



Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Tiina Tarvainen

Employer branding in an HR shared service center

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Author: Tiina Tarvainen
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Supervisor: Vesa Suutari
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ABSTRACT:

Kansainväliset yritykset tähtäävät tehokkuuteen ja arvon luontiin jatkuvasti muuttuvassa ympäristössä. Jaetut palvelukeskukset ovat uusi organisaatiomalli vastaamaan näitä tarpeita. Keski- ja Itä-Eurooppa ovat kasvava alue rakentaa näitä palvelukeskuksia. Tyypillistä tämän alueen työmarkkinoille on voimakas kilpailu ja ongelmat työntekijöiden vaihtuvuudessa. Yksi mahdollinen ratkaisu houkutellessa uusia työntekijöitä ja pitää heidät jaetuissa palvelukeskuksissa on keskittyä työnantajamielikuvaan. Tämä mielikuva saattaa nousta erityisen tärkeäksi, sillä palvelukeskusten rekrytoinnin kohderyhmänä ovat pääasiassa nuoret ammattilaiset. Tämä tutkimus keskittyy työnantajamielikuvaan ja työnantajakiinnostavuuteen jaetussa palvelukeskuksessa, joka keskittyy henkilöstöhallintoon ja sijaitsee Keski-Euroopassa. Strategiaksi on valittu tapaustutkimus ja tiedonkeräysmenetelmäksi teemahaastattelut. Tutkimustulokset yhdistävät edellisten tutkimusten tuloksia työnantajamielikuvasta ja jaetuista palvelukeskuksista. Lisäksi tulokset ehdottavat, että työnantajamielikuva voi auttaa uusia työntekijöitä kiinnostumaan jaetusta palvelukeskuksesta työnantajana. Tutkimustulokset antavat myös uusia ajatuksia heikon työnantajamielikuvan vaikutuksista. Tulokset näyttävät myös, kuinka rekrytointi ja työpaikassa aloittaminen voivat olla ratkaisu työnantajamielikuvan luomiseen sekä työntekijöiden pysymiseen tarvittavan ajan palvelukeskuksessa. Toisin kuin aiemmat tutkimukset, nämä tulokset ehdottavat, että työntekijöiden vaihtuvuus voidaan nähdä myös mahdollisuutena tutkittavassa organisaatiossa. Tutkimustulokset eivät kuitenkaan ole yleistettävissä johtuen tutkimuksen rajoituksista. Tämän takia lisää näyttöä tarvittaisiin työnantajamielikuvan vaikutuksista jaettuihin palvelukeskuksiin tulevaisuudessa.

KEYWORDS: employer branding, shared service center, young potentials, Central and Eastern Europe, talent attraction, talent retention

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Abbreviations

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EU	European Union
EVP	Employee Value Proposition
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
MNC	Multinational Corporation
P-O fit	Person – Organization fit
SSC	Shared Service Center

1 Introduction

1.1 The background of the study

Global organizations are seeking value and effectiveness through new business models and strategies (Žilić & Čošić, 2016). One organizational solution that is growing is to build shared service centers (SSCs). The most common functions to centralize to these are finance, HR and IT services. (Szabo-Szentgroti, Csonka & Szabo-Szentgroti, 2016; SSON, 2019, p.3-4; Gaffney, 2015) From Fortune 500 companies more than 75% have built a service center (Accenture, 2015).

Central and Eastern Europe is increasing as the choice where multinational corporations (MNCs) want to build their SSCs (Tholons, 2014; Drygala, 2013). The area brings different kinds of challenges for MNCs and especially the competition of talent in Central and Eastern Europe is intense (Horwitz, 2011; Felker, 2012). The global pool of talent is shrinking and the competition of talent is increasing in Europe (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011; Frances, 2008, p.5). Besides attraction challenges, the current trend in the field of shared service centers is the challenge of retaining the needed talent in the changing environment. (SSON, 2019, p.14-17; Miskon et al., 2011; Koval, Nabareseh, Klimek & Chromjakova, 2016) Marsh and Wooley (2010, p.189) suggested that the company transformations and the trend of individual uncertainty require new tools to retain and improve employee engagement.

These organizational changes require long term strategic plans (Marsh & Wooley, 2010, p.191). One solution for the above-mentioned challenges of the shared service centers can be employer branding. It is used to attract and retain the right kind of talent in the competitive markets (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011; Shah, 2011 p.30-31). Employer branding is one dimension of talent management and it can help companies to promote themselves and be distinctive and desired employers (Shah, 2011, p.30-31; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p.501).

Young talent is the first recruitment target group of service centers (Koval et al., 2016; Szabo-Szentgroti et al., 2016). It would be beneficial for shared service centers to aim for creating a positive employer brand since it helps organizations attract and keep the young talent. This new generation of employees value especially the symbolic attributes of the corporations. (Eger, Mičák, & Řehoř, 2018; Chi-Cheng, Rui-Hsin Kao, & Chia-Jung, 2018; Vuorinen, 2013, p.196) Another reason for the shared service centers to pay attention to employer brand is the mentioned competition in Central and Eastern Europe. In CEE the brand and reputation can be the keys to keep the needed talent and attract possible employees (Horowitz, 2012; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77).

The research of the shared service centers has concentrated more on motivation and implementation issues and the subject is fairly new to academia (Richter & Brühl, 2017). Because of the popularity of the service centers, they are becoming more and more important topic to study (Schulzin & Brenner, 2010). The academia has not defined a clear definition of shared services yet and the theory is evolving rapidly (Soalheira & Timbrell, 2014, p.67).

Furthermore, employer branding is a relatively new topic in academia. Ambler and Barrow introduced the term the first time in 1996. The theory of employer branding and its definition is still developing (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Bendaraviciene, 2016; Edwards 2010; Mosley, 2014, p.3-4).

Therefore, there can be found some studies of both employer branding as well as shared service centers. However, no studies are combining these two topics which is why this study concentrates on reducing this research gap. Also, the attraction and retention of shared service center employees have not yet been studied. The focus of this research is an HR shared service center located in Poland. This study brings new thoughts about HR shared service center management. This creates valuable information about the effects of employer branding for HR service centers' own HR and management.

Besides of academic interest on this topic, it was chosen because of the author's personal experience of working in an HR shared service center. This gives the understanding of the research topic and context for the researcher and thus helps to make a more in-depth analysis of the findings. Subsequently, this helps to improve the quality of the research. Next the objective of this study is presented as well as the research questions.

1.2 The aim and the research questions

Based on the background of shared service centers' research as well as the theoretical background of employer branding, this research aims at studying the role of talent management and employer branding in an HR shared service center located in Central Europe. The objective of the research is achieved by finding the answers to the following main questions.

1. How does the HR shared service center attract and retain talent?

The first research question studies the phenomena at a more general level. It evaluates the main ways the HR shared service center is attracting and retaining the needed talent as well as the challenges the center is facing. Additionally, the target group of the service center is examined more closely.

2. How does employer branding help to answer to the challenges of attracting and retaining talent in the HR shared service center?

The second research question focuses more on the practical ways how employer branding can answer to the service center's challenge to identify, recruit and keep the needed talent. It answers if the employer brand is important when choosing the shared service center as an employer and staying to work there. It also indicates what the ways are, the shared service center uses to promote employer brand.

1.2.1 Delimitations

To clarify the scope of the study for the reader, next are presented the delimitations of the study. There are five main delimitations that are in connection with the main themes of the study.

Firstly, this study focuses only on attraction and retention of service center talent as well as the employer branding. Other processes or aspects of the service center management are not included in this study. Secondly, employer branding is evaluated only in the HR shared service centers point of view in this study. Other forms of service centers are not included.

Thirdly, the focus is on a Western multinational company with a service center operating Central Europe. The study does not focus on the local service centers or other emerging markets. In more specific the company that is studied in the methodological part is a shared service center operating in Poland. Fourthly, the case study focuses only on one HR shared service center organization. Because of the limited recourses other organizations are not studied in this research.

Lastly, the chosen data collection method is semi-structured interviews. This is to get more in-depth answers and deeper analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p.320). Questionnaires or other quantitative methods are not chosen since they can limit the understanding of subjective and socially constructed meanings of the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2016, p.568-569).

1.3 Terminology and key concepts

Next the main terms and concepts of this study are introduced. This is to explain these concepts examined further in this study to the reader.

Employer branding

Employer branding lacks a clear definition among the researchers (Mosley, 2014, p.3-4) but this study uses the following from Sullivan (2004): employer branding is "a targeted,

long term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm".

Shared service center model

Academia has unanimity of definition for shared services (Soalheira & Timbrell, 2014, 67). This study uses the following from Bauer and Vargas (2018): a shared service center is one department responsible for executing and handling one of the operational tasks of an organization. In Figure 1 is illustrated a simplified positioning of shared service center model.

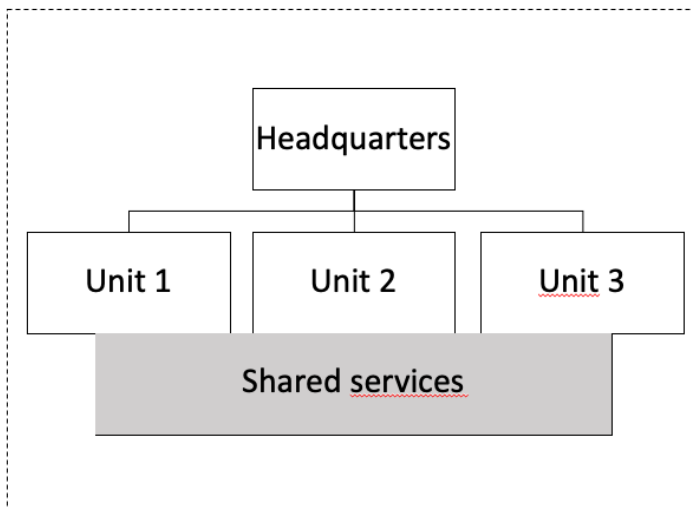


Figure 1 The SSC model (modified from Janssen & Joha, 2006).

Young potentials

In this study the new generation of employees is referred with the term of young potentials. It is used to refer to the terms of Y generation, Millennials as well as the graduates which all have slightly different definitions depending on the researcher. They all have in common that they are indicated as the new generation of people with different life outlook than previous generations and that they have different expectations and motives (Pînzaru & Mitan, 2016; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008; Vuorinen, 2013, p.196).

CEE

CEE is referred as the countries from Central and Eastern Europe in this study. The group of countries consist of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. (OECD, 2001)

1.4 The structure of the study

Next, the chapter 2 presents theoretical background of employer branding. The positioning and definition of employer branding are discussed first. Also, the determinants and effects of employer branding are presented. The management aspects of employer brand end the chapter.

In chapter 3 an overview of shared service center theories is provided. The sourcing solution is first defined as well as the common areas where the multinational corporations are building these centers. Furthermore, the different characteristics of SSCs, such as the benefits, challenges and management aspects, are presented. The attraction and retention of young talent in HR shared service center in Central Europe concludes the literature review.

Chapter 4 briefly explains methodology of this study. The case study method is further discussed as well as the data collection and analysis of the findings. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study is assessed.

Chapter 5 delivers the findings of this study. The main categories of the findings are presented in two parts: first one concentrating on attraction and retention of talent in the case company and the second part on employer branding in the case company.

Chapter 6 the study discusses the findings further and compares the results in the previous studies. The chapter provides answers to the research questions presented earlier and the discussion is divided following these two topics.

Chapter 7 concludes this study with theoretical contributions and managerial implications. Also, the limitations of this study are discussed. In the end, the suggestions for future studies are presented.

2 Employer branding

This chapter provides an overview of the current employer branding theory. At the beginning of the chapter, the theoretical background of employer branding is briefly explained. After that, the study presents the definitions of employer branding. The third part of this chapter focuses on the dimensions and antecedents of employer branding. Also, the effects of employer branding are explained. The end of this chapter illustrates the adaptation of employer branding.

2.1 Background theories of employer branding

Next, the broader concepts behind employer branding are explained. Employer branding is a tool of human resources management (HRM) and talent management more specific (see Hughes & Rog, 2008; Shah, 2011, p.30-31). It also aligns these concepts with marketing and branding (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p.501; Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Successful HR management in a multinational companies depends on “getting the right people in the right jobs in the right places at the right times and the right cost” (Pucik et al., 2016, p.32). The tasks of HRM are attracting and recruitment, managing, and rewarding performance as well as developing and retaining people (Pucik et al., 2016, p.32).

One of the reasons for companies to pay attention to their human resources is globalization and its effects. It has been deepening over the centuries building new challenges for growing international business (Burke & Cooper, 2006; Okafor, 2007; Pucik et al., 2016, p.6-7). Organizations are taking more network forms and globally performed work is increasing (Burke & Cooper, 2006; Kellerman, 2007; Pucik et al. 2016, p.6-8). New technology, processes, products, and strategies are emerging but the competitors can easily copy these (Burke & Cooper, 2006). Organizations’ practices and culture can turn out to be a unique competitive advantage (Burke & Cooper, 2006). This is why it is important to pay attention to the companies’ most vital resource: its employees (see Hughes & Rog,

2008). Since the units of the organization are apart, the alignment and collaboration become the challenges where the human resources management and talent management more specific are the key (Brewster, Sparrow, & Harris, 2005; Pucik et al. 2016, p.6-8, 11; Schuler, Jackson & Tarique, 2010, p. 506, 514).

Talent management (TM) is a strategic approach to HRM (Hughes & Rog, 2008; Schuler, Jackson & Tarique, 2010, p. 506). Shah (2011, p.30) summarized that “talent management refers to the process of developing and integrating new workers, developing and keeping current workers and attracting highly skilled workers to work for company”. Talent management practices enhance the organizational image and thus organizational attractiveness (Maurya & Manisha, 2018). The higher the practices fit the more attractive an organization is to a possible employee.

The ever-changing environment requires adapting and developing the companies' competences to fulfill the needs, both in the short term and in the long-term. With the help of talent management, companies are able to conquer the global talent challenges such as the growing shortage of the needed competences and motivation. Linking talent management and strategy would be important, in order to increase the company's success. (Schuler, Jackson & Tarique, 2010, p. 506, 514)

According to Hughes and Rog (2008), the pool of talented employees is decreasing which is why it might be beneficial for companies to pay attention to the TM approach. Talent management can improve employee recruitment, retention, and engagement (Hughes & Rog, 2008). Through these, talent management enhances the operational and financial performance of a company and also builds competitive advantages and brings strategic value (Hughes & Rog, 2008; Pucik et al. 2016, p.169). Successful talent management shapes the organization's competences and prosperity and helps to prevent failures such as mismatch between talent demand and supply (Cappelli, 2008, p.1).

Global corporations are rethinking their internal resourcing and trying to improve their competitiveness which leads to different ways of global work (Schuler & Tarique, 2012; Schuler, Jackson & Tarique, 2010, p. 506). Self-initiated employers, who pursue employment opportunities abroad by themselves (Richardson, 2006), for example, require different kind of talent management where the focus would be in various levels, such as individual characteristics, organizational needs and national regulatory regimes (Rodrigues & Scurry, 2014, p. 103).

The flatter, networked organizations create constantly new talent management tools and approaches (Kellerman, 2007). Employer branding is one of the dimensions of talent management (Shah, 2011, p.30-31; see also Vaneet & Neha, 2018). The determinants of employer branding are crucial for attracting and retaining talent in comparison with other talent management practices (Maurya & Manisha, 2018). Academic research sees employer branding as a distinctive phenomenon to be studied as such (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Besides being an approach to human resources management and talent management, employer branding is using marketing and branding strategies. Employer branding is the application of branding to HR management and it promotes the company and makes it different and desired employer both inside and outside of the organization (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p.501). Marketing and HR practices are aligned through the whole employer branding process (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Before defining employer branding it is useful to reflect the branding itself. Swystun (2007, 14) argues that “a brand is a mixture of attributes, tangible and intangible, symbolized in a trademark, which if managed properly, creates value and influence”. Brands have been managed over 80 years and they are proven to capture and generate value to companies (Mosley, 2014, p.44). Branding is today used for differentiating people, places, and companies, besides its original use for differentiating tangible products (Peters, 1999).

Mosley (2007) illustrated how corporate, customer and employer brand propositions are linked with each other. Corporate leaders create the core purpose and values and those guide the marketing and HR choices of branding. Branding proposition helps to attract and retain the right kind of talent and customers. Employer brand is suggested to be a part of the corporate brand adapted to the needs of current and potential employees (Mosley, 2014, p. 44). Successful employer brand is associated with the corporate brand, values, and purpose (Mosley, 2014, p.35). Łacka-Badura (2015, p.27) suggested that employees and customers could nowadays be treated with equal care (see also Haak, 2019) and that employer branding is a vital part of corporate branding strategy. Sengupta and others (2015) suggested that employer branding should be raised as an important issue in an organization as a corporate branding process designing.

2.2 Definition of employer branding

This chapter extends the definition of employer branding from the one presented in chapter 1. The employer branding topic is relatively new to academia. There is no common widely accepted definition of employer branding (Mosley, 2014, p.3-4). Additionally, there are still some critical questions about employer branding, for example, how organizations can develop and implement effective employer brand. The employer branding theory itself is evolving still. (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, Edwards 2010) Next, are presented many different definitions of employer branding to give a more complete and extensive view of this tool.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) originally coined the term *employer branding* as a tool to manage the brand and talent of an organization. Martin, Gollan, and Grigg (2011) define "*employer brand* as a generalized recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing a high-quality employment experience, and a distinctive organizational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others". They differentiate *employer branding* as "the process by which branding con-

cepts and marketing, communications and HR techniques are applied to create an employer brand". Employer branding is the marketing of the employer where customers are possible and current employees and the product is the organization (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Vuorinen, 2013, p.190). Biswas and Suar (2016) concluded that employer branding is branding of employment experience. Employer branding is a long term strategic tool that is vital in the quickly changing markets that involve constantly innovations and learning (Vuorinen, 2013, p.190).

