INTERNAL BRANDING

An Exploratory Case Study of the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping

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Abstract

Background
Internal branding refers to initiatives, where organizations promote brand values and promises inside the organization, from managers to employees. Today, more than traditional marketing is needed, therefore it is argued that organizations need to align their internal- and external image to achieve the greatest advantage of a brand. Moreover, literature has highlighted that to successfully implement internal branding in organizational operations, HR practices such as Training and Communication need to be integrated with the strategy of internal branding. This, in order to achieve the desired effects of employees’ brand-supported attitudes and behavior. Previous research has also presented, that internal branding initiatives are of greater importance for organizations in the service industries, since the employees are the ones interfacing with the consumers. Moreover, the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping was chosen as a case study for this thesis due to the professions relevance today.
Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is (1) to explore how IT consultancy firms in Jönköping use internal branding in their operations and (2) how the HR practices Training and Communication promote the internal branding initiatives to influence employee brand-supported attitudes and behavior. An analysis of existing literature combined with empirical data from conducted interviews, will be used to fulfill the purpose of this thesis.

Method and Methodology
This thesis is based on a qualitative research method with an interpretivist philosophy. Furthermore, it is an exploratory case study of the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping. The main technique for gathering empirical data included semi-structured interviews with a narrative analysis.

Findings
Previous literature suggested that the HR practices Training and Communication could promote the initiatives within internal branding to influence employees to adopt brand-supported attitudes and behavior. Findings indicted that this could be held true within the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping, based on the interviews with the chosen companies. One major conclusion could be drawn that the chosen companies argued that they used both of the HR practices Training and Communication. This included educational conference days, group-meetings and brand-based intranets. Moreover, findings presented that companies involved their employees when developing organizational values. This, in order to create brand-supported attitudes such as, identification among the employees, which in turn was argued by the companies to enhance commitment. Further, it was found that these initiatives led to that employees felt pride in the organization, thus creating loyalty and wanted to stay within it. Furthermore, it was concluded by the authors of this thesis that the companies’ initiatives within internal branding, led to an enhancement of commitment, which in turn influenced the employee brand-supported behavior.
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1. Introduction

This chapter will introduce the reader to the topic of internal branding by presenting the background and problem discussion of this thesis. Furthermore, the purpose will be introduced and research questions will be presented. Definitions relevant to this thesis will be explained in order to give the reader a better understanding.

1.1 Background

Broadly speaking, branding refers to an organization’s possibility to distinguish its products from its competitors by a certain design, symbol, logo, term or name (Aurand, Gorschels & Bishop, 2005). However, brand management focus on more than the managing of a product’s essentials to the consumer. It includes consideration to not only consumers, but also other internal and external stakeholders, which are involved in the interpretation of brand promise. As Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng (2010) highlighted in their study, corporate branding is an important factor in the delivery of the brand promise. Within this perspective the organization itself becomes the brand. This means, that the employees play a crucial role. This since customer satisfaction is dependent on their interaction with the employee. Therefore, employees’ actions and behaviors can enhance the positive reputation of a brand (Foster et al., 2010). Furthermore, brand management considers internal stakeholders, which can be connected to the phenomenon of Internal Branding, that onwards will be the focus of this thesis.

