culture and values are not the easiest variables to measure. Nevertheless, tracking their development and rewarding preferred behavior should not be overlooked.

“We have started value-based rewarding. Each quarter, our people nominate peers that live by our values and discuss what it actually means. This way we aim to bring the values into our everyday actions,” explains Koisti.

Leading by example, supervising with experience

Top management has an important role in molding the culture. As culture is not something that can be ordered into reality, leading by example is the best way to enforce wanted actions and beliefs.

“If we as leaders are not acting the way we would like others to act, it’s not going to work,” as Väisänen puts it.

At both Ramboll and Gasum, supervisors are also given a lot of responsibility in communicating the company strategy and securing the culture. The supervisors’ responsibility for nurturing the culture already begins during the recruitment phase, when deciding whether the applicant is a good fit for the company culture.

Another particularly significant phase is onboarding.

“The supervisor needs to understand the background from which the new employee comes to us. For example, students coming into their first job need very different support than senior level professionals coming from a more traditional environment, in the onboarding phase as well as later as a part of our organization,” Koisti says.

At Ramboll, the readiness and experience in delivering this level of support is emphasized when selecting supervisors and further developed together with HR. Gasum’s Väisänen also makes a note of taking into consideration the differences in supervisors’ team functions when providing them with proper tools.

“It’s very different to be a supervisor to technicians than to a group of specialists.”

Alone is not an option

Both companies identify one thing that they would like to see even more of in the future to be able to generate growth and reach their strategic targets: working together.

“It comes back to one company culture. In our field of expertise and given the changing business environment, we cannot be successful if we are not able to collaborate. We expect all of our employees to collaborate and support cooperation across business units, cities and countries. Empowerment allows us to make decisions where the expertise is, close to clients and addressing their local needs,” Lehmusvirta stresses.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Identify and enforce the cultural aspects that support your strategic targets
- Utilize change brought by growth in molding the company culture
- Piecing long-term targets into smaller steps gives a motivating sense of progress
- Successful deployment of values builds a stronger culture; remember to track development and reward for wished behavior
- Lead by example and put emphasis on selecting and training supervisors into culture ambassadors
- Cultural integration is a matter of legwork in mergers and acquisitions; plan together, discuss, and meet face-to-face

8. Stretch your creative muscles and succeed – the business benefits of diversity

Satu Valtere

In a global world, where consumers look for personalized experiences, organizations need to understand the varied clientele and successfully serve them if they are to drive sales. Diversity also supports organizations in running faster by fostering creativity. However, diversity does not come without effort.

Finland needs new growth and innovation, but without the diversity of working communities and the knowledge of different cultures and operating environments, it is likely to be a long and difficult journey. Employees of the Posti Group, the state-owned Finnish postal service, represent over 80 different nationalities. According to **Heikki Malinen**, Managing Director, Posti Group, “*In the rapidly changing postal and logistics sector, the need for a diverse and international knowledge potential will only grow.*”

According to a study of Innovation, Diversity, and Market Growth (2013) by the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), companies that embrace diversity gain higher market share and a competitive edge in accessing new markets. Furthermore, in the 18th Annual Global CEO Survey by PwC (2015), 85 percent of the CEOs from companies with a formal diversity and inclusiveness strategy said it had improved their bottom line.

According to the study, leaders have long recognized that an inherently diverse workforce (inclusive of women, people with different cultural backgrounds, LGBT individuals, for example) confers a competitive edge in terms of selling products or services to diverse end users – what’s known as “matching the market.”

The research noted that “*an inherently diverse workforce can be a potent source of innovation as diverse individuals are better attuned to the unmet needs of consumers or clients like themselves. Indeed, their insight is critical*

to identifying and addressing new market opportunities. We find that when teams have one or more members who represent the gender, ethnicity, culture, generation, or sexual orientation of the team's target end user, the entire team is far more likely (as much as 158% more likely) to understand that target, increasing their likelihood of innovating effectively for that end user."

On this topic, **Matti Kalervo**, VP Corporate Responsibility, Kesko, states, *"Simply put, people are the most important asset of any company. To succeed, companies must make the most of the full range of their people. Companies must attract and retain the right skills, the best minds, all the required resources – and that means diversity."*

According to **Richard Crisp**, a scientist and professor of psychology at the Aston School of Business, UK, the latest research in behavioral science shows that diversity can have much broader benefits than previously thought, such as enhancing creativity and problem-solving.