According to this literature review, the two most used definitions of employer branding are from Sullivan as well as from Backhaus and Tikoo. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p.502) argue that employer branding "suggests differentiation of a firm's characteristics as an employer from those of its competitors, the employment brand highlights the unique aspects of the firm's employment offerings or environment". Sullivan (2004) defines it as "a targeted, long term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm". The latter definition is used in this study since it concludes the previous statements of employer branding well and is used by many other researchers.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) separated the term into external and internal employer branding. External employer branding attracts the possible employees towards the organization while internal employer branding helps to retain and facilitates the key talent performers (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015). Internal and external communication adds value to corporate reputation and can help fully utilize the employer branding tool (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018).

Some researchers differentiate employer branding from internal branding where employer branding focuses on potential employees while internal branding focuses on existing employees (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010). Others see internal branding as part of employer branding as Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) presented (see also Maurya & Manisha, 2018). This research follows this idea. According to Mosley (2014, p.2), employer

branding includes the disciplines of internal marketing and communication, consumer brand management and recruitment advertising. Next, the different determinants of employer branding are discussed.

2.3 Dimensions of employer branding

Franca (2012, p.116-117) found in her study that employer branding consists of different dimensions influenced by different factors. Companies may have problems in different dimensions and advantages in others. To recognize and analyze these differentiating factors, companies can build a strong employer brand (Hubschmid, 2012, p.205). Various levels, personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels, promote employment experience which is why there can be various factors influencing employer branding (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Also, culture has a strong impact on the features of the employer brand (Chi-Cheng, Rui-Hsin Kao, & Chia-Jung, 2018). Next is presented the key factors influencing employer branding according to my literature review. The seven dimensions are presented that companies can focus on managing, in order to create a successful employer brand.

All the activities of an organization, such as marketing, recruitment, customer service, management, physical buildings, and products, affect their employer brand. However, the strongest factors are people's own, friends' and family members' experiences as employees, customers or other stakeholders. This is why employer branding needs to be strategic long term development of the whole organization. (Vuorinen, 2013, p.191; Valvisto, 2005) Managing these experiences is the first key factor that can be taken into consideration when managing an employer brand.

The company's unique key qualities, also discussed as the key values among other researchers, can be seen as the second key antecedent of employer branding. Shared sense of the organization's culture and purpose can enable a high level of motivation, loyalty, and performance. With a distinctive cultural identity, the key qualities generate

attraction, employee pride, support, and commitment. The way to share, form and measure these qualities is the employer brand management. (Mosley, 2014, p.1)

Differentiated employer value proposition (EVP) is the key to build an employer branding process (Botha, Bussin and de Swardt, 2011; Sengupta et al., 2015). Łacka-Badura (2015, p.27) defines EVPs as a set of factors summarizing the returns of influencing an organization which can be financial and non-financial. Mosley (2014, p.4.) argues that if the employer brand defines organizations' reputation in terms of the qualities *currently* associated to it, EVP is about defining qualities organizations *want to be* associated with the future. Biswas and Suar (2016) suggested that organizations can first determine the desired values and then compare them with the actual ones and this way plan strategies to manage the gaps.

There are different studies of the most effective value propositions. Results of Sengupta and others' (2015) study shows that internal employer branding is affected the most by career potential, justice, employee engagement, contented, comfort and appreciation values. However, image, job structure, work culture, reference, and pride values predict external employer branding. Dabirian, Kietzmann, and Diba (2017) argue that value propositions are the key when people are evaluating places to work, although they list seven depart from Sengupta and others (2015). Dabirian and others (2017) suggested that the most successful value propositions are: social, interest, application, development, economic, management, and work/life balance. Marsh and Wooley (2010, p.189) emphasize the values, that have the performance-driven factors embedded in them, are able to align ethics, engagement, and brand with successful business decisions. Mosley (2014, p.36) argues that EVPs can be drawn directly from the strong company values and employee focus. If the corporate values are recently created the EVPs are not recommended to be separate or additional values to these to avoid the confusion.

The third dimension of employer branding is employee engagement. Employee engagement factors can be also taken into consideration when developing the employee value

propositions. What makes work engaging are: purpose, challenges, freedom, learning and growth, mutual care and respect, and rewards. Clear and compelling purpose, for example, guide the employee attraction (Haak, 2019). The factors help to identify the internal brand perceptions of employee experience. Active audience participation and involvement, as well as brand promises and their retention, lead to engagement. (Mosley, 2014, p. 107, 227)

The fourth dimension of employer branding is good Human Resources Management practices (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011; Prajapati & Patel, 2017). Job satisfaction created with the help of HRM practices leads to loyalty, and employees are more willing to spread a positive message. This way possible employees are more attracted to the company and the company image is more positive. (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011)

Mosley (2007) illustrated the employee touchpoints and everyday behaviors that HRM involves and by paying attention to these the employer brand can be consistently managed. Everyday behavior consists of leadership and management competencies and values. Process touchpoints are recruitment, communication, shared services, performance and reward for example. Consequently, being consistent and distinctive with these experiences companies are able to manage the link between brand, culture and customer experience.

Biswas and Suar (2016) pay also attention to the importance of HRM processes. Increased realistic job previews raise awareness of possible employers and raise satisfaction in the long run. Perceived organizational support show that employers value and care about the well-being of employees and thus increases the employer brand. In addition, equal reward administration makes employees less willing to leave the company and increases the employer brand. Moreover, offering training, career and growth opportunities, organizations are able to fulfill the psychological contract obligations and thus improve their employer brand. (Biswas & Suar, 2016)

Leadership of top management can be the strongest predictor of employer brand (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Managers set the directions of employer branding and their actions affect the employees more than official messages. That is why it is suggested the managers to be the first ones to engage in EVP and employer brand creation (Mosley, 2014, p.227). Mosley (2014, p.108) presents that positive relationships with managers and trust in senior leaders predict employee retention.

The fifth predictor of employer branding is the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Corporate Social Responsibility is one of the current trends when discussing about employer branding. Fisher (2015) defines CSR as an ethical approach to international development taking the social and environmental impacts of business into consideration. CSR perspectives can lead to organizational attractiveness (Belinda, Westerman, & Bergmanc, 2018). Belinda and others (2018) found that advertising corporate social responsibility through media channels can be one of the best recruitment practices nowadays. Clear and consistent CSR communication could help to attract the best talent and thus it would be beneficial to be recognized and managed more in organizations (Puncheva-Michelotti, Hudson, & Jin, 2018).

The sixth dimension of employer branding is the brand personality factors. Edwards (2010) argues that organizations with a high degree of symbolic personality characteristics have strong a impact on psychological contract content. This helps with the rewards to create unique employment experiences and so have a strong effect on an employer brand. Strong personality characteristics also help potential employees to identify strongly with an organization and focus less on economic and financial-based rewards. According to Bendaraviciene (2016), employment experience features differ even in the same industry.

According to Eger, Mičák and Řehoř (2018), the most ideal symbolic personality traits describing an employer are: reliable, professional, flexible and organized. Davies (2008)

however, found that employers can focus on outcomes of recognized differentiation, loyalty, satisfaction and affinity as they can promote a strong employer brand. Aspects of brand personality predict these outcomes. Especially agreeableness dimension could be promoted since it is the most noticeable dimension. Alternatively, Brusch, Brusch, and Kozlowski (2018) concluded that personality factors influencing employer branding are environmental and social awareness, progressiveness, trust, and tradition. Similarly, Biswas and Suar (2016) see that organizational trust predicts a positive employer brand. Employees identify with companies that are positively appraised which is why perceived organizational prestige emphasizes a positive employer brand (Biswas & Suar, 2016).

The final dimension that the employer branding process could take into consideration is the person-organization fit (P-O fit). Potgieter and Doubell (2018) stress how important it would be for organizations to understand that person-organization fit enhances the employer brand. Kristof (1996) (see also Cable & Edwards, 2004) defined the person-organization fit as compatibility between individuals and organizations with supplementary and complementary fit. Supplementary fit exists if there is a similarity between the characteristics, such as values, goals, culture, and personality. Complementary fit exists if the demands and supplies, such as resources, opportunities, and tasks, of both an organization and an individual meet. Valentine (2000) on the other hand, defines P-O fit as “congruence between individuals and organizational values, practices, and cultures”.

While managing these above presented seven key factors companies could aim for consistency, attractiveness as well as accuracy with their employer branding. Botha, Bussin and de Swardt (2011) argue that brand consistency is one of the predictors of a positive employer brand. Similarly, Wilska (2014) argues that consistent and socially responsive initiatives increase satisfaction and makes organizations more attractive. According to Mosley (2014, p.142), the core areas of employer brand consistency are brand positioning, personality, and pillars which are also the key components of EVP.

Similarly, App, Merk, and Büttgen (2012) bring the sustainable human resources management view to employer branding. They explain how employer brand can signal potential employees' vision, what it would like to be working for the organization. They also claim that an employer is more attractive if the image is seen positive by applicants and employees. Sustainable HRM includes also paying attention to the perceived fit between personal characteristics as well as the EVP. The whole process needs to be taken care of when creating a sustainable employer brand, from potential employees to the post-employment phase in different life and career stages.

Furthermore, Moroko and Uncles (2008) argue that a successful and sustainable employer brand is defined with two key dimensions: attractiveness and accuracy. This is how job seekers choose the organization and their experience fits or exceeds the impression of the company. These employees are more likely to stay in the company and create success. Determinants of employer attractiveness is discussed more in chapter 2.4.1.

To conclude this chapter, below is illustrated in Figure 2 the employer branding dimensions that companies could focus to manage. The dimensions are linked with each other and some have overlapping effects as described earlier. Successful employer branding could aim for consistency, accuracy, and attractiveness. The next chapter concentrates on why companies should pay attention to employer branding.

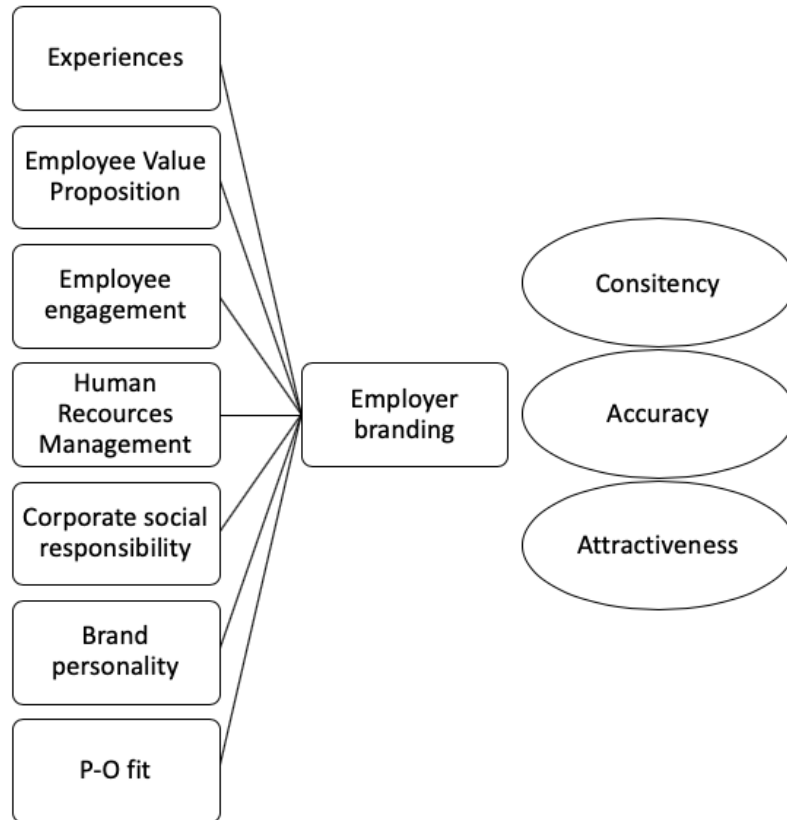


Figure 2 Dimensions of employer branding.

2.4 Effects of employer branding

The employer branding concept is also facing some criticism. Some argue that employer branding is not required and that organizations can attract and retain the needed talent also without marketing (Vuorinen, 2013, p.196). This is why next is presented why it is recommended for companies to pay attention to this strategy. The answer is that talented employees are the key to success while the global competition of talent is tightening. This way employer branding can be one of the solutions.

Organizations' value depends increasingly on high-quality employees (Greening & Turban, 2000; Vuorinen, 2013, p.189). The skills and knowledge of talented employees build the competitive advantages of an organization if they are attracted to the organization and remain productive (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005; Maurya & Manisha, 2018). Employees are the key to build and retain employer brand and they can become employer

brand ambassadors who promote the brand themselves (Graham & Cascio, 2018). Employer branding can have either a positive or negative influence on potential, current and former employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). In other words, the effect is circular: employer brand affects employees who affect again on the employer brand.

There is a “war for talent” in the global markets where strategic HR tools, such as employer branding, play an important role (Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015). Employees in the global markets are more mobile than ever before (Earle, 2003) which is why it can be challenging to find highly qualified and motivated employees (App, Merk & Büttgen, 2012). Mahesh and Suresh (2019) argue that employer branding can help to grow the possible pool of talent for corporations. Business processes are expanding, growing and becoming more diverse where a focus on employer branding can be the key. HR is using it as a long term strategic tool investing in employees as internal customers. This way organizations can enhance competitive advantages in the global market as well as the corporate reputation (Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018).

Employer branding can help corporations to attract, motivate and retain talent (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Graham & Cascio, 2018; Küpper, Klein & Völckner, 2019; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Neeti & Sharma, 2014). According to Wilska (2014), internal and external actions of an organization to enhance employer brand can make employees less willing to leave the company. Employer branding can also have a strong emphasis on employment experience (Maurya & Manisha, 2018). Employer brand may help to differentiate and personalize the company and motivate the right kind of talent (Łącka-Badura, 2015, p.27; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019). Personalization can be a way to fulfill the individual needs, wishes and meet the competencies of employees (Haak, 2019).

Employer branding can be the most effective tool of signaling theory (Bendaraviciene, 2016). According to signaling theory, an organization sends signals to possible employees about what it would be like to work in there (Greening & Turban, 2000). Strong employer

brand can increase the amount and quality of information available for possible employees and hence help to recruit the best candidates (Bendaraviciene, 2016). The study by DeGrassi (2012) shows that especially ethical signals increase the organizational attractiveness for potential employees.

Other theories are linked with employer branding as well. Edwards (2010) presents that employer branding determines organizational identification. Recognizable and prestigious employer brand increases the level of organizational identification (Edwards, 2010). Identification roots the individuals into an organization (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). The identity of a relevant collective or role boosts the identification and makes the individual act in the organization's best interest (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). According to Edwards (2010), employer branding could include information on corporate image and identification linked with the organization's distinctive characteristics. This information can increase employee commitment and identification.

A strong employer brand can enhance business success. To fulfill the needs of the stakeholders and to achieve success, organizations benefit from highly loyal employees (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen & Schoonderbeek, 2012). A strong employer brand can get the talent to stay longer and bring reliability to business (Mahesh & Suresh, 2019). Employer branding helps organizations to build competitive advantages and prosperity (Graham & Cascio, 2018). Employer branding can increase the authenticity, responsiveness and social capital of an organization as well as help to change an organization into innovative and transformative business (Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011).

Moreover, employer branding shapes corporations' intangible assets. According to Potgieter and Doubell (2018), a well-executed employer branding process improves the organization's profile both internally and externally. Employer branding can affect the global recognition of company image, culture and business practices (Mahesh & Suresh, 2019). Besides, it can have a strong influence on corporate reputation which makes it an

important corporate reputation management strategy (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018; Graham & Cascio, 2018). Similarly, the study by Verčič and Čorić (2018) presented that strong employer brand as well as corporate social responsibility signal good corporate reputation. This reputation enhances the possible employees' likelihood to apply for the job (Eger, Mičič, & Řehoř, 2018).

Additionally, the employer brand itself has its reputation. Most common associations of the employer determine this employer brand reputation (Mosley, 2014, p.96). Brand disasters are very hard to repair, so paying constant attention to employer brand becomes much easier for an organization. The awareness pays off and can prevent the reputation damages. (Graham & Cascio, 2018) Employer branding initiatives might be seen as costs in the short-term but in the long-term, it is an investment in a stable reputation and mutually beneficial relationship with employees (Kucherov & Zamulin, 2016).

Besides its non-financial outcomes employer branding has financial effects (Biswas & Suoar, 2016). It is cheaper for a company to keep an employee than try to get a new one (Dabirian, Kietzmann & Diba, 2017). Employer brand lowers recruitment costs, attracts more qualified applicants, reduces training costs, and lowers employee turnover which increases the profitability of an organization (Biswas & Suar, 2016; Vaneet & Neha, 2018). According to a LinkedIn survey, a strong employer brand can halve the costs per hire and reduce the cost of employee turnover by a quarter (Mosley, 2014, p.12-15). With the help of employer brand management the time, money and efforts can be targeted to the right kind of talent (Mosley, 2014, p.20).

2.4.1 Employer attractiveness

One more important effect of employer branding is the employer attractiveness. As described in chapter 2.3 employer branding could aim for attractiveness. A strong employer brand increases this employer's attractiveness (Celani & Singh, 2011, p.223) alongside the earlier mentioned compelling purpose, HRM practices, and CSR for example. Employer attraction is defined by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) as "as the envisioned

benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization". Other researchers talk about this with the term organizational attractiveness or employer brand attractiveness. Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, and Schoonderbeek (2012, p.358) defined that organizational attractiveness "refers to the extent to which potential employees view an organization as a desirable and positive place to work" (see also Rynes, 1991; Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005). According to this literature review, there are many antecedents of employer attractiveness. Next, are presented some of the ideas from different researchers. At the end of this chapter is presented also how the concept is linked to other theories.

According to the study of Gomes and Neves (2011, p.684, 695), employer attractiveness is the key variable in the process of intending to apply to a job. The characteristics of a position and the organizational attributes can determine employer attractiveness and thus the intention of possible applicants to apply is increased. Possible applicants become more attracted to an organization in which recruitment advertisement includes the employer brand communicating personality traits. Those traits are for example honesty and innovativeness. (Celani & Singh, 2011, p.230) Additionally, Jin-Feng, Sz-Ping, Shu-Yuan, and Shu-Hwa (2011) found that a positive word of mouth increases organizational attractiveness with other external influences.