Internal Branding refers to initiatives, where organizations promote brand values and promises inside the organization, from managers to employees. This, in order to motivate employees to transform brand values into reality when interacting with customers (Liu, Ko & Chapleo, 2017). Over the last decade, organizations worldwide have tended to increasingly invest resources in Internal Branding initiatives. This, due to e.g. increased competition, which implies that more efforts than external marketing strategies are required to build strong brands (Judson, Aurand, Gorchels & Gordon, 2008). Internal Branding has therefore gained a significant and accurate place in literature. Previous research has highlighted that an
organization achieves its greatest advantages when brand image and employees’ attitudes towards the organization are reinforced together. It has also been presented that for Internal Branding to be successfully implemented, HR practices needs to be aligned with Internal Branding strategy (Aurand et al., 2005). By this meaning that companies need to manage their human resources carefully to implement Internal Branding efforts. Human resource management (HRM) refers to the practices an organization undertake to effectively manage its human resources for positive organizational outcomes. These include, Training and Development, Performance Management, Compensation and Benefits, Planning and Communication, Staffing and Industrial Relations (Dowling, Festing & Engle, 2013; Panayotopoulou, Vakola & Galanaki, 2007). Moreover, it has been argued that it is especially important for organizations to invest in the practice of Training to educate employees in brand values and in Internal Communication to motivate employees to behave aligned with the brand. This to be able to influence employees’ attitudes of identification, commitment and loyalty towards the brand, in order to enhance employee brand-supported behavior (Punjaisri, Wilson, & Evanschitzky, 2008).

Internal Branding is considered most important within the service sector, due to that services are characterized by an intangible form. In the situation when tangible goods shift to intangible services the employees’ roles get more crucial. This, since the front-line employees are expected to deliver the promises of the brand and shape the perceptions of the consumers (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014). The implementation of Internal Branding initiatives is therefore far more crucial. If a lack of employee commitment exists it might imply the risk of negative word-of-mouth in the service delivery to consumers (Yang, Wan & Wu, 2015). As concluded by Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) organizations in the service sector are highly dependent on the attitudes and behaviors of employees, since it affects the customers’ perceptions of the organizations’ brand images. To study the perspective of Internal Branding within the service sector, the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping was chosen for this thesis. As argued by Vasiliev and Levochkina (2015) the employees in the IT industry are of high importance since their competences are of great value when providing services to consumers. The IT consultancy sector also continues to grow rapidly, due to the need of technology in today’s workplace (Vasiliev & Levochkina, 2015). Therefore, the authors of this thesis found the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping as a feasible, relevant and interesting case to explore with respect to the purpose.
1.2 Problem Discussion

With the background of Internal Branding (IB), one can argue that this phenomenon is accurate and crucial to further explore. According to previous literature more than external branding is needed to build a strong organizational brand (Judson et al., 2008). It is also assumed that IB is even more important in the service sector, since the front-line employees can be considered as the “product” to the customers in the delivery of the service (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014). Therefore, IB is important to explore today since the employees’ behavior play a crucial role in the success of transferring brand image into reality (Judson et al., 2008). By using IB as a strategy, Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) argued that an organization can create a powerful corporate brand, which in turn will imply advantages for the organization in question. Moreover, the advantages of a powerful corporate brand reduce the consumers’ risks in engaging in purchases and increases their trust in the organization when purchasing intangible services. The employees’ behavior in these service situations are therefore crucial, since they play the role of delivering brand promises and shape consumers’ perceptions of the brand (Punjaisri et al., 2008).

Furthermore, Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng (2010) highlighted in their study that IB needs to be integrated with HR practices to achieve the desirable outcomes. This is moreover said to be one of the key success factors when implementing an IB strategy. Previous research has presented that Training and Development and the efforts of Internal Communication contribute to the success of IB implementation. This, in turn is suggested to positively affect employees’ attitudes and lead to brand-supported behavior (Punjaisri et al., 2008).

A lack of research concerning branding within the business-to-business (B2B) sector has been identified, if compared to the high number of publications connected to consumer brands. Up until today, brand management has according to Baumgarth (2010) been found to act as a function to first and foremost strengthen the relationship between businesses and its customer. However, Baumgarth (2010) advocated that since 2000, marketing scholars and marketing managers have begun to apply the theories in practice in the B2B sector as well. Sales within the B2B environment are characterized by personal contact, transparency and interaction between the customer and the supplier. The author supported the relevance of brand
management within B2B and argued that it is basically equally important in these contexts (Baumgarth, 2010).