Similar employee profiles, with nearly uniform social and educational backgrounds, are likely to come up with the same types of ideas and, therefore, are less likely to yield genuine innovation. Successful companies know that by building a diverse work community, they will have better opportunities to create something unique. Diversity promotes out-of-the-box thinking, which, in turn, allows for the production of new, innovative products and services. Crisp explains how it works:

"We can compare diversity experience to the subjective feeling of surprise: it is telling us that something is not in place – a person does not fit the norm or stereotype. In the brain, this leads to a process of not relying on memory and existing knowledge, which is a key component of creative thinking. So, one of the reasons why diversity can stimulate creativity is that they require use of the exact same part of the brain. It then follows that the more we are exposed to diversity the more we become practiced in not relying on our memory, which allows us to become more creative. Diversity warms up the brain's innovation muscle."

Crisp continues: *"More broadly thinking, diversity can promote a company's mental flexibility. It can boost negotiation, cooperation, and teamwork. It can facilitate adaptation to change in the sense that the more profiles vary, the more diversified reactions to change will be, complementing and influencing one another."*



The more we are exposed to diversity the more we become practiced in not relying on our memory, which allows us to become more creative.

-Richard Crisp

RICHARD CRISP is Professor of Psychology at the Aston Business School, where he is also Director of the Behavioural Science Laboratory. In his recent book 'The Social Brain' he examines the growing scientific evidence in support of the link between diversity and innovation.

APPU HAAPIO is the Head of Sustainability at Posti. Posti Group's employees represent 85 nationalities, different geographical locations, and different functions. A D.Sc.(tech), Haapio has an international background in research and in corporate responsibility.

MATTI KALERVO, the Kesko Vice President for Corporate Responsibility, has a long employment history in the area of product safety and responsible sourcing in both the food manufacturing industry and the trading sector. Currently, Kalervo is responsible for the development of Kesko's responsibility work and he leads Kesko's Product Research Unit. Kesko was selected the most sustainable trading sector company in the world on the 2017 Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World list.

Diversity is a journey

However, embracing diversity is not always easy.

“On the whole, people like the world as easy and non-complex as possible. With diversity, one must deal with different norms and cultures. People operate with differing views, mannerisms, styles of communication, dress codes, religious beliefs, and so on. Adapting to this complexity is hard work. It is like starting to go to the gym. It might hurt in the beginning, but it gets easier over time, as we get fitter,” explains Crisp.

Appu Haapio, Head of Sustainability, Posti Group, looks back at how the Finns' directness has, on occasion, caused confusing situations at the corporation, with the absence of 'small talk' just one notable example. *“For the benefit of all, cultural differences should be discovered. At Posti, we want to help all employees become well-acquainted with Finnish work life culture.”*

At Kesko, a Human Rights Assessment conducted together with K Group customers in 2016, was a wake-up call. According to the results, the K Group was perceived as being less diverse than the competitors.

“Based on their in-store experiences, our customers saw our most important competitors as more diverse than us,” says Kalervo. A global world where people move and travel easily, and anticipate personalized experiences, requires companies to meet new needs.

“From diversity, the company gets added value. We live in a time of change where globalization poses new challenges to management. At the K Group, we have the idea that every store is different and every customer is different. Diversity gives us tools to meet the needs of everyone, from accessibility to different products,” states Kalervo.

“Diversity is a journey and a state of mind,” he adds. *“We need to accept it and be humble towards it.”*

This is where leadership steps into the picture.

Leading diversity

Diversity does not automatically translate into business benefits. It must be led and managed.

Appu Haapio understands that *“an employee cannot change the whole work culture alone – the employer needs to support and assist for mutual adjustment.”* She adds, *“Diversity and its management are currently on the agenda of many employers, and companies are eager to implement equality and diversity-related development measures. However, to ensure that diversity values are not just written words, long-term work is needed.”*

Small things also make every working day easier. At Posti, visual images, for example, often accompany written instructions, to help deliver greater clarity when important information needs to be shared amongst employees speaking different languages.



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-Matti Kalervo, Kesko

“If organizations don’t manage diversity properly, they’ll get left behind. Today, workplace equality is top-of-mind for businesses, governments, regulators, society, and – most important of all – it is the vital asset that will drive their future success,” posits Kalervo.

At Kesko, diversity leadership is currently a priority in the organization, to maximize employees’ potential and serve clients.

“Our thinking starts with the K Group’s competitive advantages. As we want all our stores to be fit for each client and locality, we need diversified personnel. This must be taken into account in recruitment policies. With an open-minded attitude, we can find the people who can look at things from all different angles. It is the only way we can then consider all customers,” Kalervo reasons.

According to Crisp, the first step in developing diversity leadership, is to examine the benefits that can be achieved through diversity. Secondly, a company needs to create a diversity policy or statement, followed by an implementation plan. This is the basis for steering, measuring and taking diversity further. He clarifies:

“Companies need to provide institutional support and to think through what diversity means to the whole company. It has to be added in the culture of the company. It must be in the DNA of the company. That is when diversity is a strength for the company. It also should be very visible in everything that company does: in recruitment and leadership.”