Rample and Kenning's (2014) research concentrates on employer brand personality traits, employer brand trust, and employer brand, which determine employer attractiveness. Their results show that this combination, personality traits, trust, and affect, originally build for testing the consumer brands is also applicable for employment context. Brand personality promotes brand trust and affect. Affect is positively associated with sincerity, excitement, and sophistication while trust is positively associated with personality trait sincerity. In other words, their finding shows that it would be beneficial for the companies to concentrate on employer brand personality characteristics that have an impact on employer brand affect and trust.

Similarly, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) claim that employer brand effects brand associations. Further, their study links these associations to employer image and thus to employer attraction. Correspondingly, Neeti and Sharma's study (2014) shows that a strong brand image of a company correlates positively to the likelihood to apply. Also, Chhabra and Sharma (2014, p.50) argue that employer branding emphasizes the image of an employer and the attractiveness. The organization's image shapes how its members define themselves and so it strengthens the organizational identification (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). A strong employer brand image distinguishes the corporation from its competitors and influences the decisions of possible employees (Wilska, 2014). In the following, Figure 3 presents how employer branding effects on employer attraction and employee productivity (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

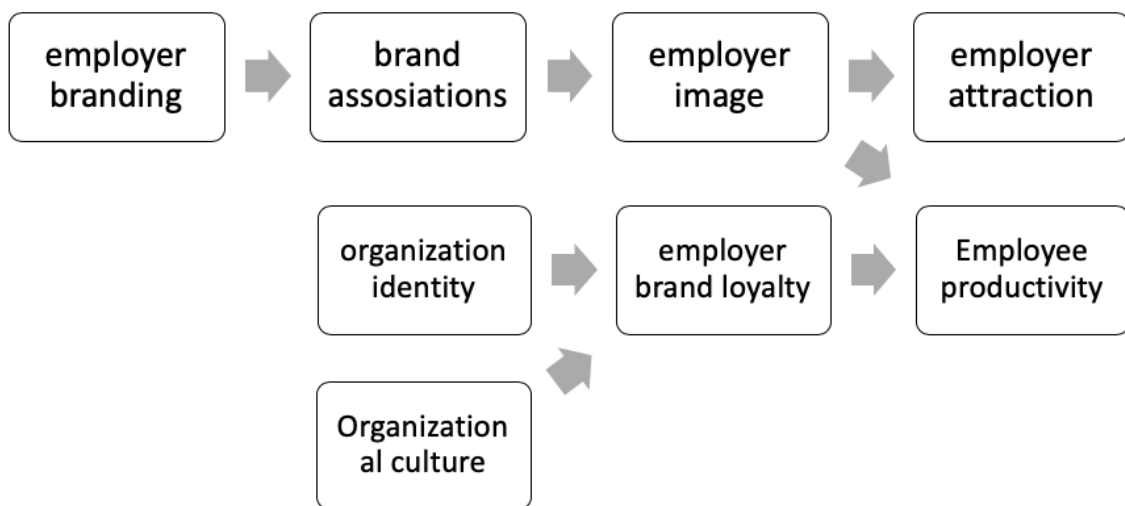


Figure 3 Employer Branding Framework (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Conversely, Ehrhart and Ziegert (2005) observed the metatheories that predicted applicant attraction. According to their study, actual and perceived environment, as well as objective and subjective fit, predict attraction. Actual environmental and person characteristics predict objective fit while predicted environmental and person characteristics influence subjective fit.

Similarly, Xie, Bagozzi, and Meland (2015) focused on the metatheories. They illustrated the links between employer branding, social identity theory, attitude theory, and person-organization fit to show how reputation and identity influence on employer branding attraction, which is shown in Figure 4. Tajfel (1978, 63) defines social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. According to social identity theory, possible employees have a higher self-image when working in a socially responsible organization, and they are more likely to apply (Greening & Turban, 2000). Employer attractiveness means applicants’ intention to search for more information and apply for a job. Company reputation and identity similarity between self-identity and perceived organizational identity impact through cognitive social identity on employer branding attractiveness. Cognitive identification is the first step in the identification process. Attitude links the instrumental attributes of an employer brand, such as evaluation of job attributes, to employer brand attractiveness. (Xie, Bagozzi, & Meland, 2015)

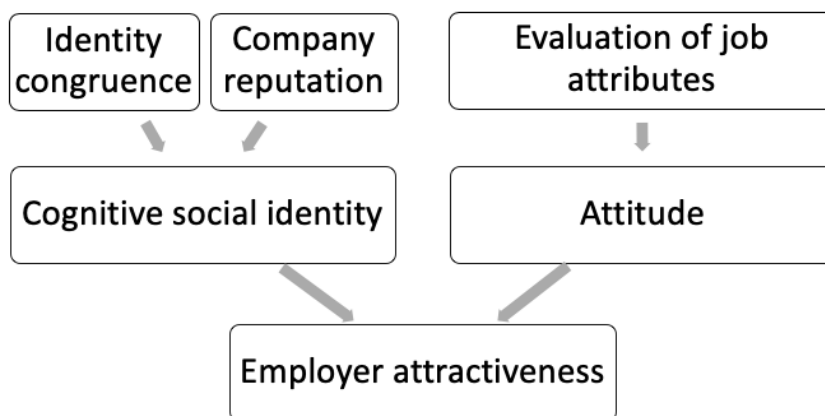


Figure 4 Organizational based social identity (Modified from Xie, Bagozzi, & Meland, 2015).

2.5 Adopting employer branding

Davies (2008) highlighted that employer branding management is complex and that there is no clear function of an organization that takes the responsibility of managing the

employer brand. Employer brands might be also very hard to adapt to a company successfully. The case with Avatar brand failure (see Cushen, 2011, p.87) was about communicating unsuitable values of the company and the gap between what top management said and what they did. Also, there was a contradiction between what Avatar's HR department presented and how the employees took the initiative. (Cushen, 2011, p.87)

Because of these challenges, this chapter concentrates on the different aspects which companies could consider when adopting the employer branding tool. Strategy is the foundation of this process. Clear strategy guides employer branding which focuses on the target group's needs (Hubschmid, 2012, p.204). Employer branding can be an employee-focused strategy adapted to meet the talents' demands. It can be a proactive tool to maintain and manage the career and comfort of employees. (Maurya & Manisha, 2018)

Vuorinen (2013, p.191-195) concluded five questions that help organizations to enhance their employer brand: (1) What people think of us as an employer? (2) What are our future recruitment needs? (3) What kind of employees are we looking for? (4) What is our message as an employer? (5) How do we deliver this message effectively? Finding answers to these questions can help with the process of managing the employer brand.

Elving and others (2012) state that employer branding is a three-step process: developing the value proposition, communicating the brand externally and integrating the brand promise into an organization's culture. Further, Mosley (2014, p.156, 165) presents different ways to manage the employer brand. The employer brand development process needs the courage to be creative. It requires distinctive, insightful and inspiring ideas. Adaptation, consistency, and control of the marketing could be decided, as well as who is involved in the process. Different media channels can be taken into consideration in the development process. When it comes to adaptation of the employer brand, the created EVPs needs to be tested in different market groups internally and externally. Differ-

ent values can be emphasized in different target groups to meet their needs better. Employer brand could be adapted to diversity and change regularly. (Mosley, 2014, p.156, 165) It has been recommended that organizations try constantly to find new ways to improve their employer branding process (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018).

Organization benefits when all the employees are aware of the employer branding process (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018). Employer branding has become the responsibility of everyone in the organization (Haak, 2019). Both employees and management are recommended to involve in the creation and implementation of the employer branding process. It has been recommended that an employer brand is transparent and deeply root how an organization feels like. The communicated values are suggested, to be honest, reliable, responsible and credible and thus a top-down implementation is risky. Building an employer brand is part of a bigger process to build corporate identity and thus all employees, current and potential, can relate to the values, feel part of the organization and finally become brand ambassadors. Personnel is the key to develop, keep and attach distinctive corporate identities. (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Elving et al., 2012)

Besides choosing whom to involve in the employer branding process the target group needs to be taken into account. Employer brand needs to be unique, targeted to the right group of people and emphasize the strengths of the organization (Vuorinen, 2013, p.190). Successful employer branding also requires modification of organizations' practices to fit the target group's needs and expectations (Vuorinen, 2013, p.190). Also, the core positioning of the employer brand would describe the quality the company wants to be famous for as an employer. It requires designing of company offer and image to meet the target groups' needs and values. (Mosley, 2014, p.121)

In addition to the target group, the context is important in the employer branding process. Creating a positive workplace involves many variables and context is the key because what works for one company doesn't work for another (Earle 2003). The individual and personal needs and values have age and cultural impact which organizations are

suggested to take into account when designing their employer branding process (Sengupta et al., 2015). Corporations can try to find relevant connotations of the employer brand, in able to take into consideration the cultural differences of all employees (Chi-Cheng, Rui-Hsin Kao, & Chia-Jung, 2018).

Communication is another important aspect of employer brand management (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011). The communication strategy needs to be carefully planned to consider the target group's needs and spread the message (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011; Mosley, 2014, p.210). According to Elving and others (2012), corporations can only select true and accurate information on job advertisements to construct the employer branding message (see also Edwards 2010; Vuorinen, 2013, p.190). Support, openness in communication and fairness attract higher levels of identification from employees (Edwards, 2010). Distinctive employer brand is created with unique and attractive psychological contract content which can be transactional, relational or ideological (Edwards, 2010). Edwards (2010) argues that employment branding messages can include the organization's as well as employee's obligations which then helps the employee form a unique employment experience.

Controlling the job advertisements is one part of communication management. According to Edwards (2010), increased general advertising campaigns of organizations help to build stronger employer brands. Also, according to Łącka-Badura (2015, p.28), job advertising is one of the ways to enhance employer brand. Successful communication depends on the choice of the right words to encourage the desired target group to continue the recruitment process (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2013). The study by Bejtkovský (2018) showed that the most common information in job advertisements, in the context of employer branding, was job positioning and working conditions. Also, references, general information, and internship opportunities were mentioned. According to Mosley (2014, p.200), the trend for job descriptions is to focus on the feel of the role, the business unit and company context as the job requirements and responsibilities. The key is to produce relevant, informative and entertaining content.

Some researchers focus on the recruitment part of the employer branding process. According to Gilani and Jamshed (2016), paying careful attention to the recruitment process especially can improve the employer brand of an organization. Recruitment is one of the most remarkable investments of the company (Vuorinen, 2013, p.189).

Gilani and Jamshed (2016) focus on the outsourced recruitment process, although they stress that it can be equally effective as insourced services, which are both new ways to support the recruitment process (see also Johnson, Wilding, & Robson, 2014). Recruitment process outsourcing provides a pool of talent and competent employees who are the key to building strong employer brand through employer image, reputation as well as enhanced performance. Outsourcing or building a shared service center saves also costs and time, and lets the HR and managers focus on core tasks (Gilani and Jamshed, 2016; Reilly, 2003, p.15).

Besides the traditional recruitment and training process as ways to improve employer brand, companies can take into consideration the electronic recruitment and training possibilities (Mishra & Kumar, 2019). These can help with employer's knowledge and organizational development. To deliver value to all of the companies stakeholders, HR needs to adapt to the context which is now more and more technology-based with concepts of big data, social media, gamification, robotics, internet of things, virtual reality, etc. (Ulrich, 2019, p.xvi) Digitalization makes companies reinvent themselves and become more agile. This means digitalized HRM, new communication, and learning tools, people analytics skills as well as new organizational design. Digital HRM helps with employee engagement, learning, and development as well as talent search. The focus of a successful employer branding could be on learning, leadership development, mobility, rewards and competency systems. The development of digital skills is the key to obtain business value. (Mihalcea, 2017)

Technology creates new sourcing solutions for employer branding (Haak, 2019). Internet, specialized social networks, such as LinkedIn, and social media channels, such as Facebook, play an important part in reaching potential employees (Nagy & Putzer, 2012). However, for example, digital storytelling (see Crişan & Borţun, 2017), communities for potential employees or virtual employee experience (Haak, 2019) are rising. Other channels can be used as well: Küpper, Klein, and Völckner (2019) for example observed how organizations can strengthen employer brand via serious games which are digital games with the focus on learning. The more complex media channels bring challenges to manage employer brands, but they also bring opportunities (Mosley, 2014, p. 184).

Employer branding can be managed if all the different channels are taken into consideration. Potgieter and Doubell (2018) for example stress social media. Employees can be influencers through social media and thus organizations are creating social media policies to control the risk and signal what is appropriate to publish. Furthermore, companies can benefit from their employees' activity in social media and through them signal the employer brand. Millennials especially associate with this corporate reputation with their reputation in society. (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018)

Haak (2019) argues that employees are now looking for real stories by real people – not carefully planned brochures. Also, Mosley (2014, p.199, 200) concentrates on this. He presents that content marketing is the key to benefit from technology given opportunities. He defines content marketing as “generation of a rich flow of engaging and shareable content, which matches a wide range of target audience and interests, while simultaneously building desired associations with the brand”. Also, in this, employees are the key because potential workers are interested in the personal perspective of the company.

Finally, also the measurement of employer branding efforts is an important part of enhancing and sustaining the employer brand (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011; Hub-schmid, 2012, p.209). The most used metrics are employer league table rankings, em-

employee turnover and cost per hire (Mosley, 2014, p.269-270). Also, internal brand perception and engagement would be beneficial to measure. Mosley (2014, p.269-270) argues that three categories of employer brand can be measured and they are: brand reputation and experience, desired behaviors and outcomes, and marketing efficiency and effectiveness.

Chapter 2 has given an overview of the relatively new strategic tool of human resources management combining the theories of HRM and branding. The studies presented, give an overview of what the concept is about, why companies overall should pay attention to this and how can it be adopted successfully. After assessing the characteristics of employer branding next chapter will concentrate on shared service centers. The following chapter gives an overview of the context of the methodological part of this study.

3 Shared service centers

As described in the introduction, a typical organizational solution of global corporations to organize their activity more efficiently is shared service centers (Szabo-Szengroti et al, 2016; Hinek, 2009). A shared service center is defined by Bauer and Vargas (2018) as a department managing and processing an operational task of an organization. This definition is used in this study since it concludes the nature of the shared service centers. The separation of the operational tasks lets the headquarters concentrate more on leadership and corporate governance (Ochs & Riemann, 2018, p.873-887). Another definition from Schuppan (2009, p.17-36) concludes that shared service centers provide cross-department services for internal customers which leads to networked service delivery. The specialization, quality improvements and costs reductions are achieved by combining the repetitive back-office processes (Schuppan, 2009, p.17-36).

It is not only a strategic decision to build a shared service center, but also technical, financial, tactical and political decision (Hinek, 2009). Shared service center models are implemented in order to avoid double work and to deliver support processes as the core concept. The centers have focus on internal customers. The separate unit is operating as a business with external competitors. Implementing this model is a widespread approach in practice. (Schultz & Brenner, 2010; Reilly, 2000, p.7) The tasks are not only centralized but also more like common services. The tasks are more than just administrative tasks – the included services can be diverse. (Reilly, 2000, p.3)

The recent technological change, which has improved the communication between distant units, has made the creation of SSCs possible (Reilly, 2000, p.4). MNCs typically centralize their finance, HR and IT functions to service centers (SSON, 2019, p.3-4). Organizations build service centers with both short and long term contracts (Aldag & Warner, 2018). According to Deloitte's survey, MNCs are building more centers with three or more functions (Gaffney, 2015; see also Ślusarczyk, 2017). In academia, the views and

the terminology are not integrated and more research of this field is required. The questions are for example about how these services are managed as well as which are the competitive advantages. (Soalheira & Timbrell, 2014, 81)

This case study focuses on an HR service center and thus the characteristics are described next. The re-positioning of HR is reshaping the HR delivery. HR has become a more long-term strategic business support function with less ties to administrative tasks. (Reilly, 2000, p.9-10; see also Cooke, 2006) Shared services can be the new solution for HR delivery if the model is successfully implemented to an organization (Reilly, 2000, p.10). Companies should choose the right level of strategic, operational and support tasks that their HR service center takes care of (Reilly, 2000, p.14). There is no single HR service center model that suits for all the organizations (Reilly, 2000, p.14). The customers of an HR service center are employees, line managers and decentralized HR professionals (Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2013).

In this chapter, the attention will be drawn towards different sourcing solutions to differentiate the SSC model from the other models. The locations where the SSCs are built at the moment are presented. Additionally, this chapter provides an overview of the characteristics of SSCs. The benefits, challenges, and management of the service center are also assessed. At the end of this chapter, the focus is on the attraction and retention of the HR shared service center talents in Central Europe.

3.1 Sourcing solution

The shared service center model is a sourcing solution for corporations (Szabo-Szengroti et al, 2016; Hinek, 2009). In Figure 5 is presented, how the shared service center structure is implemented in an organization from a traditional divisional structure where services are in silos (Rothwell, Herbert & Seal, 2011).