Looking more deeply into service organizations in the B2B market, Peterson (2007) lifted the fact that the relationship and interaction between customers and service providers tended to become more complex during the 1990s, as the importance of customer service grew during that time. A sector that grew rapidly during this time was the Swedish IT consulting sector (Peterson, 2007). The profession of IT consultants is knowledge-intensive but is simultaneously characterized by a high customer orientation. Before the financial recession in the early 2000s the technical skills of an IT consultant were the most crucial. Although after the recession, these competences were no longer sufficient enough in order to become a high-performance IT consultant. With the sector’s high customer orientation, a consultant is now needed to also possess social skills to handle complex customer relations (Peterson, 2007). The authors of this thesis choice to study the IT consulting sector can therefore be regarded as relevant and first and foremost current. Moreover, shortcomings have been identified in previous literature where this sector has not previously been explored based on its brand management and IB initiatives. Due to the IT consultancy sector’s high level of customer orientation and interaction, the sector is considered relevant to explore when it comes to how managers get their consultants to possess brand appropriate attitudes and behaviors.

Previous literature conducted by Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) has touched upon the link between IB and employee band-supported behavior within the hotel industry. However, the topic deserves to be further explored, since the previous literature suggested that the link should be further explored in various sectors (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Moreover, there is also lack of literature presenting how Training and Internal Communication can be used within IB. Therefore, it is of interest to explore the initiatives of IB and the use of these HR practices within the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping.
1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how Internal Branding is used within the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping and in what ways the HR practices Training and Communication can promote the initiatives of IB in order to influence employee brand-supported attitude and behavior.

1.4 Research Questions

i. How does the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping use Internal Branding?

ii. How does the HR practices of Training and Internal Communication promote Internal Branding to influence employee brand-supported attitudes and behavior?

1.5 Delimitation

This thesis only considers the five chosen IT consulting firms in Jönköping view on IB and its affection on employee brand-supported behavior. Therefore, the result will not be generalized for the entire IT consultancy sector, since there is lack of information to determine the sector as a whole view on IB. Moreover, this thesis had a limited timeframe, meaning that if more time had been given there would be further opportunities to explore a greater part of the IT consultancy sector. This, in turn would contribute with more extensive empirical data for the result and analysis of this thesis. Moreover, since the authors of this thesis have chosen to explore one particular sector no general conclusions can neither been drawn concerning other sectors.

1.6 Definitions

**External branding** is the process of utilizing the different marketing activities to influence consumers into a purchase decision and to engage with desired target groups (Fill & Turnbull, 2016).
Corporate branding is defined as “a systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintaining favourable images and consequently a favourable reputation of the company as a whole by sending signals to all stakeholders by managing behaviour, communication, and symbolism” (Einwiller & Will, 2002, p. 101).

Employer branding is, according to Van Mossevelde (2014) the process of advertising the organization and attracting a desired target group to recruit and retain employees. The aim is to be the company of choice for the desired employees.

Internal Branding (IB) is a strategy where the organization promotes brand values and promises inside the organization with the purpose to ensure that employees express brand messages into reality for both customers and other stakeholders (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).

Human Resource Management (HRM) is the management of an organization’s human resources, including practices such as, Training and Development, Compensation and Benefits, Performance Management, Staffing, Planning and Communication and Industrial Relations (Dowling et al., 2013).

2. Frame of Reference

This chapter will introduce the reader to the theory behind this thesis, starting by lifting the broader perspective of brand management. Moreover, the reader will be further introduced to Internal Branding, followed by its effects of brand-supported- attitudes and behavior. The chapter will lastly conclude with the HR practices within Internal Branding by introducing the relationship between them.
2.1 Brand management

This section will discuss and clarify various types of branding strategies, in order to get a better understanding of how they are linked together, but also how they differentiate from one another. This thesis will further focus on IB, i.e. the employees’ and their importance in delivering an organization’s brand promise.