Diversity, and inclusion policies and actions, should encompass the organization broadly: from individual attitudes and behaviors to HR, marketing and communications functions as well as management. As Kalervo states, *“a tolerant working community is not enough.”*

He continues, *“To begin with, you need to get the leaders to commit and to show example. And for our HR, the diversity management program is a very concrete effort, since we have 45,000 employees. While the process gets started, it is important to listen, to find new angles and to help others.”*

Another viewpoint of note, is how diversity and inclusion build a company’s employer brand. Kalervo, Haapio and Crisp all believe that a company that has a strong implemented diversity program, will have a better reputation, because it will be seen as having fair employment practices. Fostering positive values such as inclusiveness and respect for difference will make a company stand out in the market, so that clients will choose to do business with that company rather than with its competitors.

“The K Group has started to pay attention to its recruiting processes to have more diverse workforce, and thereby to make the company more interesting,” says Kalervo. While the K Group is building the employer brand, diversity also gives better access to talent: companies with a diversified workforce stand a better chance at attracting different types of people who wouldn’t normally apply for positions in those companies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Added value diversity management:

- Innovative teamwork
- Better responsiveness to clients’ needs and expectations
- Access to new markets
- Better adaptability to change
- Positive brand image

9. Measuring for impact

Saara Bange

Target-setting, follow-up and measurement are as vital in employer branding as in any business-crucial activity. When managing the employee experience and employer image, it is essential to focus on relevant data and to find the right metrics to measure impact.

“When measuring and managing employee experience, the focus should be on leadership, culture, and micro-moments during the employee lifecycle,” says **Anu Tuomolin**, HR Director, Accenture Finland and Nordics. To measure employer image, on the other hand, Accenture, along with many other companies, uses key performance indicators (KPIs) such as willingness to recommend the employer to others or an employee net promoter score, and results in employer branding rankings. Other typical employer image-related KPIs measure visibility and traffic in traditional media, social media, and in their own media, especially on their corporate career site.

Mathias Höglund, VP, Organization and Talent Development, Cargotec, agrees with Tuomolin and emphasizes an inside-out perspective starting with measurement and development of the actual employee experience.

“Rather than thinking about how we want to be seen externally, we think about what we want to be internally. We try to look at different levels of the organization to see where we are doing well and where we can improve. But most importantly, we focus on the interaction between the manager and the team, because when it comes to employee experience, that is where you can make the biggest changes and progress.”

At Cargotec, measuring is holistic. It starts from the corporate level including areas like sustainability and safety, goes down to the business level, such as strategy and vision, and finally deals with people practices on the team and individual level.

Leadership drives the employee experience

According to Höglund, team leadership is key for the employee experience, since teams are the communities where people spend their day-to-day working time.

“At Cargotec, we are developing leadership in terms of the kind of experience we want to create for individuals and teams. We are looking at the kinds of teams we need to have, the kind of climates we need to have in them, and the kind of experiences that need to exist in the teams for them to be effective. We develop leaders to change the experience of individuals and teams.”

Merja Fischer, Director at Staria, with an extensive background in leadership from Wärtsilä, Nokia and ABB, also emphasizes the role of leaders for the employee experience. In her Ph.D. dissertation (2012) on ‘Linkages between employee and customer perceptions in business-to-business services,’ she writes:

“Leaders are the role models and lay the foundation for a climate for positivity through their own emotions, attitudes, behaviors and actions. Leaders embody the underlying assumption of what is important in the organization and in doing so, they influence the activities in the workplace through their own behavior.”

Höglund says that the aim at Cargotec is to provide a platform of different measurement tools for leaders to develop their teams and themselves as leaders.

“We have seen many leaders succeed in turning the climate around and turning a bad experience into a good one.”

Actions to follow measurement

Tuomolin underlines that data-based analysis is important for credibly driving employer branding development. As an example, Tuomolin brings up Accenture’s headway with gender equality after starting to track the issue from recruitment to succession. Now, the efforts are on measuring and developing diversity more broadly.

“The mindset is essential, mere figures don’t change anything.”

Höglund also points out that it is important that you measure for a purpose and are willing to change course, if the results indicate a change is needed.

“Collecting data raises expectations, which is why you should measure things that you plan to do something about. And this won’t change; you need to know what you are going to do with the data,” he says.



For us, it is important to start internally, to work on the experience we want, the leadership we want, the processes we want to support the experience, and then we basically push it outward from there.

-Mathias Höglund,
Cargotec

MERJA FISCHER is the Director of Robotics and Shared Service Centers at Staria Oyj, a software and financial service company that also offers a variety of business intelligence and human resource solutions. Fischer, a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering and Management, has a wide personal background in strategy execution and leadership development.

MATHIAS HÖGLUND is the Vice President, Organization and Talent Development at Cargotec Corporation, a leading global provider of cargo and load handling solutions that employs over 11,000 people globally. A Ph.D. in Economics, Höglund has an international background in both HR practice and research.