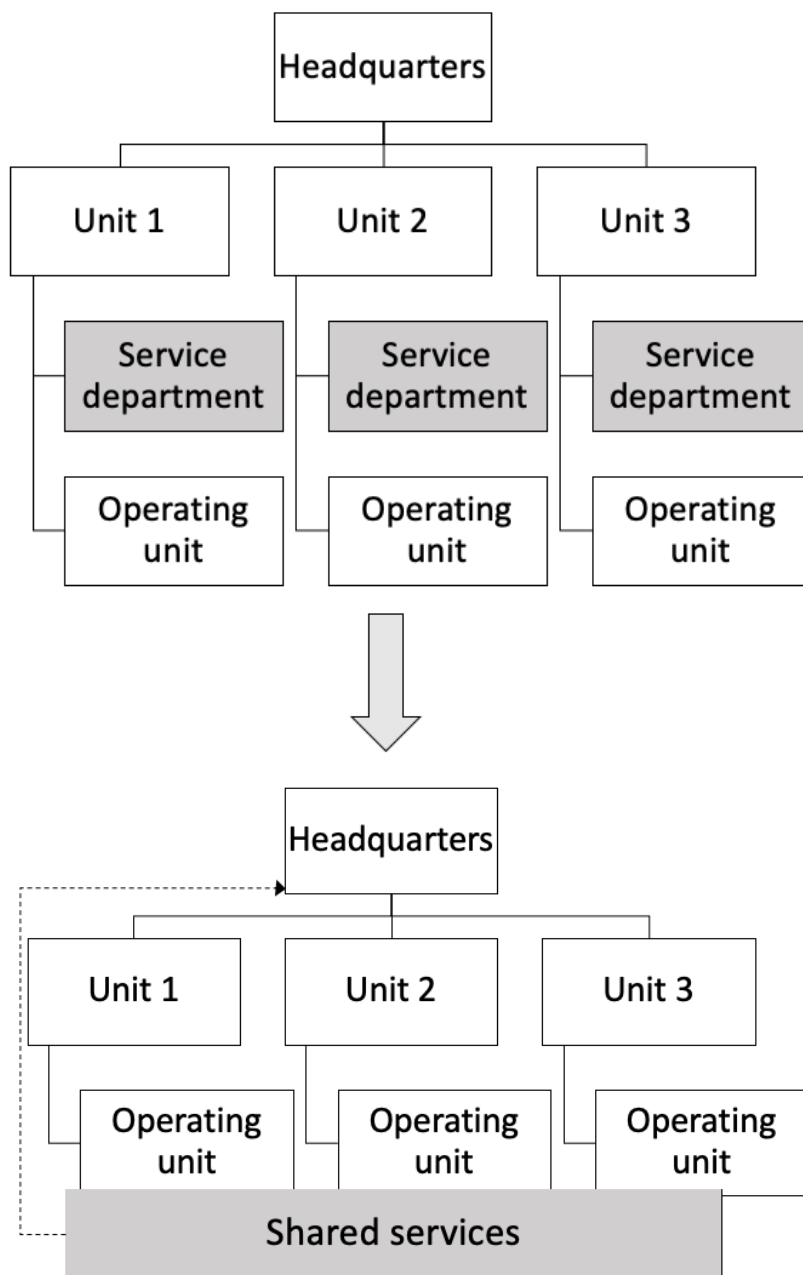


Figure 5 Implementing the SSC model (modified from Rothwell, Herbert & Seal, 2011).

It has been stated that companies can decide between making or buying the services to be able to survive in the changing environment (Williamson, 1991). A shared service center model differs from centralized models and outsourcing solutions (Ulbrich, 2003; Bergeron, 2003, p.2) which is summarized in Figure 6. A high level of corporate control is achieved in centralized models but a SSC model is closer to customers and they can

affect more on the service delivery (Bergeron, 2003). In an outsourcing solution, the service is contracted out or sold to a third party vendor (Willcocks & Kern, 1998). According to Reilly and Williams (2003, p.2), three aspects distinguish SSC from other models: customers determine the nature of the services, there is a common provision of the services and they are provided for several users.

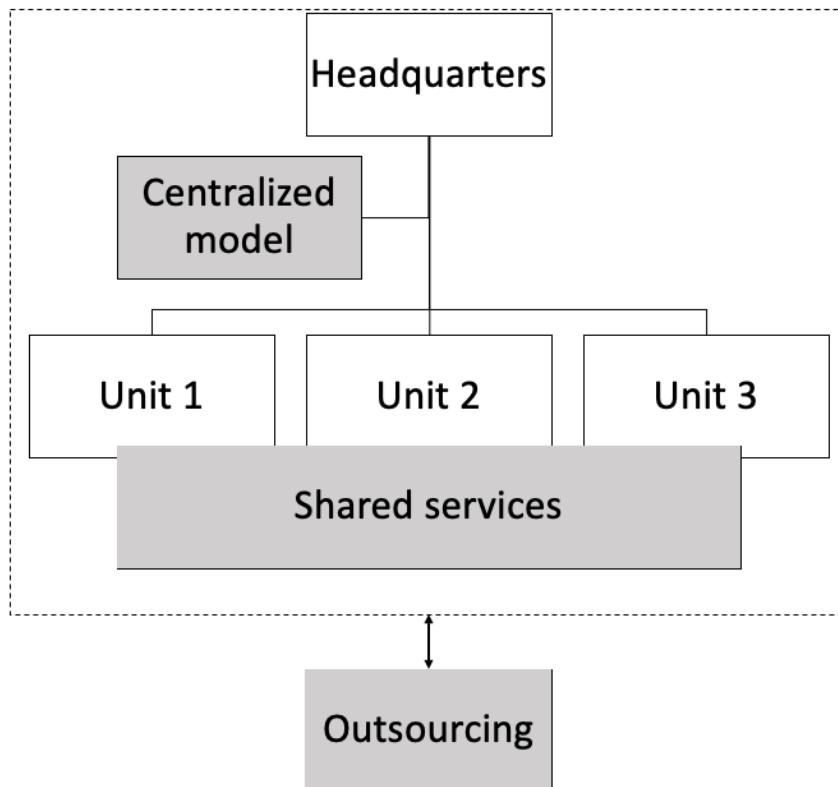


Figure 6 Positioning of SSC model (modified from Janssen & Joha, 2006).

Outsourcing or building an own SSC depends on the corporation's preferences. 48% of the companies from the SSON survey do not want to outsource anything. Nevertheless, still outsourcing is a growing phenomenon. (SSON, 2019, p.9) Sometimes implementing the SSC model is a pre-stage of outsourcing (Schultz & Brenner, 2010). Corporations are suggested to balance and decide between internalization and externalization as well as informal and explicit knowledge (Fenema, Keers, & Zijm, 2014, p.205) to reach the best solution for them.

The costs, the competitive relevance and the modularity drive the choice between outsourcing, building an own SSC and other sourcing arrangements. Outsourcing can help firms from overinvestment and is the best solution when modularity is high, relevance low and development costs are high (Grahovac, Parker & Shittu, 2015, p.421). It works when the transaction costs are lower than the in-house transfers. Outsourcing can help to save in labor costs, the benefit of arbitrage and take advantage of economies of scale. On the other hand, when the contracts are so complex, it has raised questions if they reduce transaction costs and improve productivity over time (Blair, O'Connor & Kirchhoefer, 2011, p.263, 310-311). Also, the employees working in the outsourced functions do not feel like belonging in the organization, which can be seen as an issue (Cicek & Ozer, 2011).

Lentz (1995) suggested that the decision of buying or making the services should be made by asking if the activity adds value to the organization. If the service does and it needs organizational knowledge it should be made by the company itself. Other perspectives can be found as well. Keeping the services in-house is the best solution when the reasons are, that there are specific investments, coordination benefits and risk for the company information to be copied (Besanko, Dranove, Shanley & Schafer, 2009). The long-term positive impact of SSC to all the parties competes often with the outsourcing arrangements. The basic promise of SSC is that one local department can provide services to others with relatively low efforts. Building an SSC is criticized for being the best solution since it takes advantage of both centralized and decentralized models which are conflicting. The expectations when building a SSC, are cost reduction and service improvement but they are found in the areas that are not expected initially. (Janssen & Joha, 2006, p.102, 114) The benefits of shared service centers are presented later in this chapter.

A SSC is a hybrid form of organizational activities and provides the benefits of outsourcing while avoiding the risks with external providers (Herbert & Seal, 2014). In the short

term, cost savings explain the choice of SSC model but in the long term service quality, cooperation and coordination across the departments or organizations are valued more (Aldag & Warner, 2018). The model can strategically benefit the whole organization (Herbert & Seal, 2014). The trend for building service centers is growing – 37% of the organizations of the SSON survey (2019, p.3) answered that they are either at an early stage of implementation or planning to build a service center.

3.1.1 Offshoring

After differentiating the SSC model from other sourcing solutions, it is relevant to see where the service centers are built at the moment. A shared service center can also be an offshoring solution.

Corporations build service centers regionally but there is an increase in the number of centers build globally to achieve the cost savings and other benefits (Gaffney, 2015). EU used to be the second most popular location to build a shared service center after United States (Shuker, 1997). Most of the service centers are now built in Eastern-Europe as well as in the Far East and they are owned by American or Western Europe multinational companies (Hinek, 2009; Pyndt & Pedersen, 2006, p.9). Companies are moving their processes from high-cost countries to low-cost countries in able to keep up with the changing markets, cost advantages and needed talent. Offshoring can bring remarkable global advantages to a firm. (Pyndt & Pedersen, 2006, p.9) Sparrow (2012) argues that moving towards emerging markets enables greater flexibility to an organization.

One emerging market is the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). After the Iron Curtain fell and because of the expansion of the EU, CEE has become an interesting area for foreign companies to invest in and many companies are focusing on intangible resources there (Ferencikova & Schuh, 2012). CEE is a particularly attractive place to build service centers globally (Tholons, 2014; Drygala, 2013). Service centers are built in CEE because of the political and economic stability, similar culture, good language knowledge and low cost of labor (Ślusarczyk, 2017).

Poland has become one of the most competitive countries in CEE and nowadays a fast-growing sector to build a service center (Ślusarczyk, 2017; Slusarczyk & Golnik, 2015). Most of the parent companies are located in Western Europe as well as in the Nordics (Ślusarczyk, 2017). In Poland, companies have a large pool of talent to recruit well-qualified but cost-efficient workers (Kedziora, Piotrowicz & Kolasinska-Morawska, 2018). The major incentives for foreign companies to build their SSC are government grants, taxation benefits, special economic zones and labor legislation in Poland (Slusarczyk & Golnik, 2015).

3.2 The characteristics of shared service centers

In the following, the most common benefits of the shared service center model are presented. Furthermore, the solution faces many challenges that are described. The end of this part focuses on the SSC management.

3.2.1 Benefits of SSC model

The most widely approved benefits of shared services for multinational companies are improved performance, increased control, standardization and optimization as well as costs and time saving (SSON, 2019, p.3-7; Miskon, Bandara, Gable & Fielt, 2011; Schulzin & Brenner, 2010; Bauer & Vargas, 2018). Reilly and Williams (2003, p. 11) divided the reasons to build SSCs into four categories: cost savings, quality improvement, organizational change, and technological development. This chapter follows the division from Reilly and Williams when examining the benefits of shared service centers.

Cost savings and improving efficiency are usually the main goals for implementing the SSC model (Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014, 59). The SSC can achieve economies of scale with cost rationalization (Bauer & Vargas, 2018). The main ways for a SSC to do so are by cutting the number of employees needed and thus reducing office costs as well as improving the efficiency of what and how services are produced. Removing the regional support units and building one cross-business unit can help to reduce the needed staff

by 20-40%. Also, moving the service center to a cheaper area than the head office in the city center saves costs. Creating a SSC helps the organizations to improve their efficiency and cut the unnecessary work when the need for all the provided services are evaluated. Expensive double work can be reduced and the focus turns into the core services. Internal projects can be managed better. Improving the internal consultancy reduces the costs and reliance on external consultancy. (Reilly, 2000, p.5-6) Cost savings are the solution for the competition corporations are facing (see Aldag & Warner, 2018).

Cost savings and competition are not the only reasons to build a SSC but also coordination, cooperation, and service quality (Aldag & Warner, 2018). A SSC can increase the quality of operations (Bauer & Vargas, 2018; Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014). Companies try to improve processes, increase functionality, raise customer satisfaction, remove layoffs and get additional value in a form of shared service center model (Cornelisse, Downs & Patton, 2011, p.57; Reilly, 2003, p.15). When focusing on the core services, the employees can improve their professionalism, provide consistent and accurate services on time and budget as well as improve and share the best practices and use better processes (Reilly, 2003, p.15). According to Maatman and Bondarouk (2014, p.171), value creation needs recourses which capabilities perspective can help to see. They have created a capability map to show which capabilities are required for a SSC to create business value. The key capabilities are service delivery, change facilitation and engineering. The most effective SSCs think globally from the very start, expand rationally and standardize processes (Sharon, 2019).

The creation of a SSC is part of an organizational change, which is the third beneficial aspect. The change is meant to offer more structural flexibility, improve organizational learning and reposition the core services (Reilly, 2000, p.8-10). A shared service center usually mirrors the common organizational culture (Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014, 59). Fenema, Keers, and Zijm (2014, p.201) found that when a SSC is built to serve different stakeholders, it can release joint benefits and it offers opportunities for co-improve with others.

The fourth reason to build service centers is the technological development for the whole organization (Reilly & Williams, 2003, p. 11). The SSC model requires technological investments (Reilly, 2000, p. 11; Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014, p.59). When constantly improving the core of the centers, the people, processes, and technology, shared service centers can bring value to their internal customers. Robotics and investing in employees are the current trends in SSC. (Sharon, 2019)

3.2.2 The challenges of shared service centers

The shared service center model faces often also some challenges. It can be implemented only if the parent organization is big enough (Žilić & Čošić, 2016) although there is quite little research done of this (Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014, p.59). SSC model can be successful only if there is paid enough attention to the corporate culture, appropriate technologies as well as investments and time to manage all the expectations (Žilić & Čošić, 2016). To build a SSC, an organization needs to invest in new technological infrastructure which needs large capital investments at the beginning (Reilly, 2000, p. 11; Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014, p.59).

A SSC has to balance between the choice of efficiency and customer satisfaction (Reilly, 2000, p.35). According to Bondarouk and Friebe (2014, 59), the right mix of skills and the ability to serve customer needs are achieved with a balance between specialization and professionalism in SSCs. An organization needs also to recognize the value of the administrative work to execute these strategical decisions (Reilly, 2000, p. 40-41).

Another duality for service centers to choose from is the balance between centralization and decentralization (Bergeron, 2003; Janssen & Joha, 2006, 114). Service centers offer knowledge and expertise from a single location while the control is decentralized in local business units (Maatman, Bondarouk, & Looise, 2010; Meijerink, Bondarouk, & Maatman, 2013). There is no academic consensus whether of these dimensions or a mixture of both is the best solution (Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014, 59). Service centers could retain

services in-house while keeping a high degree of control. However, at the same time, they aim at reducing the control complexity and increase the focus on core business. (Janssen & Joha, 2006, 114) It can be a compromise balancing between the interests of stakeholders. Service centers can distinguish the common services and the optional ones that can be optimized. The choice and the balance of the motives are carefully considered. Also, the internal arrangements and management could require more attention than for example in an outsourcing solution (Janssen & Joha, 2006, 114; Reilly, 2000, p.45).

The idea of centralizing services in shared service centers is criticized for being too simplistic as well as for the separation of the strategic, operational and administrative tasks (Cooke, 2006, p.211). A SSC model can create a danger of creating too generic business support (Reilly, 2000, p.35). Also, the financial and emotional costs might be underestimated (Cooke, 2006, p.211). Consequently, the indirect costs, such as the value-added tax (VAT), might be beneficial to take into consideration (Shuker, 1997). As a result, the management of taxation is another issue so carefully planning it is recommended for SSCs management (Cornelisse et al., 2011, p.57; Shuker, 1997).

Besides the duality balancing issues, the SSC boundary management between the units is challenging. It might be hard to draw a line between the responsibilities of SSC employees and local managers. This creates a lack of accountability: SSC employees are not involved in the work itself in the units which might cause realization challenges for projects. (Reilly, 2000, p.35) Moreover, centralized units create communication challenges between the units: the loss of face-to-face contacts can depersonalize the service and the internal customers can see this very negatively (Reilly, 2000, p.35; Meijerink, Kattelaar & Ehrenhard, 2014).

Additionally, the employees of the shared service center bring different challenges. As described earlier, young potentials are the first target group of SSC recruitment (Szabo-

Szentgroti et al., 2016). According to the SSON study (2018), more than 55% of the respondents have 60% or more of the workforce of their SSC millennials (20-35 years old). This means that a large amount of the SSC employees are nowadays young professionals. Meeting the expectations of young graduates can be very hard (Zupan et al., 2017, p.78). The attraction and retention of these young potentials are described more in-depth in chapter 3.3.2.

Because of the digital and environmental change, the competition of service center talents is global. Rothwell, Herbert, and Seal (2011) use the term of Martini workers to describe the employment flexibility that the SSC model enables with the geographical flexibility. The contracts, working hours, place, and procedural prescription vary by employees. This creates global competition and especially the young professionals in first-world countries are experiencing this. In other words, the pool of potential workers for shared service centers is global. However, Koval and others (2016) have found that in practice students decline from the SSC positions because the jobs are not flexible enough. Thus it can be questionable if SSCs offer enough flexible positions.

Another reason for young graduates to decline from the position is the non-interesting support tasks that service centers offer (Koval et al. 2016). The range of tasks of an SSC employee can end up being very narrow and segmented focusing on for example just entering changes to employee records (Reilly, 2000, p.34-35; Rothwell et al., 2011, p.251). Thus, companies try to widen career development for SSC employees through rotation between different service teams (Reilly, 2000, p.8-10). The future career development can still be challenging since the service center positions might not increase the expertise needed in senior positions (Reilly, 2000, p.34-35). Rothwell and others (2011, p.245) wrote about the polarization of professional activities which can have many long-term consequences on organizations and professions. They suggested that young professionals within contingent work may have trouble getting the mid-career positions after for example working in a SSC while gaining little of the experience needed for the second

step. Companies no longer plan long-term careers for employees which brings the challenge of uncertainty into talent management (Cappelli, 2008, p.205).

3.2.3 The management of SSCs

The research of SSC management styles, governance, and control is limited but a growing field (Minnaar, 2014; Soalheira & Timbrell 2014). Different control structures can be chosen and the governance and control choices may lead to very different outcomes in practice (Minnaar, 2014, p.101-102). There is also written some guidelines on how the SSC is implemented in practice (see for example Reilly & Williams, 2003). According to the previous findings (Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014, p.59), service centers could aim for standardization and formalization but also some customization is needed for the solution to be implemented successfully.

Infrastructure, network, and risk management are the key principles to concentrate on (Cascarino, 2012, p.256). Recourses, security, problem and incident management are some of the challenges in SSC environment. To control these challenges, SSC management should design their tools for these. Cascario (2012, p. 266-267) found that continuity management is critical at least for the IT service centers to secure that in case of an IT disaster the availability is ongoing. The management is not recommended to only concentrate on IT as a separate function but as a part of the whole organization.

Also, Ulbrich (2003, p.10) focused on information management and what is required for applying this perspective to SSC. His study focused on public organizations and on aspects that a corporation needs to plan, organize and control to build an SSC. Ulbrich presented that these aspects are persons, processes and activities, information use and the systems as well as infrastructure for information processing and communication.