As previously mentioned, brand management is not only about managing a product’s benefits to the consumers, it also includes how the organization as a whole manage their own appearance towards internal and external stakeholders. One can argue that it is a tactical development of differentiation through a distinctive identity (Malmelin & Hakala, 2009). There are multiple ways of presenting a brand promise, where firms can use both external and internal branding strategies. External branding refers to marketing towards customers, which previously has been the most usually used strategy for organizations. Different marketing activities are used to illustrate the brand promise towards the customers, in order to influence their behavior into a purchase (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Moreover, another strategy suggested to deliver a strong brand promise is through corporate branding. The term "corporate brand" is a common notion in the literature and Foster et al. (2010) defined corporate brand as the expressed promise between an organization and its stakeholders. The authors further explained corporate branding as a company's systematic planning and management of behavior, communication and symbolism. This, to enable the achievement of a favorable and positive reputation around the organization among its interest groups. Additionally, Foster et al. (2010) argued that this strategy highlight employees’ attitudes and behaviors and more specific the behaviors connected to the delivery of the brand promise. This implies that all key attributes of the organization's distinctiveness must be known, in the form of a well-defined brand proposition including, values and promises. It is crucial that the employees are aware of the promise and that they are committed to it in order to deliver it. Corporate branding has over time developed into IB and employer branding, which emphasizes the importance of a closer alignment between the employees’ values and those of the corporate brand (Foster et al., 2010). While corporate branding is the promise between an organization and its key stakeholders, IB focuses on the organization’s initiatives to promote brand values and promises within the organization, to its employees. This, in order to motivate the employees to transform brand values into reality (Liu et al., 2017). By engaging in efforts of motivating
and increasing the satisfaction of current employees the objective of retaining them in the organization can also be achieved (Einwiller & Will, 2002).

In contrast to IB and its focus on current employees, employer branding put emphasis on attracting new employees. The activities of employer branding include, recruitment of those who fit the firm, and maintenance of the right employees at the firm. It is defined as a process aimed at promoting the organization as an employer to a desired audience, i.e. the right employees (Van Mossevelde, 2014). It can also be seen as a strategy that can be efficiently used when a company wants to gain competitive advantage and differentiate itself against competitors within a specific industry (Wilden, Gudergang & Lings, 2010).

### 2.2 Internal Branding

In order to understand the concept of IB, a detour might need to be taken by explaining concepts that led to its emergence and contemporary significance. Over time, a change has been identified with regards to brand building activities. Judson et al. (2008) addressed in their findings that organizations now have begun to understand the fact that more than external promotion strategies such as advertising and sales promotion are required in order for firms to build strong brands. Tosti and Stotz (2001) asserted that branding historically mainly involved creating an image and defining a promise through external communication. The authors argued that IB is a concept that now a days requires the same amount of attention. By the same token, King and Grace (2008) also highlighted the theory that a brand not only represents the relationship between the organization and its customers, but equally the relationship between it and its employees. Also, Punjaisri et al. (2008) pointed out the importance of the brand-employee relationship. What the authors aim to clarify is that, depending on the way employees are taken care of, it affects the way in which they in tur take care of the organization's customers. It is therefore possible to argue that employees' perceptions of the brand in turn may affect the brand perceptions of the customers. Evidence even exist supporting that a positive employee-firm relationship can affect the company's earnings and profitability in a positive direction (Punjaisri et al., 2008).
The need for an internal perspective on branding has made the concept of IB to arose into a practice that has gained more space and importance in existing literature (Punjaisri et al., 2008). According to the authors, this is the result as companies today must ensure that their employees have the appropriate attitude and behavior in order to deliver the promise of the brand and represent it. Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) explained the function of IB as to vigorously creating a brand through intertwining internal processes with the brand's corporate culture. Furthermore, Foster et al. (2010) illuminated the idea that IB is seen as a function to deliver the corporate brand promise. Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) highlighted several benefits. The authors disclosed that numerous publications have identified the profits with a successful IB strategy. They emphasized that a well-implemented strategy leads to that employees within an organization feel commitment, identification and loyalty towards the brand.