ANU TUOMOLIN is the Human Resource Director at Accenture Finland. She is also Accenture’s Nordic HR Business Partner Lead. Accenture, the global management consulting and professional services company, employs 394,000 people globally and almost 1,500 in Finland.

Performance achievement at Accenture

Accenture has a long history of measuring people performance. Recently, Accenture Finland and Nordics moved from a traditional model with development discussions and broad ratings for compensation to a performance achievement model. The big change is that the model allows for more diversity and accepts that all employees are not cast in the same mold – nor should they be.

Measurement is less HR-driven and structured, but more dependent on meaningful dialogue with the supervisor and focused on progress with a forward-looking approach. This demands a lot from the supervisors: time, presence, and authenticity.

Some business performance indicators, such as sales, continue to be used. And high performers and achievements are still identified, but more by looking at the individual and less at compiled ratings.

“The essence is that this is all about you. The model starts from the individual’s passions,” says Anu Tuomolin, HR Director, Accenture Finland and Nordics.

Continuous measurement and development

In a fast-paced operating environment, it is essential for companies to be able to adapt fast and flexibly. Detecting small signals throughout the year makes it easier to constantly develop and start working with challenges as soon as they are detected. Traditional approaches to employee experience measurements, such as annual engagement surveys, are time-consuming, and they often convey a snapshot of only a single point in time.

Many organizations have already updated their measurement tools to measure individual and team experiences on an ongoing basis. Instead of, and in addition to, annual development discussions and annual measurements, organizations increasingly aim for continuous dialogue. This dialogue takes place in the everyday environment, whenever needed, and with a constructive and forward-looking approach. At Accenture, the focus in measurement has been shifting towards the individual and their individual development. Also, teams are provided with an on-demand quick survey with only 12 questions and results within 24 hours.

“We used to have a very conventional mode of operation in terms of internal measurement. We used to set annual targets and conducted biannual development discussions. The employees were rated on a Gauss curve, and the compensations were based on that. We now understand that everything starts from the individual. Everyone is different, and we see that this is a good thing,” says Tuomolin.

Emotions central to building the right culture

Well-being is rising on the strategic agenda of many companies as a growing number of organizations offer well-being programs and provide employees with tracking devices to measure mental and physical health signals anonymously.

One growing area of interest is measuring individuals’ emotions and collective emotional climates in work communities. However, while the tools that track

emotions are increasingly used in consumer research and marketing, utilizing them in the workplace is still in its infancy. According to Harvard Business Review (2016); *“Some use apps to record how much fun people are having. Some (companies) hire technology consultants who specialize in the monthly, weekly, daily, or even hourly tracking of moods. Unfortunately, though, these organizations are in the minority. Most companies pay little attention to how employees are – or should be – feeling. They don’t realize how central emotions are in building the right culture.”*



Decision-makers are rational.
Therefore, you need data to
prove your message.
-Merja Fischer, Staria

Using data to prove the business case

Tuomolin sees an excess of data, at least in her organization, but a key challenge is how to use it wisely. An interesting topic is cross-linking and merging data. Accenture is currently testing merging different data on employees to better understand employee behavior and to be better able to proactively respond to it. Such data can include career development, pay, and sick leave.

Höglund emphasizes that in the future, when different platforms and tools will be used for follow-up, it will be important to accept less-than-perfect data quality, if one can still get the sense of direction by cross-linking information. At Cargotec, thanks to merging data, Höglund today knows what the optimal team size is from an employee experience perspective. He also knows, through cross-linking data, that the fact that a team is geographically fragmented does not impact experience. Höglund says that it would be especially interesting to merge business performance data and client experience data with employee experience data.

This is basically what Merja Fischer did in her PhD.

“I studied the business impact of people’s emotions at the workplace and I proved that there is a bottom line impact – this is very solid evidence of the importance of the employee experience and how it correlates with customer experience,” she concludes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Use data to steer your employer brand and drive employer branding on the strategic business agenda
- Measure both employee experience and employer image, but prioritize the experience
- Leadership and team climate are essential for the individual employee experience (thus, measure leadership)
- Mix different measurement tools with different timeframes and scopes
- Merge data, accept less-than-perfect data quality and look at the overall picture
- Do not measure if you are not planning to do something about the results

ALUMNI



10. A new force to be reckoned with – social networks enter the realm of employer branding

Petra Mursu

Social networks are raising their head as the new influencers of Finnish working life. New networks can pop up overnight on social media and gather hundreds or even thousands of members. For a company, however, building a network is not that simple. What should companies understand about these networks and how should they be utilized in employer branding?

One of the largest networks is Ompeluseura, a Facebook-based working life network for those who identify as women. **Milla Halme** and **Maria Teikari** originally established Ompeluseura in 2014 for a small group of friends to support each other in finding hidden jobs and eventually also to discuss pressing issues related to their working life.