Further, Herbert and Seal (2014, p.148-149) have concentrated on the knowledge management of SSCs. According to their research, a SSC can gather noncore activities from divisions successfully and also create new, improved and standardized routines for the

whole organization. The strategical impact of a SSC can be significant for a whole corporation. Similarly, in able to release the full potential of HR service centers, Meijerink and Bondarouk (2013) suggest centers to update the knowledge and skills of their employees. Also, they suggest the internal customers to keep centralized information up to date and business units and center to collaborate more. This way, an HR service center can create value for other business units (Maatman & Meijerink, 2017).

Additionally, the study by Amiruddin, Aman, Auzair, Hamzah, and Maelah (2013) focused on the risks of SSC. The study divided the risks into two main categories: relational and performance risks. The biggest relational risk is the possibility of opportunistic behavior which can be managed through social control. The biggest performance risk is unsatisfactory services which can be managed through behavior control like reporting or with output control. The ways to control and monitor these aspects are presented next.

One more dimension in service center management is monitoring which for example Reilly (2000) has researched. Monitoring the performance becomes easier when the SSC model is implemented. A service center can monitor for example the Service Level Agreement (SLA), faults in processes and customer satisfaction. A service center can help management in many ways with the increased monitoring and convince them with data of reliability and efficiency (Reilly, 2000, p.28-31). An HR SSC can, for example, detect an increase in bullying cases in some units (Reilly, 2000, p.28-31). However, Maatman and Meijerink (2017) questioned if these formal control mechanisms create value for SSC and suggested that the centers should concentrate more on informal control mechanisms such as trust and shared language. Also, the balance needs to be kept so that the measuring does not become the priority over the work itself (Bondarouk & Friebe, 2014, 59).

To conclude, many aspects could be taken into consideration in the service center management. According to this literature review, the most critical ones are the management of information, collaboration, risks, employees, knowledge, processes, activities, and monitoring.

3.3 Attraction and retention of SSC talents

Next, the attraction and retention of the shared service center talents are presented more closely. This case study focuses on employer branding in the context of a shared service center and the importance of this view is presented at the end of this chapter.

3.3.1 CEE

Since a growing area to build SSCs is Central and Eastern Europe, Poland especially (see Drygala, 2013; Ślusarczyk, 2017; Slusarczyk & Golnik, 2015; Tholons, 2014), I focus on studying the effect of employer branding for HR shared service centers in there.

HR service centers, as well as outsourced HR solutions, are attracting global corporations and the developing sector is Poland especially because of the labor costs and quality of human capital (Winnicka-Wejs, 2014). The most common personnel services provided in Poland are recruitment and selection, performance management, training, and professional development, payroll and benefits, HR administration, global mobility, and HR information systems (Winnicka-Wejs, 2014).

The scarcity of financial resources, lack of international experience and managerial knowhow can be the challenges in CEE. Another downside of the evolving CEE markets are political uncertainty, corruption, inefficient rule of law, high tax rates as well as bureaucracy. (Ferencikova & Schuh, 2012)

In the uncertain environment of emerging markets, organizations are creating new strategies with strong public policy as well as agile and adaptable HR strategies. There is a lack of specialized and professional skills in CEE markets to answer to the global competition (Horwitz, 2011; Felker, 2012). This is why the ability to motivate and retain talent becomes especially important in CEE (Horwitz, 2011).

Talent management (TM) practices in Poland are constantly developed although, many Polish companies treat the TM as a separate image improving process (Przytula, 2014, p.231). Zupan and others (2017, p.77) suggested that employer branding should be the priority of employers in transitional countries since attracting young talent has become more difficult there. Thus, understanding the needs and the expectations of graduates are important. In CEE countries company brand and reputation are the key factors for attracting and retaining talent (Horowitz, 2012; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77).

Furthermore, Felker (2012) concluded that wage gaps are narrowing especially for high-end technical talent which might influence the future cost efficiency of CEE branches. Also, attitudes and behaviors, which are influenced by old communist legacy, might cause adaptation problems for MNCs' culture (Felker, 2012).

The availability of educated and multitalented people in low-cost countries is a challenge service centers face (Cornelisse et al., 2011, p.57). The expectations of young graduates in transitional countries, such as Poland, differ from the students' expectations in traditional markets (Zupan, Dziewanowska & Pearce, 2017, p.76-77). They found out that attraction, management and retention are the key challenges of talent management of young potentials in the CEE context. In transitional countries, especially the graduates have high expectations and lots of opportunities also outside of their country, which creates difficulties in attracting the needed talent. Zupan and others (2017, p.78) discovered that engaging and motivating young talent in transitional countries can be difficult for companies. Reilly (2000, p.34-35) found that their lack of knowledge, experience and not knowing the customers and the culture can lead to a decrease in the quality of services. More of the characteristics of young potentials as employees are assessed in the next chapter.

3.3.2 Young potentials

Young graduates are the first recruitment target group of shared service centers (Koval et al., 2016; Szabo-Szentgroti et al., 2016). Adaptability to changes, openness to innovations, performance orientation and flexibility are typical for this generation Y employees (Szabo-Szentgroti et al., 2016) which is why SSCs want to invest in them. According to the SSC leaders, the millennials are innovative and creative, have good analytical and technological skills, and they are open to changes and great at dealing with uncertainty (SSON, 2018). The young professionals accept positions in SSCs because of the good career start and good salary (Koval et al., 2016).

To identify, recruit and retain the needed talent companies are facing intense competition in the global markets. Shared service centers want innovative employees who have data analytics and leadership skills. Additionally, employee turnover of the service center is high. The changing environment and growing automation and digitalization causes these challenges. (Meijerink, Bondarouk & Looise, 2012; Miskon et al., 2011; Koval, Nabareseh, Klimek & Chromjakova, 2016; SSON, 2019, p.14-17; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77)

External marketability is important for young talent but the stability of a position not so much (Zupan et al., 2017, p.77) which partly explains the quick turnover. The number of graduates with science, technology, engineering and maths qualities is decreasing in many countries which increases the mismatch between supply and demand (Mosley, 2014, p.72). The trend of the aging population creates even more competition of talented workers in the future (Franca, 2012, p.78).

It has been found that the new generation of people, called the Y generation, who are digital savvy, embrace a different life outlook than previous generations (Pînzaru & Mitan, 2016). According to Shaw and Fairhurst (2008), learning styles and expectations of Millennials differ from earlier generations. The expectations of employers differ only slightly across cultures among generation Y (Hubschmid, 2012, p.203). Money and career-building are not the main motives to choose the employer anymore but motivation, meaningful and flexible work, open communication as well as culture and values that fit the

employee's own are important (Vuorinen, 2013, p.196). Employees of the Y generation do not make their decisions of an employer based on income only but they consider companies' features as well. These company features are for example the employer brand, company size, and promotion possibilities. (Szabo-Szentgroti et al., 2016) Young potentials value especially corporate values and their fit to the organization (Hubschmid, 2012, p.205). Young applicants and the current workforce become especially attracted to an organization if it pays attention to functional factors connecting emotions and satisfying psychological sustenance (Chi-Cheng, Rui-Hsin Kao, & Chia-Jung, 2018).

Pînzaru and Mitan (2016) concluded that HR is the best asset to meet the needs and fully release the potential of young employees. If an organization offers internships and training, values social components and security of employees as well as communicates unique selling point, young potentials pay more attention to a company (Brusch, Brusch, & Kozlowski, 2018). Similarly, the three most common ways service centers try to retain the millennial generation are by offering flexibility, engaging in creative projects and providing continual skills upgrading opportunities (SSON, 2018).

Companies should focus on employer branding especially when talking about recruitment, retention, and motivation of Generation Y (Vuorinen, 2013, p.196). Generation Y especially values the symbolic attractiveness of an employer brand (Eger, Mičák, & Řehoř, 2018; Chi-Cheng, Rui-Hsin Kao, & Chia-Jung, 2018). This is why employers should focus on messaging this and the symbolic traits of ideal employer to young potentials (Eger, Mičák, & Řehoř, 2018).

Some studies do not support the idea of employer branding being more important for young potentials (see Myrden & Kelloway, 2015). Moreover, Myrden and Kelloway (2015) found that the symbolic characteristics of a brand image attract employees with growing work experience – not only the young potentials. There is also criticism of stereotyping

young talent and making generalizations of them, which is why companies are recommended to be careful with the misunderstanding of the values, mindsets, and preferences (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008).

In addition to paying attention to employer branding, the attraction and retention channels are important for shared service centers. Recruitment, selection and skills development for the new generation of employees is reshaped with digitalization (Mihalcea, 2017). Millennials require fast and effective feedback on their questions and applications (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018; Mosley, 2014, p.200). This is why the authenticity and transparency of communication can be especially important for young potentials (Hubschmid, 2012, p.205). Consequently, the Employer Value Proposition could be aligned to the perceptions of potential and current employees (Hubschmid, 2012, p.205).

Young potentials use various channels, such as recruitment websites and social media, to look for possible employers (Eger, Mičik, & Řehoř, 2018; Nagy & Putzer, 2012; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018). Well-designed corporate websites could be an asset for organizations since potential employees can have the opportunity to identify if they could fit the organization (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018). It is recommended that the websites have enough information and also have links to all the social mediums the organization uses (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018).

It is suggested that companies do not forget that the generation Y uses all media as well as traditional sources, to search for information of possible employers (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2013; Nagy & Putzer, 2012). Corporate competitions and open days can be equally effective as social media information (Nagy & Putzer, 2012). The challenge for companies is to reach friends, teachers, and acquaintances who act as opinion leaders for young potentials in order to guide their employer preferences (Nagy & Putzer, 2012). Generation Y employees have large networking potential both online and real-life which brings different kinds of recruitment opportunities for companies (Hubschmid, 2012, p.208).

3.3.3 Employer branding in HR shared service centers

After discussing the concepts of shared service centers, employer environment of CEE as well as the young potentials, it is relevant to focus on the HR shared service centers to conclude this chapter. This is because of the chosen case organization of this study offers HR services for the multinational corporation it is part of. Next, some studies of HR shared service center employees are presented.

HR Service Center employees who work for one organization are more satisfied and less willing to change their employers than workers who serve multiple organizations. The benefits of working in an HR service center include a possibility to work with a large team of professionals, cross-team collaboration, having a feeling of belonging as well as reduction of relationship complexity and organizational politics. The key recourse of HR service centers are the HR employees. The position's needs and views are still neglected in the working world and would need more attention. (Redman, Snape, Wass, & Hamilton, 2007) HR SSC model is a relatively new way to deliver HR services (Cooke, 2006) and the research of HR shared service centers are scarce and requires more academic attention (Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2013).

The attraction and retention of an HR service center employee has not yet been studied. There are only a few studies on how new sourcing solutions affect on employer branding of an organization (see Gilani and Jamshed, 2016). However, there are no studies on how employer branding effects on service center workers. As described earlier, one of the key challenges of SSCs is the attraction and retention of young talent (see Koval, Nabareseh, Klimek & Chromjakova, 2016; Miskon et al., 2011; SSON, 2019, p.14-17). Since employer branding can be one of the key solutions to this (see Chi-Cheng, Rui-Hsin Kao, & Chia-Jung, 2018; Bendaraviciene, 2016; Eger, Mičik, & Řehoř, 2018; Graham & Cascio, 2018; Küpper, Klein & Völckner, 2019; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Neeti & Sharma 2014; Vuorinen, 2013, p.196) this research focuses on studying this yet neglected causation. Next, the

methodology of this research is explained more in detail before presenting the findings of this study.

4 Methodology

The research philosophy behind the study is epistemology with the subjectivism aspect, interpretivism in other words since the nature of knowledge is in the center (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007, p.101-107). Interpretivism approach allows the focus to be on understanding what is happening in the given context (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001, p.15). The interpretivism perspective suits business and management studies well and it sees that the business situations are complex and unique. This perspective also creates a question of the generalizability of the study. However, in interpretivism, this is not seen as crucial in the ever-changing world. (Saunders et al., 2007, p.101-107)

When asking why and how questions and trying to explain something, such as relationships or reasons, a study is called an explanatory research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p.139-140). This study is also an explanatory research since the main focus is on the relationship between employer branding and HR shared service center.

Next, the research approach is presented. After that, the focus is on the chosen strategy of this research. Additionally, the chosen case organization is presented. Also, the data collection method of this study is discussed as well as the analysis process of the study. The assessment of the trustworthiness of the study as well as the ethical aspects conclude this chapter.

4.1 A qualitative approach

Quantitative data is based on meanings resulting from numbers and the data and analysis are done using diagrams and statistics. Qualitative data, on the other hand, is based on meanings communicated through words and images and the results require arrangement into categories and analysis is done through the use of conceptualization. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016, p.568-569) Qualitative research is often related to inter-

pretivism philosophy to study the subjective and socially formed meanings of the phenomenon. This is why the research approach to this study is qualitative. Employer branding as a phenomenon is social interaction hence the qualitative data are more varied, elastic and complex than what the quantitative data offers. (Saunders et al., 2016, p.568-569)

The approach to the analysis in this study is abductive. It is a combination of developing theory and collecting data. Data is collected to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework and test this through subsequent data collection. The abductive approach moves back and forth from moving theory to data (deductive approach) and moving data to theory (inductive approach). (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p.21, 23; Saunders et al., 2007, p.119-120; Saunders et al., 2016, p.145, 148) A balance of deductive and inductive approach suits well for the interpretive approach as well as the case study method (Carson et al., 2001, p.21, 95, 97).

4.2 Case study research

Case study research is one of the ways to do social science research. This research strategy is chosen when why and how questions are in the focus, the researcher has little control over the events and a contemporary phenomenon with real-life context is studied (Yin, 2009, p.2). Robson (2002, p.178) described that case study research is “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”. A case study is a good way for exploring existing theories which the topic of this research is about and this is why this approach is chosen (Saunders et al., 2007, p.139-140). The method helps to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2009, p.4). Case study research helps to study complex topics about which little academic research has been published thus it suits well as the methodology of this study (Carson et al., 2001, p.92).

The primary purpose of the case study research is to explore the uniqueness of a single case (Simons, 2009, p.3). A critical case study is chosen for this research for extending the existing theory of employer brandings' effects on HR service centers (Yin, 2009, p.48). The strategy of this research is a single case study where a typical example of the HR service center model is chosen as the case to capture the circumstances and conditions of these models (Yin, 2009, p.48).

The case of this study is an HR service center organization operating in Poland. It is a unit of a multinational corporation. The MNC is operating in the business to business field. The service center consists of about 100 employees offering HR support for different countries where the corporation is operating. The offered HR support is further divided into recruitment, administration and training support. This center was chosen due to the fact it has already been operating for more than 7 years and it has gained some knowledge already of the recruitment and retention processes and challenges as well as employer branding. A shorter period of operating time might not give enough stabilized and long-term data for the study.

4.3 Research method

The mono method is chosen for this study. This means that the study uses only a single qualitative data collection method. This is chosen to get in-depth analysis from the interviews with qualitative data analysis procedures (Saunders et al., 2007, p.145). It will be a cross-sectional study since the empirical part will be about a certain phenomenon at a particular time (Saunders et al., 2007, p.148). Additionally, the interview data is compared to the job advertisements in the company websites with more information about company values, HR service center description, and job description.

Interviews are a major source for many qualitative studies (Carson et al., 2001, p.75). Interviews help to get targeted data focusing on the case study topics and the data is usually insightful providing perceived causal inferences and explanations (Yin, 2009, p.102). In this case study, interviews should be more like guided conversations (Yin, 2009,

p.106). This is why I use semi-structured interviews as the data collection method in my study with both what and how questions to get more in-depth answers. Semi-structured interviews suit well exploratory and explanatory research categories and to the interpretive epistemology since the focus is on the meanings of the phenomenon the respondents describe. (Saunders et al., 2007, p.312-319; Saunders et al., 2009, p.320)

Interviews were conducted during October 2019. The interviews were held via phone and Skype and they were recorded for which the permission was asked at the beginning of the interviews. The length varied between 22,29 to 54,29 minutes with a mean of 44,29 minutes. The interviews started with the introduction of the interviewer and the purpose of the study. The interviewees were informed that the data is handled confidentially and anonymously to protect the delicate information of HR systems and interviewee experiences. After the introduction, the interviewees were asked to tell about their position and work in the company. Then, the recruitment process, as well as the attraction and retention of talent, were discussed. Additional questions of the reasons and consequences were presented. At the end of the interviews, the employer branding point of view was evaluated. The list of interview questions that were used to guide the semi-structured interviews are presented in Appendix 1, 2 and 3. Different questions were asked depending on the position of the interviewee. The question guides were not followed precisely in every interview although the order and the wording of the questions varied depending on how the conversation developed due to the semi-structured interview model.

The summary of the sample is presented in Table 1. All together eight interviews were conducted. The participants consist of the Employer brand manager in the corporation Headquarters as well as three Team Leaders and four HR Specialists in the HR Service Center (HRSC). Interviews B, C, D, E, and G were held in English, which is not the native language of the participant but the most commonly understood.

Table 1 Summary of the sample.

Interviewee	Position	Department	Interview questions
A	Manager, Employer branding	Group HR	Appendix 3
B	Team Leader	HR Service Center	Appendix 2
C	Team Leader	HR Service Center	Appendix 2
D	Team Leader	HR Service Center	Appendix 2
E	HR Specialist	HR Service Center	Appendix 2
F	HR Specialist	HR Service Center	Appendix 1
G	HR Specialist	HR Service Center	Appendix 1
H	HR Specialist	HR Service Center	Appendix 1

4.4 Analysis of the findings

The qualitative data analysis is a complex process with several phases. The collected data requires organizing the mass of information with the techniques of summarizing, structuring and categorizing data together or separately (Saunders et al., 2009, p.490-491). Subsequently analyzing the data and producing knowledgeable conclusions can be done by conceptualization and narratives (Saunders et al., 2009, p.516). The researcher is recommended to be objective in the qualitative analysis to avoid misleading interpretations (Saunders et al., 2009, p.516).

In this case study, the audio-recorded interview transcripts were transcribed immediately after every interview (Saunders et al., 2007, p.475). This qualitative data has been then organized into relevant categories. These categories were derived from the data itself and support the research questions. Also, because of the abductive nature of this study, it was possible to contrast previous studies to the patterns found from the interviews (Yin, 2009, p.130-131). Categorizing allowed the data to be analyzed more systematically and rigorously. These categories were built and modified after each interview.