2.2.1 Internal Branding in the service and IT consultancy sector

By looking more deeply into service organizations, literature on branding and service marketing emphasized that employees within a service organization have especially an essential impact on customers during service encounters. The importance of employees in service organizations was raised by narrating its effect on the brand’s positioning among organization competing in the same industry (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). The important role of employees in the IT sector is furthermore highlighted by Vasiliev and Levochkina (2015). The majority of the employees within the IT sector possesses knowledge, skills and competences that are of great value when providing IT services to consumers. The employees’ interaction and delivery of the IT services is therefore crucial to consider as a matter of importance (Vasiliev & Levochkina, 2015). This is furthermore highlighted by Peterson (2007) who discussed the profession of IT consultants as knowledge-intensive but still characterized by a high customer orientation. The author thus argued that consultants within the IT sector need to also possess social skills in order to handle complex customer relations (Peterson, 2007).

In the research conducted by Judson et al. (2008), the actual transfer of the brand message to employees in an organization is highlighted. The authors asserted the idea that this process has grown to become an increasingly important aspect of an organization's positioning in the mind of the customer. By the same token, Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) concluded that service
organizations are highly dependent on their employees' behavior when they produce and deliver their services to the customer, thus affecting the customers’ perception of the brand. Punjaisri et al. (2008) raised several authors conducting research in the field of service marketing that have presented theories based on emotional connection to brands. For service organizations, this involvement is said to be more difficult to establish due to the intangibility of services, which in turn impedes customers’ evaluations. The relationship between the firm and the employees is therefore a prerequisite for the relationship between the customers and the firm, thus affecting the organization’s ability to reach success (Punjaisri et al., 2008).

Service companies have begun to realize that it is of great importance to encourage their employees to assume the characteristics of the brand (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Moreover, Sirianni, Bitner, Brown and Mandel (2013) found that research indicates that the everyday communication between people is significantly more compelling compared to advertising and other media communications. The substantial nature of delivering the brand’s identity is according to Punjaisri et al. (2008) what acts as a relationship builder in the service industry. The authors lifted the idea that the brand is what ties the bond between the organization and the customers through its value proposition and promise. Since the employees is the ones that are going to deliver on this promise it is essential that it is present throughout all service encounters. This, in order to make sure that the beneficial relationships between the organization and the customers is sustained (Punjaisri et al., 2008).

2.3 The effects of Internal Branding

In addition to understand what the brand stands for, in other words, its identity, it is also important that employees are committed when it comes to supporting the brand they are working for. This in order to consistently deliver the brand promises to customers (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010).
2.3.1 Employee brand-supported attitudes

The study conducted by Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) indicated that IB affects employees’ attitudes. This, in such ways that when employees have a clear understanding of the brand's values the probability increases that they feel greater commitment to the brand, both intellectually and emotionally. Brand commitment among employees is one of several attitudes that IB is claimed to influence. Findings in recent literature indicated that initiatives within IB positively influence brand commitment among the employees. IB’s influence on brand commitment among employees is said to occur through the creation of a shared understanding of the brand values across all divisions of the organization (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Brand commitment is considered as one factor that furthermore includes three interrelated attitudes, namely identification, involvement and loyalty (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010). These attitudes are according to Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) said to strongly affect the behaviors of the employees. The authors advocated that if employees are committed to the brand of the employer they are said to be better equipped to fulfill the brand promise due to their emotional attachment to the brand. Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010) clarified that the term “employee brand commitment” is referred to as the extent that employees can identify with the brand as well as their willingness to exert efforts in order to achieve the brand's objectives. Moreover, according to the authors, employee brand commitment is also a term used to interpret the employee's interest to remain within the organization (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010). Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) have found that IB is said to have an essential impact on employees’ identification and loyalty towards the brand. The authors raised that, when the personal values of the employees are aligned with those of the brand, the identification and loyalty towards the brand is said to increase. Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) raised the idea that the more employees identify with an organization, the greater is the chance that they maintain that particular identity throughout their actions. By the same token, Chauhan and Mahajan (2013) highlighted that when employees feel that they can identify with the organizational culture they create a connection towards the company. The connection in turn establishes a strong sense of commitment for the employee towards the organization. Moreover, the authors argued that the commitment will create a feeling of belonging, which will enhance the employees’ loyalty for the organization and result in that employees want to stay within it (Chauhan & Mahajan, 2013).
2.3.2 Employee brand-supported behavior