“It was an act of the social media era. You set up a group and invite a bunch of like-minded people to think about what should be done. These tools that we have are very powerful in breaking down barriers,” Halme recalls.

The network has come a long way in a short period of time, and it currently has around 20,000 members. Since its inception, the group has been both hidden and closed. The network builds up only through personal contacts, as members invite their friends with similar values to join the network. Media publicity has also accelerated the rise in the number of members.

How to build a functioning social network?

The secret behind Ompeluseura’s success is shared values, which were stated in the group’s very first discussion instructions.

“We come together around these values. It might be harder to join around only a common degree or a job,” considers Halme.

Continues Teikari, *“If people can recognize themselves, the message resonates. But after acknowledging that ‘hey, we’re all social scientists’, for example, you still need to have something to discuss.”* And that’s where the shared values come in.

Ompeluseura’s invitation policy has helped in maintaining the value-base.

“Every member takes responsibility over who they add to the group and has a ‘conversation’ with herself to make sure she upholds the group’s spirit,” Teikari explains.

As you can disconnect yourself from a group with a click of a button, another important factor for a functioning network is that it brings constant value to its members. In relatively open and inclusive social networks such as Ompeluseura, the membership itself is not of value, but the content and experiences shared within the network are.

“Peer support and discussions are currently the most important feature for our members, job advertisements come second,” explains Teikari, regarding the current needs expressed in Ompeluseura. *“Peer support is also what sparks shared joy: the amazement of the fact that all these people really want to altruistically support each other. That feeling is very empowering to many,”* she continues.

One way to keep the discussions relevant to all is to guide more industry, or theme-related conversations, to sub-groups, smaller group chats or gatherings.

Though closed, a network of 20,000 people can no longer be confidential, but it has managed to conserve a rather trustworthy and conflict-free atmosphere. Asking for the members’ opinions, feedback, hopes and wishes about the group builds this trust. Both Halme and Teikari emphasize that the group exists for its members.

In addition, only constructive criticism, in an attempt to find solutions for injustices in Finnish working life is accepted. No person or company is allowed to be called out by their names. *“It is not our job to judge, as we do not have both sides of the stories. Even though we are a women’s career group, we are also on the employers’ side in this sense,”* Halme says.

MILLA HALME and **MARIA TEIKARI** are the founders of Ompeluseura, a Facebook-based working life network for those who identify as women. Established in 2014, the group has rapidly yet organically grown into a network of 20,000 supportive sisters. Halme works as the Head of Communications at SOSTE and Teikari as the Service Director at the Social Science Professionals.

LEENA TIENSUU is the Human Capital Director and **ELINA HOIKKALA** the HR Coordinator at PwC Finland, one of the leading consulting organization in the world as part of the global PwC network. The company has over 930 advisers in Finland, complemented by a network of around 600 alumni and pensioners, who stay a part of the PwC family through the company’s alumni operations.



If you want to be seen as an equal workplace or an employer who supports equality, the effort is yours to make.

-Milla Halme, Ompeluseura

How can companies cooperate with networks?

Companies have been important partners to Ompeluseura. Direct cooperation can be done in the form of workplace visits or through partnering up, as in the popular Helsinki-based The Glorious Career Festival (known as the Upea ura -festivaali in Finnish), which was organized by Ompeluseura.

Working life networks can help employers also put their values into action through helping them reach the kind of job applicants they want. In Ompeluseura's case, that would be people who identify as women. Halme sees that trying to explain the all-male-panels or male dominated boards by saying that no good female candidates were available, is only an excuse for not putting in the effort required to find and attract suitably qualified women.

"If you want to be seen as an equal workplace or an employer who supports equality, the effort is yours to make. The responsibility falls to the employer who wants to promote its values, not to the employees or applicants," she states.

Companies can have their job advertisements posted to the group, but only if a member is willing to post it. Having a person instead of a company share the advertisement has its benefits.

"Just the fact that somebody with a name shares the advertisement, even though the position is already public, makes the job somehow more easily approachable than if you would see it on a faceless job board," Halme postulates.

Sometimes, people also actively let others know they work for the company with an open position and share their experiences about it.

"If an employee is able to answer various questions, it's a sign of a company that has a transparent culture," argues Halme.

"People who post these advertisements are private persons. Ompeluseura members do not think that the advertisement is coming from the employer. Everybody thinks it's sisters helping each other out," adds Teikari.

Another benefit of directing recruitment efforts into working life networks is the quality of applications. *"If your focus group is academic women in their 30s from the Helsinki area, Ompeluseura is a way to target your ad towards them,"* Teikari explains.

"We cannot promise that everyone in the group is the right talent for the job, but we can promise that they are interested in their career. And that is already a promise of an ambitious individual," continues Halme.