The categories were drawn from the data or the theory and grouped into codes by content. After categorizing the data the analyzing process started with conceptually organizing the categories. This is to find relevant relationships of the data. It is noticeable that the analyzing of the data was a mix of these different steps conducted simultaneously. (Saunders et al., 2007, p.479-481; Williamson, 2002, p.295-300)

4.5 The trustworthiness of the study

The quality and credibility of research should be evaluated. The suggested means to do this varies among the researchers. (Heaton, 2004, p.90) According to Saunders and others (2009, p.156-157), traditional criteria are reliability, validity, and generalizability. However, Guba and Lincoln (1985) questioned if the reliability and validity are even possible to evaluate regarding qualitative studies and if these criteria suit this approach. This is why they suggest that the focus could be on the trustworthiness in the qualitative studies. They present that the new criteria would be credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p.301-331). This study follows this approach and the trustworthiness of this study is assessed next.

First, the credibility of this study is enhanced by providing detailed information about the research process. This chapter has provided the reasons for the chosen methods. Also, the data collection method is explained and the interview guidelines are visible in Appendix 1-3 at the end of this study. (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p.301-331; Rapport, Clement, Doel, & Hutching, 2015)

Secondly, transferability is increased by giving sufficient information about the case itself and the context of this study to provide more general information. This has also some limitations because of the ethical aspects of this study which are discussed at the end of this chapter. Also, because this is a single case study, further research is required to bring more generalizable information about the topics. (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p.301-331; Rapport, Clement, Doel, & Hutching, 2015)

Thirdly, the dependability of this study is increased by offering enough detailed information about the research process. Consequently, other researchers could repeat the work and extend their knowledge and understanding further. (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p.301-331; Rapport, Clement, Doel, & Hutching, 2015)

Finally, the confirmability of the study is assured by analyzing the findings objectively. The concepts presented in the next chapter are linked to themes from previous literature as well as the participant answers, not only according to my preferences. (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p.301-331; Rapport, Clement, Doel, & Hutching, 2015)

In addition to the trustworthiness of the study, the ethical aspect of the research need to be taken into consideration. This is to protect the organization and the interview participants. (Saunders et al., 2007, p.153) Consequently, the data is collected and stored with care and the organization and interviewees are kept anonymous. The process of the study has been open with the case company and the approvals have been asked in advance of the interviews and before publishing the research.

After the literature review as well as the illustration of the methodology of this study, it is relevant to summarize and analyze the results. The next chapter concentrates on explaining the main patterns found from the conducted interviews.

5 Findings

Next, the findings of this study are presented. The chapter is organized following the research questions and the objectives. The first part analysis the findings of attraction and retention of talent in the case company. The second part concentrates on the findings of employer branding in the case company.

5.1 Attraction and retention of talent in the HR shared service center

As presented in the literature review, the most common recruitment target group of the shared service centers is the group of young potentials (Koval et al., 2016; Szabo-Szentgroti et al., 2016; SSON, 2019, p.14-17). Similarly, the interviewees of this study view that young professionals from universities are the ones the case organization is trying to attract to work there. However, as Koval and others (2016) mentioned, the target group of service centers should be considered to be more diverse. This is what one of the interviewees also brought up. One manager also said that diversity in the team is much more important than just trying to attract only one target group.

“[...] in our work students would be more appropriate, if I can say so, because the job is not so difficult and for the students in HR it’s a very good entry level for those who would like to start a career in HR, definitely. But for other side, each team should be diverse. And the diversity in the teams is very important, we would like to have difference in the team. Because of young people have the mind for careers so they stay one or maximum three years so then they change the company but for example for older people who need stability so it is also good that for those people that are still working and keeping expertise there. [...]I would say diversity is much more important than keeping only one vacancy type of candidates.” (Interview D)

HR shared service center is a good start for the career which attracts candidates (Koval et al., 2016). Participants of this study also raised the importance of this possibility when choosing the center as an employer. One of the team leaders called the service center as an “HR cradle” for the young professionals. Additionally, participants talked about the importance of motivation when attracting new talent.

Also, the international atmosphere and working abroad were important factors to choose to work in the shared service center by interviewees. One of the team leaders

concluded that they are looking for people “who graduate from their university and they are looking for some international experience”. Another aspect that the case organization is looking for from their candidates is the willingness to develop as some of the managers pointed out. One of the team leaders described that “for my team, I am searching for really creative people with the continuous improvement mindset”.

Furthermore, the interviewees saw that the topics, that affect the candidates’ choice to come to work for the HR service center, are the right skills as well as the person-organization fit. This supports the view appearing from the literature review (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Hubschmid, 2012, p.205; Kristof, 1996; Mosley, 2014, p.121; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018; Vuorinen, 2013, p.190). The feeling of fitting to the company was seen attractive especially by the interviewees when she was choosing the company. It was commonly shared by the interviewees that highlighting this fit when recruiting new employees is important. The P-O fit is discussed further in this and in the next chapter.

The interviews indicated that the employer brand can also affect the choice of the employer. The employer brand’s effect on attraction is discussed further in the next chapter. Additionally, participants said that the reputation and the size of the corporation affected their choice of the employer. The size and location of the multinational corporation even more than the employer brand for one of the participants. As Szabo-Szentgroti and others (2016) presented, these company features make the company interesting for young potentials. Also, the values of the company play an important part when choosing the employer one of the participants pointed out. One of the employees said that “the values were very important to me” when choosing to come to work in the case company. Also, the employer value propositions are discussed more the next chapter.

Finally, the organizational solution was seen attractive by one of the interviewees. Working for one internal organization instead of many external ones can be more satisfying for the employees as mentioned in the literature review (Redman, Snape, Wass, & Hamilton, 2007).

Maybe I would see that this service center model, that the customers are colleagues, so it is a very pleasant for communication with the people who you work all the time with. So this culture of doing together things compared to a different type of customer, this relationship matters. (Interview F, translation by author)

The importance of the networks to employer attraction and intension to apply to the service center (Hubschmid, 2012, p.208; Nagy & Putzer, 2012) was also raised by the interviewees. One of the managers described how networks influence to the recruitment process and intension to apply.

"[...] we have a lots of referrals. So quite some people have been hearing from friends who have been working here. Then they saw the job offer and then they were already inspired to see" (Interview B)

Participants of this study said that they asked for more information from their friends who have been working in the center when applying there. One of the managers said that the networks are the best attraction channel to get new talent to work in the center.

"So I think that these social networks work so much better. And then also the recommendation of the friend attract." (Interview D)

Besides networks, the service center uses many channels to attract talent. One of the team leaders said that they "do not post the positions in the newspapers, because a newspaper does not fit for university students or people working for [the organization] mainly." This is why more suitable channels, such as internet and social media, are chosen (Eger, Mičik, & Řehoř, 2018; Nagy & Putzer, 2012; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018) as well as other traditional recruitment channels (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2013; Nagy & Putzer, 2012). Interviewees highlighted the LinkedIn, but also Facebook and Instagram are used in the case organization. One of the interviewees also mentioned that they are currently building a Polish equivalent for the LinkedIn page where they will present the HRSC more closely. According to the participants, job fairs, recruitment agencies, and conferences are also important channels to attract the right candidates. Additionally, one interviewee described that in some areas they "have been doing a lot of direct searches. So [...] really contacting people on LinkedIn and headhunting". Also, the fastness of the communication in the channels is important as mentioned in the literature review (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018; Mosley, 2014, p.200). Interviewees were also talking about this when describing their recruitment process.

Besides concentrating on the employee attraction this study assessed the retention of talent in the case organization. Next, the findings of talent retention are described. Young talents have different expectations from the employer than previous generations (Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008) which affects the retention of talent in the service center. These expectations are for example the importance of motivating, meaningful and flexible work and improvement opportunities (Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2013; Vuorinen, 2013, p.196; SSON, 2018). These are included in the case company's benefits to retain the talent as one of the participants concluded.

"[...] first of all our benefits. So we have a really big variety of benefits here, [...] like medical service, flat for the beginning of the employment here for our foreign employees, budget for development in HR area, so this is something new, and work from home. Many benefits." (Interview E)

Other interviewees also talked about the development opportunities and how important they are to keep the needed talent working in the center.

"[...] I think we are trying to really encourage people to develop, so to take a new role. We are always trying to make sure that some interesting things or developmental things are going along with the daily work to make sure that there is side projects to keep interest and there is other opportunities that can help people grow[...]" (Interview B)

"[...] young people they are seeking for new opportunities to develop. So we open like huge punch of projects, trainings, internal sharings, these kind of things. [...] Because I think that if you are studying HR you know that if we use the money to motivate the people, it will last for three months or six months and people forget it. But if we use it for development opportunities, people are growing, it might take longer time and it is a win-win for both sides. [...] Second is that we encourage a lot of internal rotation." (Interview C)

Additionally, other interviewees described that these developmental projects are one of the key reasons they want to keep working in the center.

Another important aspect of retaining the needed talent is the atmosphere in the working place. It was commonly shared by the interviewees that the atmosphere of enjoying working together is important. One interviewee said that "it is about people and friendship here". Interviewees were talking about the feeling of community and family. All the

interviewees highlighted how important this is for staying to work here and that the center makes effort to retain this.

Onboarding is seen as one key function to retain the needed talent by the managers. The corporation is putting a lot of effort into “joining” as the Employer Brand Manager concluded. One of the team leaders described how the onboarding, as well as other training, affect on creating a similar mindset around the service center.

“[by] highlighting of our strengths or giving them space, [...] we are creating little bit of a similar mindset for everybody. So for example the same service quality. There are certain trainings for the newbies of course and like in onboarding you have also the possibility for picking this up. Basically throughout the whole employee life cycle there is always touchpoints again with certain topics to get them room and space and develop the similar mindset around us.” (Interview B)

5.1.1 Challenges of the HR shared service center

The HR shared service center is also facing some challenges. Next findings of talent attraction challenges are presented. One of them is the intense competition of talent as mentioned in the literature review (Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015; App, Merk & Büttgen, 2012; Horwitz, 2011; Felker, 2012; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77; Cornelisse et al., 2011, p.57). One of the interviewees described, that in the city “with the service centers there it is a very big competition”. One of the team leaders was talking about the language skills needed to work in the center and concluded that it is very challenging to attract the right talent.

“I think for example for our languages like Spanish, or Russian or French, it is extremely troublesome to find somebody.” (Interview B)

In return, the attraction of talent depends on the country and location, as one of the team leaders presented. He answered the following to the question if the center has challenges to attract the right talent.

“Of course we do. But of course we are also very lucky. Because, so far we are doing pretty good [...] overall so this is the situation [in one country]. [...] But [the company] in rest of the world is totally, we are a B2B company we are not the B2C company so we do not contact the end users. So it is not famous in Poland, it is not famous in Germany or China, Russia, US etc. So in that moment, the people in those locations would like to select the famous companies.” (Interview C)

Besides the brand of the company, the salaries of service centers matter as one of the managers pointed out.

“Of course people in different events show that [the company] is not that famous [in Poland]. And some candidates are making decisions based on our salaries that the companies promote. And we have had a couple of cases when I have gotten a negative answer to the offer because of the salary.” (Interview D)

This is even though one of the managers said: “salary we are offering are in the first quarter for this type of work compared to other service centers”. Also, locally the challenge is to attract future employees because of the office location, which is outside of the city as interviewees pointed out.

Additionally, the expectations of young potentials might be very high and not that easy to meet as Zupan and others (2017, p.78) concluded. One of the managers has noticed this in the candidate interviews as well.

“When I graduate from the university it might be directly the HR manager? No! And we are facing so many students, they are full of ambition. They think they are studying some HR courses and they passed the management course and they can be HR managers. No.” (Interview C)

Another attraction challenge in the center is that for example in Germany, the reputation of service centers is not that good as one of the participants pointed out.

“[...] we are the HR service center and in Germany, the word service center can be a little bit distracting and might have a negative view, like oh service center, I don't like to work in a service center[...].” (Interview G)

Besides attraction challenges, the talent retention challenges were studied and these findings are presented next. The nature of service centers brings challenges to talent retention in the case organization. The type of work is administrative (Koval et al. 2016; Reilly, 2000, p.34-35; Rothwell et al., 2011, p.251) which might bring questions to highly educated employees that what next, as one of the HR specialists pointed out. One of the team leaders said that some employees get bored fast and that is a retention problem in the center.

“I feel that sometimes people are getting this mindset of [...] I am here for learning, and yes they are but they are also here for working. I think that quite often that when this learning part is finished or that they do not have tasks enough they are

getting bored very fast. [...] There is a little bit of ambitiousness. So I think sometimes, it is a fast pace there.” Interview B

The long-term careers of the service center employees were seen also as an issue as presented in the literature review (Cappelli, 2008, p.205; Rothwell et al., 2011, p.251). One of the participants brought this up as one of the main challenges to keep the people in the center alongside the salary expectations.

“Maybe first of all salary expectation because people someday would like to earn more money. What else... maybe some development paths so they someday could feel that there is no room for improvement here. That they have done almost everything.” (Interview E)

Similarly, one of the interviewees said that the career paths are not that clear on what the corporation can offer later on. This was pointed out also by one of the team leaders, although she said that they encourage people to take the opportunities offered in other company locations if these occur. One of the participants also pointed out that the distance to customers makes it difficult to build such relationships that might enhance the internal transfer to more challenging tasks in other corporation locations for example. Additionally, this distance might cause some communication challenges to the daily work as which was also pointed out in the literature review (Reilly, 2000, p.35; Meijerink, Kattelaar & Ehrenhard, 2014). The role of the service center is not clear for all of the customers and they are not that eager to contact the center because of the loss of face-to-face contact as one of the interviewees concluded.

Retaining the needed talent is a problem (Meijerink, Bondarouk & Looise, 2012; Miskon et al., 2011; Koval, Nabareseh, Klimek & Chromjakova, 2016; SSON, 2019, p.14-17; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77) for some teams of the case organization. One of the team leaders said that this is a challenge: “if you come to our minority groups [...] they are of course difficult to retain”.

“And I think the biggest challenge [is that] [...] we have had lots of occasions where people stay for a year and left before the year have ended [...]. They are not going back to studies and they then didn’t stay for a long. [...] Quite frequently people are leaving in waves. So when one of your friend is leaving then sometimes there is

other people following the boat. And this is something which is definitely challenging because there are not sometimes enough seniors and knowledge in the team. Of course, we would like them to stay a little bit longer.” (Interview B)

One of the HR specialists said that the high volatility in the team has effects on many levels. On a personal level, it is emotionally hard to see friends leaving because most of the employees in the team are expats and colleagues become good friends easily. On a work level the employees, who have stayed longer, feel overworked and get too many questions from both the new employees and from the customers who have gotten to know them. Also, when the team is constantly changing, it affects to the effectivity of the team. Also, customers might need to explain their requests many times to different people and new employees tend to make similar mistakes which might influence the service quality.

The case company is also trying to improve retention by paying attention to who to recruit as the results of this study show.

“[...] when you are very motivated and very ambitious and want to make a career then, of course, it is more likely that you are not going to stay two years but you are going to stay a year or a year and a half and then you are going to get another job offer from somewhere else. And that, we are trying to hire a little bit more university of applied science. However, we don’t know yet if this going to get any difference or not.” (Interview B)

However, the high volatility is a problem in one team in the center as the Employer Brand Manager pointed out. One of the managers concluded that he “wouldn’t say that we have challenges” when talking about retention problems. Retaining employees too long might become an issue even in the service center as the team leaders pointed out.

“[...] there are limitations to this work. We keep the people working in the HR service center but a proper period. We do not want people to work here for 20 years. No. We need the people working and learning, contributing and developing until they are facing the sealings they do.” (Interview C)

“[...] we have so many people to stay here almost already 5 or 6 years but they are facing the sealings. They are mature in the teams, they know how to do it. But there are also less opportunities for them to develop.” (Interview C)

“But of course at some point, we are very mature in letting people go. Yes, so at some point, there is simply somebody who knows which direction they want to develop because they have seen enough in here and then there is obviously a limit that what we can offer.” (Interview B)

Similarly, one of the managers answered that the retention is rather a good thing for the service center when asking if the center have challenges to retain talent.

“No. Because I think we need to understand that this is good that the reduction has been happening here and I think in our center and the task which is linked to it, this is good. That people are changing. So because of the different points of view and coming from different backgrounds and different experiences and different ways of working, retention is also healthy for the company. So I wouldn't say that we have challenges.” (Interview D)

One of the managers said that the challenge is rather knowledge management which becomes an issue in the highly volatile teams. Nonetheless, at the same time, the high rotation has evolved the knowledge management system and now it is more like a benefit for the organization.

“For us, the super challenge is how we can maintain the knowledge in the service center. So many times people leave the service center and they go. [...] This brings also benefit to us. It surprised us to see the benefit because our knowledge management system is getting better and better. [...] So people coming here, so normally after a couple of days of training they can start with the very basics. Once they stay longer they are growing. After normally two months they are almost able to take 80-70% of the tasks. And after almost 6 months they can be almost seniors.” (Interview C)

5.2 Employer branding of the HR shared service center

After assessing the attraction and retention in the case organization the focus is next on the employer branding. This chapter follows the second research question. First, the effects of employer branding to SSC talent is assessed. The ways to enhance the employer brand in the case company conclude the chapter.

5.2.1 Effects of employer branding to attraction and retention of talent

A strong employer brand can help to recognize and identify the organization better (Edwards, 2010). It can help employers to show what would it be to work in there (Bendarciviciene, 2016; Greening & Turban, 2000). In line with these comments, the results of this

study indicate that it makes it easier in the interview situation to tell who they are as an organization and who they are looking for. One of the managers described that in the areas where the employer is well known it is easier to explain the work.

“I think it [employer branding] is a lot of help. Quite in general it makes me think very at ease when I am in the interview because [...] I can get very clear and good attention to how it is like to work in here [...]. And I think it is quite clear to draw a picture of what it is like to work with us and also what is important to us.” (Interview B)

Drawing this picture in the interview situation helps people to get an overview of the employer as one of the participants said. One of the HR specialists described how important it bring this up in the interview situations.