Concerning the employee behavior in this case, the term brand-supported behavior also known as brand-aligned behavior is used. This term is referred to the level of congruence between employee behavior and the personality of the brand (Sirianni et al., 2013). IB is according to Tosti and Stotz (2001) a useful method for achieving positive impact on employees. According to the authors, employees feel more committed and energized by knowing that they can make a positive impact on the delivery of the service (Tosti & Stotz, 2001). The personal meetings, such as those between employees and customers, can therefore be considered more influential in communicating the brand, unlike traditional marketing-based communication with targeted content (Sirianni et al., 2013).

To further demonstrate the effects and significance of an internalization of the brand message Judson et al. (2008) stressed that it may lose its credibility in case it is not supported by the employees in the organization. The critical role of employees as relationship builders between customers and the brand are further highlighted by Punjaisri et al. (2008) who argued that employees constantly integrating with customers are representatives of the brand's identity and personality. Employees whose task is to integrate with customers must therefore be able to act and behave accordingly with the brand's values and the promises given to customers. By the same intention, King and Grace (2008) made an effort to explain the importance of IB by illustrating the practice as the "the glue" an organization's employees require. What the authors raised is that employees are in need of a central motif in order to shape consistent behavior, which matches the organizational expectations. This is an opinion shared by Punjaisri and Wilson (2007), who addressed the purpose of IB as a way to ensure that employees translate expressed brand messages into reality for both customers and other stakeholders. The same assumption was held by Yang et al. (2015) who noted that an effective implementation of IB may lead to an enhancement in employee commitment which furthermore positively influences employee behavior that is brand-appropriate.

Delivering brand promise

Customers usually seek out for a brand since they expect to receive the values that the brand promise presents and that match their personal values. Therefore, it is of great importance that this promise is fulfilled and delivered by the organization. If the promise is not held according
to the customer, this may most definitely affect the customer's trust and commitment to the brand. Since these are the factors said to play a key role in relationship building between the brand and its customer it is crucial to maintain these as high as possible (Punjaisri et al., 2008). Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) argued that at the point where brand values have been internalized among employees it will result in a consistent delivery of the brand promise, across all contact points between the company and its various stakeholders.

Punjaisri et al. (2008) highlighted that IB's success is due to the fact that it contributes to a common understanding of the brand among employees. According to the authors, this creates a competent team of employees that enables the brand promise to be delivered. This assumption is also acknowledged by King and Grace (2008), who’s research gives prominence to the phenomenon of creating a strong brand by giving employees the ability to deliver according to customer expectations. The authors advocated that e.g. implementation of IB initiatives aimed at that employees could enable improved service quality and thus bring the brand to life (King & Grace, 2008). By the same token, Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) considered IB as a support function for the organization’s adaptation of internal processes and building of a corporate culture around the brand. Sirianni et al. (2013) noted that when employee behavior is in line with the brand's personality in interactions, the ability for customers to experience the brand as a consistently uniform entity increases. This is also accentuated by King and Grace (2008) who stressed the phenomenon that through the internalization of the brand meaning among employees, they are considered better equipped to act and fulfill the expressed and implied promises. Thus, what the brand stands for and that is expected by the customers. According to the authors, this is because the brand's values, practices and behaviors are clarified and defined, which in turn gives a clear direction for all efforts within the organization (King & Grace, 2008).