If you do decide to build a network for your company, remember to;

- Find the common ground through shared values, interests and life experiences.
- Be sincere in your actions. Whatever hidden motivations you might have, they will come out faster than you think.
- Put members first. Serving the needs of the members, not the founder, is the only way to keep the network relevant for them.
- Leave the company out of the middle and create all touch points from person to person. Involve your employees.
- Support organic growth and allow the group to be in charge of its own development.

All companies have a network: the alumni

Another variant of a working life network are the alumni. The beauty of alumni networks: all companies have them. However, established alumni operations are rather uncommon in Finland, but the interest is on the rise.

Inspired by their global peer companies, consultancy firms are among the most active in this field. Alumni are seen as a valuable network in the business context.

“We try to stay in touch with our alumni, mainly in informal contact, because we see them as potential returnees,” explains **Leena Tiensuu**, Human Capital Director, PwC Finland. The alumni network is actively sourced during recruitments.

“Also, there are potential and current customers among our alumni,” continues **Elina Hoikkala**, HR Coordinator and responsible for the coordination of PwC’s alumni operations.

The alumni operations of PwC are centered around an event held once a year at their office, as a conscious invitation to ‘come back home’. PwC Finland’s alumni network includes around 600 former employees. More than a third of them usually participate.

Through these events and among this network, PwC is able to identify some of their employer brand ambassadors.

“The participants are usually the ones feeling good about us, and in these meetings, we wish to build on that feeling. Even if they might not come back or hold potential as future customers, they are still spreading the word of a great place to work to people they know,” Hoikkala says.

PwC also sees those who have retired as a valuable asset in spreading the word and also invites them to the alumni event. *“They have the best after-party,”* Hoikkala laughs.

What does your alumni network want?

According to feedback, the PwC alumni want a low-key event with few speeches and a focus on simply spending time together.

“What people really appreciate is getting together with old colleagues, having fun and catching up,” says Tiensuu.

One request raised by the network was to hear from an alumni and their career path. Other possible developments to the alumni operations entail more active engagement with the network, possibly including mail, news and research specially targeted at the alumni.

Having the right people among the current personnel present at the gatherings is vital.

“You need to make the relevant matches. You want to have people meet the people they care about,” Tiensuu states.

Hoikkala advises paying attention to the guest list. *“We opened the invitation list to our people for them to see who was coming. This way, we got a range of PwC employees, from younger associates to partners, who know the alumni attending the event.”*



You need to make the relevant matches. You want to have people meet the people they care about.
-Leena Tiensuu, PwC Finland

Alumni and social networks, different yet the same

One key difference between alumni and social networks is that updating the network contact list is the company's responsibility. At PwC, being a part of the mailing list is voluntary and offered at the time of exit. After that, keeping up with changes requires a lot of manual work. *"We want to have the list complete and correct. That has proven to be quite tricky,"* Tiensuu notes.

Both Tiensuu and Hoikkala see that, in the future, social media platforms might offer the solution, much like with the organically formed social networks. Currently, the alumni are encouraged to follow PwC's public social media channels.

Tiensuu and Hoikkala have also noticed that their alumni are active in keeping up their own networks and setting up their own gatherings. This further shows that the interest to stay in touch with their former colleagues is there and all that is needed is a time and a place.

Companies cannot build networks, but they can provide platforms

Ompeluseura's Teikari does not believe that companies can build networks like Ompeluseura. *"From the company's perspective, it is impossible to create this kind of a phenomenon,"* Teikari states. *"For companies, the purpose and the motive is very different. When people sense the will to gain money or fish for clients, it's a turnoff for most."*

But this doesn't mean there's nothing to be done. *"If you can, bring people together in a way that they get something valuable out of it. Aim to create experiences of easy networking,"* Teikari advises.

So for companies, building and keeping up networks is actually about creating platforms for people to come together. Through platforms, companies should offer opportunities – no strings attached. *"If you can give people a space for encounters and if needed, facilitate the discussions, that is enough. In employer branding, I believe in continuous interaction. Different platforms and mediums are the tools to achieve that,"* summarizes Halme.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A functioning network is based on shared values and constantly brings something valuable to its members
- Working life networks can help employers reach the kind of applicants they want
- Employees and job hunters act on these networks as private persons, but they have many possibilities to impact a company's employer brand
- All companies have a network, although it is often under-engaged: the alumni
- When organizing alumni gatherings, make sure to match people and provide interesting encounters
- Companies can build platforms to bring people together, but only if they demand nothing in return – both physical and virtual spaces are worth exploring

Employer branding 2027

Pelagia Wolff and Christina Dahlblom

Companies and organizations developing their brands today prioritize their own people as a key stakeholder group. Ten years ago, investors and media representatives were considered the top priority in terms of communications. Five years ago, decision-makers and officials were in the spotlight. Now, the pendulum is swinging to employees. The causes are manifold; competition in the industrialized world is increasingly based on human capital, the operational environment demands greater pace and constant innovation, and the modern communications landscape spurs transparency. Tomorrow, employer branding will be less about recruitment and campaigns, and more about developing great organizational climates and inspiring leadership to secure positive employee experiences. It will also be about engaging and empowering employees to build an ever stronger employer image. What will be the hot topics in employer branding a decade from now?