“[...] all [the employer branding] actions are really needed to attract new employees. This new page with our photos, our values. But also even those like little actions like publication of selfie in LinkedIn profile, it attracts new employees when they have the chance to see peace of work environment.” (Interview E)

To get the right talent attracted to the organization employer brand plays an important role which is in the literature review (Łacka-Badura, 2015, p.27; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019). The Employer Brand Manager said that it is very important for the case organization to get the right people to work in the right positions and not only to focus on the best employees in the markets.

A strong employer brand can add value to the employment experience (Maurya & Manisha, 2018). The results of this study are in line with this and indicate that the employees who stay to work in the organization longer, have a better view and feel of the corporation, as one of the team leaders concluded. One of the HR specialists came back to work for the company after finishing her studies because she “already worked for it as a company and that is why I have these positive feelings for it”. The case company is not well known in many locations where it is operating so new employees from these areas have to get to know the brand first.

In the case company, employer brand was seen as an important determinant of employer attraction which supports the findings presented in the literature review (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Celani & Singh, 2011, p.223; Graham & Cascio, 2018; Küpper, Klein & Völckner, 2019; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Neeti & Sharma, 2014; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77). As one of the participants said, “employer branding is always helping”.

“Yes, employer branding is quite important. I mean if we are asking [...] why they come to Poland, is it because of the service center job? No. But are they working because of [the company brand]? There was a yes. So most of them are staying longer and getting this low offer compared to [their home country]. [...] So of course the employer branding [...] helps us to attract people coming here.” (Interview C)

As discussed already, the case company does not have a strong employer brand in some locations. This brings challenges to attract the right talent from these locations and as one of the participants said: “if it would be better known, it would be easier to receive applications for the job offers.” One of the managers said that sometimes “it is extremely troublesome to find somebody” for a certain position. Interviewee E said that in the interview situations “with candidates, I even don’t ask about their knowledge about our [...] service center because I cannot have such expectations from them”. This is in line with what Bendaraviciene (2016) argues – employer brand can affect the information available for possible candidates. In locations with the weaker brand, the creation of the employer brand becomes important. One of the managers said that “in other locations which are not that famous it is about branding”.

Besides attracting people, a strong employer brand appears to determine the lengths of staying at work in the case company as presented in the literature review (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Graham & Cascio, 2018; Küpper, Klein & Völckner, 2019; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Neeti & Sharma, 2014). One of the HR specialists said that the well-known and appreciated brand of the company has influenced the length of her stay in the service center. When talking about the employer brand one of the participants said that “this is the area that keeps me here. And I still work here because I really like it.” Also, managers answered the following to the question if the employer brand influences retaining the talent:

“Yes, absolutely. I think that if a person is working for a famous company, well known, the person is more motivated to keep in place. He or she would want that because it is not that easy to be hired in such a company. Then also when people are communicating about their works it is also this part of belonging to something famous, it is making people to be proud of themselves. Of course, it would help to keep people working and keeping this retention.” (Interview D)

“[...] there is of course. It’s hard to say. If I talk about our polish employees, I think definitely some of the people are staying because they think it is a nice place to work. Because they are at the point where they could make the next career move. [...] I think that definitely with those employees, many of this is what keeps people working here even though they might be ready already for their next career move.” (Interview B)

On the other hand, the impact of employer brand to retention might not be as strong as other reasons for wanting to leave the company as one of the managers said.

“[...] I think it [employer brand] helps to attract, I don’t know if it helps people to stay. Because I think sometimes the reasons for leaving or for going are just more external. They are more about the salary, they are more about being back [at home], being back with people you like. Let’s say maybe having our nice and good atmosphere here and maybe trying a lot of things might keep you for some time but it will not keep you forever. So that is something it [employer brand] will prolong a little bit but then at some point, it is not just enough to out weight the salary or that friends at home or that they want to go back to their studies or I don’t know more challenging job comes along the way. So I think that little bit but there are definitely some other factors that outbalance this at some point.” (Interview B)

Also, one of the team leaders pointed out that the retention is not the problem in the case company. The findings suggest that it is beneficial for both parties when talking about people who are leaving the company.

“First you have the employer brand with you and second of all, you have an interesting experience related to the working content and project experience. So when they leave back [...] they will find double paid jobs. [...] This is quite a healthy problem.” (Interview C)

In the areas where the employer brand of the case company is not known the impact on retaining talent is not that strong as one of the team leaders said. He also pointed out how regional the strength of the employer brand can be.

“To be honest I do not see the employer branding is affecting too much [in country level]. [...] Another way is that if we zoom in or zoom out like [cities], in such a small area, then we see that the branding is important. At least in the [local] labor market [the company brand] is quite a, I’m not saying famous, but a well-known company

because we have stayed here for longer time and we have quite good employee feedback and representatives from the people working with us. So if we are talking about [the company] people know that that company is quite good. [...] Employer branding is good stuff, it is, [...] but it is limited to the locations and limited by industries and very limited by positions.” (Interview C)

One of the participants also said that locally “we are doing a good job but still a lot needs to be done for promoting ourselves in the market”.

5.2.2 Ways to enhance the employer brand

After discussing the employer brands’ effect on talent attraction and retention, next the ways to manage the employer brand in the case organization are presented. As Hub-schmid (2012, p.204) mentioned, strategy is the foundation of employer branding. Elving and others (2012) stress that the employer branding process is about developing values, communicating the brand and implementing it to the organization’s culture. According to the interview A, this can be seen in the case company as well. The employer brand, the case company is trying to promote, is based strongly on the company strategy and values. In the case company, the decisions of employer branding are made together with representatives of employer brand, stakeholder relations, brand communications, HR and strategic development. Additionally, as one of the team leaders mentioned, the “employer brand is part of company brand” which was also presented in the theoretical part of this study (Łącka-Badura, 2015, p.27; Mosley, 2007; Sengupta et al., 2015).

In the case company, the employer brand is constantly developed based on its measurements. The results of this study indicate that these are for example employer league rankings, employee turnover as well as employee surveys. Measuring these employer brand indicators is important for organizations as Mosley (2014, p.269-270) concluded.

Sometimes the implementation of employer branding can be challenging as Cushen (2011, p.87) mentioned. The interviews indicated that there is still a lot of work to do to get employees to understand the concept. External employer branding was seen easier than the internal one in the case organization. However, the organization is slowly getting to understand that employer branding is the responsibility of all the employees, not

just one person. Potgieter and Doubell (2018) concentrated on the employee ambassadors who promote the brand themselves and this is what is emerging in the case company as well according to interviews. As one of the team leaders said: “employer branding is not only HRs job, it is also managers’ and for each employees’ ”. One of the interviewees said that it is about “people to build this employer branding and this knowledge.” This is why the case company tries to encourage employees to be these ambassadors in social media.

Experiences of the employees can help to build the employer brand as Vuorinen (2013, p.191) and Valvisto (2005) presented. This is also recognizable in the case company. Experiences of the employees are shared in their network and attract possible candidates.

“[...] when we are having our recruitment open, we are always asking everybody to think of whether there is somebody they can recommend. Of course, there is a bonus if we hire somebody who is recommended [...]” (Interview B)

“Some candidates are coming and saying I have heard from a friend of a friend that this is very good center and that it is very good atmosphere [...]. This is just communication between people” (Interview D)

Also, participants said that they are promoting the company when talking with their family and friends, but as one of the interviewees pointed out, the given information should be honest and accurate.

The Employer Brand Manager said that the employer value propositions guide the employer branding process in the organization. This is in align with what was presented in the literature review about the importance of EVPs in the employer branding process (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011; Dabirian, Kietzmann & Diba, 2017; Sengupta et al., 2015). Hubschmid (2012, p.205) pointed out how important it is to create EVPs together with employees. This happened also in the case company since the values were created based on employee surveys and interviews. These values, which are also presented are visible in the service center. When asking the participants to describe the employer brand and the personality characteristics of the company, most of them answered followed these values.

The employee value propositions affect also to employee attraction. One of the participants said that “the values were quite important for that”. These values were important for retention as well. However, according to one of the interviewees, there might be a difference in the values that the HR service center represents and what the corporation represents. She was slightly skeptical of the corporate values and brand in the light of Greenwashing (see for example Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011) and current news in the field the corporation is operating. If these values of the corporation do not seem to be accurate, she might need to consider if the company is the right place for her to work in.

Besides the EVPs, actions to support employee engagement can be ways to enhance the employer brand as Mosley argues (2014, p. 107, 227). The strategy of the case company attracts possible employees. Managers try to show the purpose and targets of the organization in the case organization.

“[...] then of course so there is a lot of highlighting of our strengths or giving them space here, so people can also understand that this is expected of them, that is desired way.” (Interview B)

In the case company, development and learning are highlighted to keep people motivated and engaged. One of the managers said that when people are motivated they are more efficient. Also, leadership is emphasized in the case corporation and the company offers a lot of training for this. Additionally, employees are involved and they have the feeling they can change things in the case organization.

“[...] people want to work here because, you know, there is no just one part of the process and that they are responsible and they can learn. They can change things. And there is always some room for doing something different.” (Interview E)

The organization gives challenges and different projects to keep employees engaged.

“It [the work] can be at some point quite challenging but I like challenges. There are really quite different types of work we do. We still divide it into subgroups, but for example, in my daily work, I do a lot of different things and sometimes I can help out the recruitment team. And I think that it is pretty interesting and the company offers a lot of new challenges.” (Interview G)

Not only the learning and development actions, but also other human resources management actions matter when trying to build a strong employer brand as concluded in the literature review (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Elving et al., 2012; Maurya & Manisha, 2018; Mihalcea, 2017). In parallel, the case company puts a lot of effort into the HRM practices which are then the unique selling point in the markets.

“[...] we call it like a service center city. [...] So how can we be unique? [...] Our salary is like the rest of the companies. We will tell them that we do have people respect. We will tell them we do not have clock systems, we are working more from home and our leadership is nice, we treat people fairly. So this is also some kind of branding we try to spread in the markets. Why we do it? We want to attract [...] the candidates, we want to have the best workers. So this is the purpose. “ (Interview C)

The case company also tries to give equal rewards as participant B said: “I think we are in general putting a lot of effort into keeping the salary structure fair.” She also said that to keep the needed talent working they are “in general taking care of their employees”.

Additionally, the corporate social responsibility actions are important for the case company employees. Promoting CSR actions helps to enhance the employer brand of the organizations as mentioned in the literature review (Belinda, Westerman, & Bergmanc, 2018; Biswas & Suar, 2016; Puncheva-Michelotti, Hudson, & Jin, 2018). Participant B concluded that “many of our employees connect around sustainability in a very wide way”. In addition, the participants were talking about how important this is for them. Although, one of the participants pointed out that different kinds of CSR actions could be done more and promoting these in social media could attract employees.

Furthermore, a strong brand personality helps to promote the employer brand as concluded in the theoretical part of this study (Brusch, Brusch, & Kozlowski, 2018; Davies, 2008; Edwards, 2010; Eger, Mičik & Řehoř, 2018; Rample & Kenning, 2014). When asking the interviewees to describe the center with personality characteristics, the answers were similar to each other and these also followed the corporation values. The most common characteristics were around the following topics: community, dynamic, innovative, effective, sustainable and international. One of the team leaders pointed out how

strong these characteristics are in the center: “I think we are also having some quite a strong personality as HR service center”.

As pointed out in the literature review, especially the young potentials want to share the same characteristics, values and goals as the corporation they are working for (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Hubschmid, 2012, p.205; Kristof, 1996). This person-organization fit can determine a strong employer brand (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018). This is why the employer branding needs to be targeted right to suit the target group’s needs and values (Mosley, 2014, p.121; Vuorinen, 2013, p.190). The importance of P-O fit is recognizable in the case company as well. The company wants to attract the right people to work for the organization and thus the EVPs are modified each time to match the targeted applicants. One of the managers said that they “use the same branding but different ways to attract the candidates in different areas.”

“We need to think about the audience, yes, so for example, do we want to have young people or do we want to have people of age 40+. Of course, this promotion of the brand would be different. So this audience is also very important.” (Interview D)

One of the interviewees said that the “company [is] matching my attitude and thoughts about what is happening with the planet” when talking about the employer brand. It was recognizable how important this P-O fit is for the corporation.

“[...] first of recruitment is very important. So by the people we recruit, we are making sure that they are more or less fitting for our culture. And this fit is really something important that we are checking a lot in recruitment. I think which was very nice feedback from the team, [...] I heard that we are almost never having any miss hires [...]. I think it is really good that people are fitting because we really target having the people who are fitting the team and matching.” (Interview B)

Also, the complementary fit is emphasized in the case company to match the needs of the individuals and the company.

“First talking about the talent attraction, we need to identify the talent. The talent means the people most suitable for the positions. And they are not only suitable for this moment, but also, more importantly, they are suitable for the next two or three years. So for me that the suitability or match is equal to that thing. So we are not looking for super genius people, we are not also looking for those who are not qualified. Just looking for the people.” (Interview C)

Besides these actions, the aim and nature of the actions are also important, to enhance the employer brand. To build a strong employer brand, the company could aim for consistency (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011; Mosley, 2007; Wilska, 2014), accuracy (Elving et al., 2012; Edwards, 2010; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Vuorinen, 2013, p.190) and attractiveness (Celani & Singh, 2011, p.223; Moroko & Uncles, 2008) as presented in the literature review. These can be seen in the case organization as well. The aim of the employer branding of the case company is to be attractive. Additionally, the findings suggested that to be consistently seen as one corporation, not only as the local subsidiaries for current and possible employees, is important. As one of the participants said, she did not feel like applying for an HR service center but more for the corporation. Participants were talking about how the center is trying to build this brand consistency in the center through projects with quizzes and rewards, company parties, gifts and bonus talks for example.

On the other hand, the results indicated that being consistent with employer branding in different subsidiaries around the world might cause some problems. The corporation has chosen the most important target countries where the employer branding is more developed. Another structural issue in the organization is that who is in charge of branding as Davies (2008) mentioned. The employer branding steering group makes the decisions and communication is led by another team as well as the local managers and employees. Thus the responsibility is divided throughout the organization. These issues can determine why the employer branding activities in the service center are facing some restrictions, which was commonly shared by the participants of this study.

“But unfortunately there was because of the global rules we should have approvals and then also those approvals take a really long time. That is [why] sometimes we have stopped without any reason we cannot do that, and we are having some troubles. So if this approval chain would be easier, or the management [of the company] would say this is an organization and [...] new business, just do what you need. But unfortunately, we need to have this additional approver, which is stopping us to make such decisions.” (Interview D)

The employer branding actions need to be approved and comply with the company policies in the case organization. When talking about the employer branding in the center, they are promoting it but there are limitations as one of the interviewees said.

“So generally I think that is difficult to say. Sometimes I monitor our LinkedIn and also Facebook pages and I think it should be done more, generally [...] We do not have permission to build our Facebook for HRSC. That is a problem and the biggest challenge. [...] So there is freedom but freedom with limitation. But you can do something but on your own profiles. You can ask for some publication of photo but recently I was waiting for this publication for too long, it was too late.” (Interview E)

The findings also suggest that the consistency of the employer brand of the case company could be increased. The Employer Brand Manager concluded that the global identity of the corporation would be important. However, one of the participants described the identity of the service center is more local. This attracts more the possible candidates: “I think in this very local service center identity it helps us a lot when somebody gets in contact with us”. Moreover, the findings suggest how important it would be for applicants to hear about the local and small identity of the organization.

“[...] during phone interviews I’m telling about trends about working here so I mention about a number of specialists. This is the first attractive thing that we are a small corporation, we only hire 100 employees here. Second, we know each other and we work with each other in many different projects and internal workshops[...]” (Interview E)

Additionally, one of the interviewees used different characteristics to describe the HR service center and the global corporation. She also mentioned that the old image of the global corporation could be changed. A lot has been done to improve the employer brand although she suggested that there could be more actions to enhance it.

Lastly, the accuracy of the employer brand is important in the case company. The employer branding actions are aiming to be credible and authentic. Also, when the participants of the study said that when talking about their work with their friends and family, they like to tell honestly what they like and do not like in the work. Participants said that the communication and the description of the work in their own recruitment process were accurate and honest in the case organization.

To conclude the ways to promote the employer brand, the channels are briefly discussed. The case company promotes itself through participating in job fairs for example. Additionally, the recruitment process is a way to enhance the employer brand as described in the literature review (Mosley, 2014, p.2). Also, job advertisements can be an effective way to promote the employer brand (Edwards, 2010; Łącka-Badura, 2015, p.28). The results of this study indicate that these ways are used in the case company as well. As participant E described, when talking about how to promote the employer brand, she does it through her job as a recruiter.

"[...] as a recruiter I am building a very attractive job advertisements [...]. During my phone interviews, I'm acting as a sales manager [...]. I am doing the first stage of recruitment [...] I am able to say that this candidate is suitable for the team."

Interview E

Besides the traditional channels, the internet and social media play an important role when promoting the employer brand in the case organization which is in line with the literature review (Nagy & Putzer, 2012; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018). Participants of the study described that the internet, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram are mostly used to promote the employer brand and to attract possible employees in the case organization. Nonetheless, as the participants of this study said, social media could be utilized more. Also for some interviewees, the encouragement to promote the employer brand through their own social media might feel unpleasant.

"I like to talk about [the company] to family and friends and sometimes when there are job offers I also send the links to online job offers so there might be some interest. But otherwise, I am not that fond of social media so I am not actually using it that well so I cannot promote [the company] in that way." (Interview G)

The Employer Brand Manager said that she ordered a report of the young professionals' social media usage in Europe which is then utilized to design the employer brand. Also, one of the participants was talking about a new Polish site similar to LinkedIn which the service center is creating. Consequently, the trend in the case organization is to use the internet and social media channels even more alongside with the traditional channels when promoting the employer brand.

After summarizing the results of this study in this chapter, chapter 6 concentrates on analyzing these findings more and discussing them in the light of previous studies. The next chapter also answers to the research questions of this study.

6 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of employer branding in an HR shared service center located in Central Europe. This chapter is divided into two parts to answer the two research questions of this case study. The first part concentrates on “*How does the HR shared service center attract and retain talent?*” with a deeper analysis of the findings. The second part answers the second research question “*How does employer branding help to answer to the challenges of attracting and retaining talent in the HR shared service center?*”.

6.1 Attraction and retention of young talent

The findings of the study contribute to the findings of shared service center studies. The findings support the observations by Koval and others (2016) as well as Szabo-Szentgroti and others (2016) regarding the young professionals, who are the first target group of the shared service center currently. The findings also support the idea from Koval and others (2016) that the target group could be more diverse. As Shaw and Fairhurst (2008) concluded, the expectations of this new generation of employees are different and sometimes these expectations are hard to meet in the organizations (Zupan et al., 2017, p.78) which is also noticeable in the case company. The competition of talent to work in the case organization is high which supports the findings of the previous studies (Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015; App, Merk & Büttgen, 2012; Horwitz, 2011; Felker, 2012; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77; Cornelisse et al., 2011, p.57).

A positive word of mouth and networks are the main channels to attract new talent in the case company also recognized in the literature (Hubschmid, 2012, p.208; Nagy & Putzer, 2012; Jin-Feng et al., 2011). To attract the young potentials also other traditional channels and internet are used in the case company which is in line with the findings in the previous studies (Eger, Mičík, & Řehoř, 2018; Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2013; Nagy & Putzer, 2012; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018). Additionally, headhunting was mentioned in the case company for the German team. This is not seen as a first recruitment channel

in the theories of SSC or young talent. This could be due to the very competitive situation in the local markets as well as the mentioned reputation issues of service centers in Germany.

The shared service center model was interesting for the employees of the case company. As Redman and others (2007) concluded, working for one organization is more attractive to employees than serving many, which is common in outsourcing solutions. The findings of the study show that the HR service center was seen as an attractive place to work because it is a good career start as discussed in literature (Koval et al., 2016).

Additionally, the international atmosphere of the case company was seen as very attractive for the employees. This supports the findings by Rothwell, Herbert and Seal (2011) who reported that the pool of shared service center talent is global.

Besides internationality, willingness to develop was seen as an important aspect of the recruitment of the case organization. As mentioned in the literature review, this can be typical to young potentials since they are innovative, open to changes and look for development and career opportunities (Szabo-Szentgroti et al., 2016; SSON, 2018).

Moreover, the findings show that the employer brand can attract new talent to the service center. The findings also suggest that company features, such as the size, attract talent to work in the shared service center as reported already by Szabo-Szentgroti and others (2016). In addition, the values were highlighted by the participants of this study. This supports the findings of the studies of employer value propositions (Hubschmid, 2012, p.205 & Vuorinen, 2013, p.196).

Furthermore, the person-organization fit, with the position, culture, and values for example, was seen as the most important attraction factor for employees and managers of

the case company which supports the observations from previous studies (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Hubschmid, 2012, p.205; Łacka-Badura, 2015, p.27; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Mosley, 2014, p.121; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018; Kristof, 1996).

In the case company, the key to retain the talent appeared to be to choose the right people from the beginning as the results show. Unexpected was how important factor onboarding played to retention of talent in the case company. The reasons for this are examined at the end of this chapter. Other findings, concerning the importance of motivating, meaningful, and flexible work with engaging projects and opportunities for SSC employees, are similar to the observations by Meijerink and Bondarouk (2013), Vuorinen (2013, p.196) and SSON (2018).

As reported already in the findings of previous studies, the challenge is to retain the needed talent in one of the case company teams (Meijerink, Bondarouk & Looise, 2012; Miskon et al., 2011; Koval et al., 2016; SSON, 2019, p.14-17; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77). First, the administrative nature of shared service center work is often seen negative for young professionals in a long-term (Koval et al. 2016; Reilly, 2000, p.34-35; Rothwell et al., 2011, p.251). Moreover, the long-term careers of young talents are not very clear in the service center (Cappelli, 2008, p.205). The high volatility in one of the case company teams had an emotional and laborious effect on remaining employees. The extensive retention challenge in the service center team might occur because of the special group of people working there: the employees of this team are recruited from another country because of their language skills. Managing these expatriates, in this case, the self-initiated ones (see Richardson, 2006), might be a different kind of a challenge that does not apply to all the shared service centers.

What was unexpected was that the volatility in teams was not seen as a problem in the case company but also as an opportunity and natural cycle of the service center employment. The findings suggest that the company would like the service center employees to stay working in the organization for a certain period. This would be beneficial for the

employees since the center can offer limited career opportunities and quite administrative work and at the same time it offers a good career start for the young professionals. The moderate volatility in teams would be beneficial to the shared service center as well since the new employees bring new development ideas and might see the work more interesting and motivating. This is why the company focuses on recruitment, knowledge management system as well as onboarding.

6.2 The role of employer branding in attracting and retaining the talent

Next, the answer to the second research question of this study is provided. The findings combine to the results of previous studies from the areas of employer branding in the context of shared service centers. The findings of the study support the observations by Greening and Turban (2000) as well as Bendaraviciene (2016) regarding that employer branding can be an effective tool as can be expected in the light of signaling theory. As the results by Edwards (2010) show already, employer brand can also enhance the organizational identification of the case company. As Łącka-Badura (2015, p.27) and Mahesh and Suresh (2019) presented, employer branding can help the organization to differentiate itself from others and to attract the right kind of talent. Such a view appeared also in the present study. Additionally, the findings of this study view that employer branding can have a positive impact on employment experience (Maurya & Manisha, 2018).

As the previous studies have shown, employer branding can enhance the employee attraction (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Celani & Singh, 2011, p.223; Graham & Cascio, 2018; Küpper, Klein & Völckner, 2019; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Neeti & Sharma, 2014; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77). A positive reputation of the company can encourage people to apply to work (Eger, Mičák, & Řehoř, 2018). These observations are also supported by the findings of this study. In the areas where the case company is known, branding helps to attract the needed talent from the market. However, in other regions, where the company brand was not known, branding actions became even more important.

Most of the previous studies have concentrated on the effects of strong employer brand and ways to enhance the employer brand and branding. However, few studies have focused on the effects of a weak employer brand. One of the few once is the study by Wallace, Lings, and Cameron (2012) that concentrated on the talent attraction in the industries with a weaker brand profile. They concluded that in the industries with weaker employer brand and high competition, the talent attraction is harder. In this case study, the effects of a weak employer brand have similar consequences in some areas. The service center does not receive that many applications in these areas and the possible candidates have weak information about the company. This also supports the findings from Bendaraviciene (2016) for example, since her study shows that a strong employer brand enhances the amount and quality of information available for candidates.

Employer brand can also help to retain the talent as previous studies have presented (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Graham & Cascio, 2018; Küpper, Klein & Völckner, 2019; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Neeti & Sharma, 2014). The findings of this study are mostly in line with this. On the contrary, the findings show that the employer brand can have some effect on the decision to stay but in the end, many other reasons make the talent to change the employer. As stated before the case company does not see that the high volatility of employees is not that much of a problem for them but rather an opportunity.

The findings also show that the employer brand can be bound to geographical locations and one global employer brand might be very difficult to create and retain. According to Turner and Kalman (2014, p.166), the target of employer branding could still be consistency. A strong employer brand that resonates throughout the different generations and geographies. At the same time, the EVPs can be modified to different target groups and locations to attract the needed talent. As Cushen (2011, p.87) already reported, the implementation of a global employer brand can be difficult in the case company.

Identified ways to enhance the employer brand in the case company follow mainly the observations from previous studies. As Hubschmid (2012, p.204) showed, the strategy is

the foundation of employer branding. This was also recognizable in the case company. The process of creating first the employer value propositions and then implementing the brand promises externally and internally follow the suggestions from Elving and others (2012). The findings show that the values are important especially for young potentials as stated already by Hubschmid (2012, p.205) and Vuorinen (2013, p.196).

The findings support the idea of employee ambassadors and how important the real stories are for possible candidates (Crişan & Borţun, 2017; Haak, 2019; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018; Mosley, 2014, p.199, 200). The experiences of case company employees and their networks enhance the employer brand which is in line with what Vuorinen (2013, p.191) and Valvisto (2005) argue.

The case organization is paying a lot of attention to keeping the employees engaged and on the HR management system of the center. These actions have a positive influence on employer brand which supports the findings by previous studies (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Elving et al., 2012; Maurya & Manisha, 2018; Mihalcea, 2017; Mosley, 2014, p. 107, 227).

Additionally, the findings about the importance of CSR actions to employer attraction and brand (Belinda, Westerman, & Bergmanc, 2018; Biswas & Suar, 2016; Puncheva-Michelotti, Hudson, & Jin, 2018) were supported by this study. Also, the strong brand personality of the case organization has a positive influence on employer brand which follows the ideas from previous studies (Brusch, Brusch, & Kozlowski, 2018; Davies, 2008; Edwards, 2010; Eger, Mičák & Řehoř, 2018; Rample & Kenning's, 2014).

The importance of targeting the employer brand to the right people and the P-O fit was highlighted in the findings of this study. These support the theories of P-O fit and positioning of employer brand (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Hubschmid, 2012, p.205; Kristof, 1996; Mosley, 2014, p.121; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018; Vuorinen, 2013, p.190).

The findings of the study substantiate how important it is for an organization that the employer brand aims for consistency (Botha, Bussin & de Swardt, 2011; Mosley, 2007; Wilska, 2014), accuracy (Elving et al., 2012; Edwards, 2010; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Vuorinen, 2013, p.190) and attractiveness (Celani & Singh, 2011, p.223; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). On the other hand, the consistent employer brand is hard to retain as presented earlier. Aim for consistency can also bring limitations for a subsidiary, as the findings show that the strict global rules of the organization concerning employer branding can decrease the actions taken to enhance the brand locally. Also, as the observations by Davies (2008) already stated, the divided responsibility of employer branding can cause these challenges.

Measurement of employer branding in the case company follows the ideas from Mosley (2014, p.269-270). Although, the outcomes of employer branding could be measured more for example through brand reputation and experience, desired behaviors and outcomes, as well as marketing efficiency and effectiveness in the case company.

Channels used to promote the employer brand are similar as presented in the previous studies (Edwards, 2010; Łącka-Badura, 2015, p.28; Mosley, 2014, p.2; Nagy & Putzer, 2012; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018): recruitment process, job advertisements, and job fairs play an important role. In addition to these traditional channels, the internet and social media are used in the case company to promote the employer brand externally.

7 Conclusions

This chapter concludes the findings of this study and assesses the theoretical contribution of the results. Also, managerial implications are presented. In addition, the limitations of the study are described. Finally, the suggestions for future research conclude this case study.

7.1 The theoretical contribution

As the concept of shared service centers is still evolving and rather new to academia (Richter & Brühl, 2017), this study gives valuable information about the nature and management of this organizational solution. This study focused especially on the talent attraction and retention as well as employer branding of an HR shared service center. The study combines the previous studies of employer branding and the HR shared service centers and thus reduces this research gap.

The results of this study contribute to the previous studies to the attraction of talent as well as the challenges in a shared service center. The findings of this study also show some of the effects of high volatility in a team which is not in the focus of most of the shared service center studies. The findings suggest that the challenge to retain the talent in a service center (see Meijerink, Bondarouk & Looise, 2012; Miskon et al., 2011; Koval, Nabareseh, Klimek & Chromjakova, 2016; SSON, 2019, p.14-17; Zupan et al., 2017, p.77) can be seen also as an opportunity. There is a limit that the case organization can offer and the work gives a good career start for employees of the center. Also, since new employees bring new ideas to the center, the focus is not on keeping the talent longer but rather on managing the knowledge. This has even become the benefit of the organization because of the improved talent management system.

The importance of onboarding has been neglected in the studies of shared service centers as well as employer branding. This was seen as one of the key aspects to promote

the employer brand and get the talent adapted to the organization and retain it in the case company.

Additionally, since the research of employer branding is developing (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Bendaraviciene, 2016; Edwards 2010; Mosley, 2014, p.3-4) this study gives new viewpoints of the topic. The findings of this study suggest that employer branding in a shared service center can help to attract new employees. In the areas of weak employer brand, brand promotion becomes particularly important. This study gives new ideas about the effects of a weak employer brand which has not been researched that much before. This study also presents the ways employer branding can be enhanced in a shared service center. Especially, the importance of values and person-organization fit were emphasized in the findings of the study.

Controversially, employer branding might not help to retain the talent in the shared service center as effectively as previous studies suggest (Bendaraviciene, 2016; Graham & Cascio, 2018; Küpper, Klein & Völckner, 2019; Mahesh & Suresh, 2019; Neeti & Sharma, 2014). Other reasons, such as the salary, willingness to move back to a home country, finishing studies or more challenging job offers, might overcome the effects of employer branding as the findings of this study show.

Additionally, the challenge to maintain a consistent employer brand was emphasized in the results of the study. The employer brand can be very regional and the global practices can decrease the employer branding actions in the shared service center.

7.2 The managerial contribution

This study can bring new ideas to the talent attraction and retention of the HR shared service center as well as the importance of employer branding. Next, the managerial implications of the findings of this study are presented.

The recruitment target group of the HR service center could be more diverse and not only concentrate on young talent as the findings of this study show. The diversity in teams is important to keep the expertise there but also to generate different ideas.

In addition to the recruitment target group, the findings suggest different ways to attract this talent. The utilization of networks can be an effective way to attract new employees and promote employer brand in regard to the findings of this study. Additionally, traditional channels, the internet as well as social media can be effective ways. The good career start the center offers was seen very attractive by the participants. Additionally, the company features, such as an international and large corporation, were seen attractive. Moreover, the development orientation was important for the managers of the center. Paying attention to person-organization fit could be the key to attract and retain the right talent in a shared service center as the findings of this study suggest.

Besides talent attraction, the results give ideas on how to retain the needed talent. Expectations of young professionals might be beneficial to notify in HRM practices of the service center. The results of this study show that motivating, meaningful and flexible work as well as development opportunities are important for HR service center employees. These also help to answer the challenge of retaining the employees doing administrative work tasks. Engaging and challenging work can also enhance the employer brand. Additionally, recruitment of the right talent and onboarding are important for retaining the employees. Also, long-term careers in global corporations could be planned more which would help to keep the talent longer. The service center employees also value the atmosphere and community which are the key reasons to stay in the company.

The findings of this study show that the retention challenge could be seen also as an opportunity for a shared service center. The service center has limitations on what they can offer. However, it is a good career start for the employees. New employees can bring new ideas and development suggestions to the center. This is why the focus can be especially on the knowledge management systems in addition to talent retention.

To stand out as an organization in the markets with high competition, employer branding plays an important role. A strong employer brand can help the company to identify the talent and add value to employment experience. A weak employer brand makes it difficult to attract the needed talent.

A strong employer brand can help with talent retention as the findings of this study suggest. However, employer brand is not the main reason for employees to stay in the company but many other factors, such as the salary, family or more challenging job offer, influence this decision as well.

Employer brand is suggested to be build based on strategy and employer value propositions. These values play important roles in employee attraction. The aim for consistency, accuracy, and attractiveness could strengthen an employer brand. Global standards can help to achieve one global employer brand, but on the other hand, this limits the employer branding actions in subsidiaries. Measuring the external and internal employer brand would be beneficial to constantly develop the employer branding actions.

Organizations could concentrate on creating employer brand ambassadors to implement the employer brand successfully. This is because the positive experiences of the employees are attractive for potential candidates.

7.3 Limitations

This study has several limitations that are presented next. First of all, the method chosen for this study is a single-case study form. The results are from a single HR organization in the context of Poland. Therefore the results of this study are thus not generalizable. It should be emphasized that the generalizability was not the target of this research but rather studying in-depth the role of employer branding in an HR shared service center located in Central Europe.

Additionally, because of the limited time and resources as well as the qualitative nature of the study, the sample size is small which decreases the generalizability as well. Furthermore, as an inexperienced interviewer, the research questions might be inaccurate, poorly articulated or reflexive, answering only what the interviewer wants to hear. There might exist also the bias of responses. (Yin, 2009, p.102)

7.4 Suggestions for future research

Future research would be required to test the employer branding in the context of shared service centers. The future studies could cover different SSC models, not only HR. Also, since the focus of the study is in Central and Eastern Europe, Poland especially, more research would be required to find the similarities and differences in other contexts as well.

The suggestion from the findings of this study of retention as an opportunity in the shared service center could be studied more. Further, the knowledge management systems of shared service centers could be examined more to complement the study by Herbert and Seal (2014, p.148-149). Additionally, the relationship between onboarding, talent retention, and employer brand could be researched more closely. Also, the effects of a weak employer brand could be an interesting topic for future studies. They could focus on comparing the areas where the employer brand is weak to areas with stronger employer brand.

Because of the limitations of this study, more research would also be needed to verify the findings and bring different points of view to the research of employer branding and shared service centers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview question outline for employees

1. Could you tell me who are you and what is your position in the company?

Employer attraction

2. How did you hear of this workplace?

3. Why did you choose to apply for this HRSC?

4. What do you think are the main reasons you want to keep working here?

5. How would you describe the communication style of the HRSC during the recruitment process and your employment?

Employer branding

6. What kind of employer brand does the company have in your opinion? (personality characteristics?)

7. How would you say you promote this employer brand yourself?

8. How do you think the employer brand affected your choice of employer?

9. How do you think the employer brand affects your choice to keep working in this company?

Appendix 2. Interview question outline for managers and recruiters

1. Could you tell me who are you and what is your position in the company?

Employer attraction

2. Could you tell me about the recruitment process of HRSC?

3. What kind of talent are you trying to attract to work for the HRSC? How?

4. Are there challenges to attract the right kind of talent to work in the HRSC?

5. What are the ways HRSC uses to keep the needed talent working here?

6. Are there challenges to keep the needed talent in the HRSC?

Employer branding

7. What kind of employer brand does the HRSC have in your opinion? (personality characteristics?)

8. What kind of employer brand is the HRSC trying to build? How? (internal and external)

9. How does the employer brand help to attract new employees?

10. How does the employer brand effect on keeping the needed talent in HRSC?

Appendix 3. Interview question outline for Employer branding manager

1. Could you tell me who are you and what is your position in the company?

Employer branding

2. How do you lead the employer branding in the company?

3. How does the management of employer branding differ in the units?

4. Is the employer branding in HRSC any different?

5. What kind of employer brand is the company trying to promote?

6. How does the employer brand take into account different target groups?

Employer attraction

7. What are the ways the company uses to promote the external employer brand?

8. What are the ways the company uses to promote the internal employer brand?