PELAGIA WOLFF is specialized in employer branding and has an extensive background within corporate communications and corporate branding. Pelagia believes in transparent, engaging and inspiring communications and wants to take part in building a successful working life. Pelagia worked as a senior communications consultant and team leader at Milton until September 2017.

CHRISTINA DAHLBLOM holds a Ph.D. in Marketing from Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki, Finland, and is a trained leadership coach. Christina has 13 years of managerial experience and has worked with leadership development and executive education since 2001. Her passion is leadership development projects that aim to increase performance, while improving both customer and employee experiences. Christina is the founder and Managing Director of Milton Sparks Oy.

1. Inside out by breaking silos

Future employer brands will be built from the inside out, combining human resource management and development, leadership, communications, and marketing competence. Most importantly, the business or the purpose of the organization will be at the core. With only human resource and leadership experts on board, while a number of crucial processes will be in place, few people will be fully aware of these processes, either internally or externally. With only the communications and marketing group in place, the situation is likely to be even worse – ‘packaging without content’ will not survive in an open communications landscape. And, self-evidently, without the business there is no employer branding at all.

As **Brett Minchington**, an international employer branding authority, puts it; “*Employer branding is not an HR, marketing, communications or talent function, it is a business function.*” The employer brand is emerging under the corporate brand and is tightly intertwined with the consumer brand, not least when talking about service and knowledge industries where the people constitute the offering.

2. Distinctive angle and individualized consistency

The recipe for corporate branding has long been to develop distinctive key messages and tell the same story in different contexts, adapting it to different stakeholders’ needs.

When it comes to building employer image, we see that clarity and consistency are also of great importance. In a world overloaded with messaging, you need to explicate clearly what you stand for, both internally and externally.

One challenge is that clarity demands prioritization. If you want to be able to highlight certain themes in your brand, you cannot have too many of them. It is not surprising then that many employee value propositions (EVPs) include three to six themes. However, many of the EVPs we have seen during recent years are difficult from the communications point of view and the building of a distinctive image. Why? Because they are so generic that there is no point in communicating, much less in remembering them, at all. This is the intriguing part about the inside-out approach to employer branding; your communications should definitely be internally true and credible, but you also need to be brave to be interesting and to be heard.

Another challenge as well as an opportunity, is that employees, just like consumers, increasingly expect individualized experiences, starting from recruitment. The trick is to have a shared story on the general level, but allow for talent segment, geographical and individual adaption. Digitalization and technical tools can support individual experiences. But the everyday working climate, leadership and the immediate supervisors, will still play a key role in the individual experience. If these do not match the communicated promises, clashes will occur.

3. Dare to be visionary

Great employer branding is about development that brings out the best in the work community, not about a one-time projection. Thus, the employer brand should be based on, but not simply reflect, reality. A great employee experience can strengthen the employer image, and vice versa. This is a dual and ongoing process, and we see that great employer branding is about both respecting and nurturing this dependency. To achieve greatness, you need to do more than just listen to your people very carefully to understand where you stand today. You also have to dream big and build an inspiring story. Aim for a narrative that is simple enough and based on just a few core themes. Then review how these themes are reflected on the employee journey and identify the acts needed to both amplify and energize internally to take the work community in the right direction.

4. Empowering employees to be the channel

In employer branding, you can forget about defined groups of spokespersons going through media trainings and using well-prepared materials. In this field, rough and authentic person-to-person communication is the reality. And what is really special within this field is that the targets groups are actually also the most important channel. Each and every person in your people network – not only those employees with permanent contracts, but also all your ex-workers, your temps and freelancers – make up your employer brand channel.

Today, communicators spend a great deal of effort to get the entity – the company or organization – to look good. Tomorrow, we envision that communicators will need to get all their people to look good and spread a consistent, yet authentic message. For that to be feasible, the entire employee journey, from recruitment to engagement and all the way to the

alumni phase, needs to rigidly repeat, repeat, and repeat, both in acts and communications, what is really important for you and your employees, what your vision of your work community is.

5. P2P in networks

Employer branding target groups have been divided into three categories: potential, current and past employees. We see that current employees are the most important, since they are actively taking the brand further. However, organizations are increasingly operating in networks with all three of the groups involved. These networks are dominated by person-to-person communications and the brand is built in different contexts and communities, with only a few of them controlled by the organizations themselves. Companies wanting to scout talent in networks and to support their people in communicating and building relationships for a win-win situation, can get insight from studying both virtual and physical network platforms.

6. Soft is hard and needs data

In 2027, we envision that employer branding will be led strategically with clear targets and a follow-up of measurable results. Focus will be increasingly on value creation and its effects on turnover, more than on cost. When measuring employer branding, it will be essential to combine business KPIs and data with HRD, leadership, communications and marketing KPIs and data. It will also be especially interesting to merge data, such as client satisfaction and employee satisfaction, to get an understanding of how to drive development forward.

7. More status, more impact

Communications targeted at employees has traditionally not been given too much status. Investor relations, and public relations, followed by public affairs, have been in focus within the communications sector.

In Finland, “employer branding” is seldom combined with ‘director’ titles. Moreover, employer branding is the responsibility of HR managers and recruitment specialists. In the Nordic and international arena, employer branding is gaining status and credibility. It is evident that this business-critical and cross-functional field, demanding the capability to combine the understanding of business operations, leadership and development, marketing, and communications, needs to be headed from

the C-level. In his book ‘Employer Branding and the new world@work’ Brett Minchington, who examined announced employer brand related positions in the US, 2006–2012, states that *“A review of the job and person specifications shows a diversity of approaches being taken by companies in recruiting employer brand leadership talent. What is consistent is the increasingly strategic nature of the role requiring professionals with experience and background in a number of functions which support the employer branding role.”*

The publication Viestinnän ammattilaiset (‘Communications Professionals’) from 2015 (published by ProCom, Viesti ry, Julkisen alan tiedottajat ry, and Kirkon tiedotuskeskus) screens the communications sector in Finland. Pay rates for different kinds of communications assignments show that internal communicators are not especially well-paid. Based on salary levels, brand building, reputation management and sustainability communications seem to be valued to a significantly larger degree.

However, we predict that going forward, you will see companies with strong and sustainable corporate and employer brands, as well as good reputations, putting great value in driving employee experiences, engagement, as well as strategy execution through internal and employee communications.

8. From internal to employee communications

Companies who want to leverage the communicative power of truly engaged employees, have started investing in high-quality employee communication. Taking traditional internal communication to the next level means designing messages and ways of interacting with the specific intent of reaching employees in ways that are meaningful for them. At best, you will see a much higher impact in terms of the communicated messages, and employees actively engaging in spreading them forward.

9. Stress epidemic paves the way for well-being

Negative stress is spreading in the industrialized world, and mental health-related sick leave is becoming alarmingly common among knowledge workers. Successful employer brands will support their people in navigating the new reality, and in this way, develop both the employee experience and the employer image.

For a sound employee experience, it is essential to work towards a sustainable working culture by supporting both leadership and self-leadership in addition to optimal work processes. Well-being, sustainable work conditions and recovery are becoming as ‘fashionable’ as skipping sleep to work long hours was some years ago. However, in a digital world of constant connectivity, where running fast is essential for success, recovery is an active choice. To ensure that the human minds you employ can deliver top performances, you need to focus on individuals as a whole and on work-life integration.

When combined with acts for improving employee experience, communications measures around the topic of well-being can boost employer image. Taking this topic to a strategic level is an opportunity for thought leadership.

10. Leaders will have the driver’s seat

In the transparent, demanding, knowledge-based and fast-changing environment, people are likely to find work-life challenging also in the future. Positive organizational climates, powered by a sense of purpose, supported by high-quality connections between employees, and enabled by fluent collaboration and communication, will drive both employee experiences, strategy execution and financial results. Even in a world where lower hierarchies and self-organizing are becoming more common, we believe leaders will have a key role to play for years to come. Few leaders’ role descriptions include employer branding, or even explicitly employee experiences. In reality, leaders’ every day actions will, through their impact on employee experiences, have more impact on the employer brand than any communicated messages. The discrepancy between image and experience will have dramatic outcomes – and will ultimately lead to ‘The death of the chameleon’.

It is up to leaders to walk the talk.

Miltton would like to thank all interviewees
and other participants for their valuable input.

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WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP between the corporate brand, the consumer brand, and the employer brand? To engage employees, what kind of leadership and culture is needed in today's fast-paced and complex operational environment? What opportunities do networks provide for recruiting? And how can you use data for steering the employee experience and track the bottom-line impact of employer branding?

MILTTONS INSIGHTS VI 'The death of the chameleon' seeks answers to these questions, and many others. Milton has interviewed 23 influencers within employer branding and the report provides their views in ten articles across different themes. In addition, Milton's experts on employee experience and employer image look ten years into the future and elaborate on their vision of employer branding in 2027.

THIS IS THE SIXTH REPORT in the Milton Insights series. The report series examines companies' roles in society through influencer interviews.



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