**Corporate culture**

The employee behavior is said to be heavily dependent of the organizational culture, norms and values that tend to influence individual and group behavior. This culture can in other words be called the "corporate culture" and is defined as the shared values and beliefs between its members that contribute to meaning and rules for behavior within the organization. Informally, this culture may internally be defined as "the way we do things
around here” (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2012). Carmeli, Meitar and Weisberg (2006) wrote about individuals’ behavior in the workplace and claimed that the organizational climate in which an employee is located in may affect his or her behavior. In the study conducted by Scott and Bruce (1994) the term climate is referred to as a person's individual cognitive interpretation of an organization's setting. Their research pointed out some aspects that can directly and indirectly affect what can be regarded as the climate. According to the authors, factors such as leadership at the workplace; relationships within the working group; and the way problems are dealt with have an impact on the climate character (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

These situational factors regarding the working environment are also evicted by Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) who pointed out that these may also affect the success of IB. Their study showed that if employees feel comfortable with colleagues and leaders, they felt an increased commitment and identification with the brand. Positive relationships at the workplace also proved to positively affect employees’ ability to deliver the brand's promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).

**Brand-supported behavior from the start of employment**

The result of a research conducted by Yi and La (2006) showed that it is of great importance for an organization to hire people with the right personality that matches the personality traits of the brand. The authors illustrate in their research that a brand's personality can be likened with the characteristics of a human being that the customers are associating with the brand. Finding the "right” people will according to Yi and La (2006) benefit the company since these people are able to convey the brand promise to customers in an effective and trustworthy manner. As mentioned earlier the role of the employees in service organizations are especially essential since they are the face of the brand during the interaction with the customers (Punjaisri et al., 2008).
2.4 HR practices within Internal Branding: Training and Internal Communication

As previously mentioned, Foster et al. (2010) highlighted that aligning HR practices with IB is a key factor for the success of IB implementation. Since the importance of IB has emerged more over the last decade, the integration of HR practices has also become more crucial. This, since the need of connecting an organization’s internal image with its external has become of high importance for companies within the service sector (Martin, Beaumont, Doig & Pate, 2004). By aligning HR practices such as Training and Development, with brand values, organizations can avoid sending conflicted messages, as their internal and external image get coherent (Martin et al., 2004). At the same token a study conducted by Aurand et al. (2005) concluded that a stronger involvement of HR practices in IB, gives an organization the opportunity to deliver the agreed brand image to its employees. This in turn, affect the employees to incorporate the brand message in work activities, which influence their personal attitudes and behavior towards the brand in the delivery of brand message to the external environment (Aurand et al., 2005).

Moreover, Punjaisri et al. (2008) presented a link between Training and Internal Communication and IB and how they could influence the employee to adopt brand-supported behavior in the delivery of brand promise. The focus of the authors study was within the service-sector, due to that the employees are the interface between the organizational brand and its customers. Employees are therefore the essential key for the development of customer-brand relationships. Hence, it is suggested that by providing brand-training and Internal Communication of information, the employees will develop brand-supporting attitudes and behavior (Punjaisri et al., 2008). The attitudes include the employees’ identification, commitment and loyalty towards the brand. Further, the study suggested that the right training programs and sessions together with Internal Communication would develop and lead the employees to the desired attitudes and behavior in the delivery of brand promise to customers. Moreover, external factors are argued to affect the implementation of IB, such as, the relationships with colleagues and the employees’ personal characteristics (Punjaisri et al., 2008). In summary, the findings from the study presented that the elements of Training and Internal Communication together with the relationships and personal factors, contributed in the delivery of brand values. It is also highlighted that nor Training or Internal
Communication can work alone, meaning that there is a need of both to successfully implement an IB strategy. IB is needed in an organization to infuse the understanding of brand promise and to ensure that employees deliver the value proposition to customers (Punjaisri et al., 2008). The findings and theory of the study by Punjaisri et al. (2008) contributes to the framework of this thesis, by highlighting that Training and Internal Communication influence the implementation of IB. Next sections will further explain the practices and how they are suggested to be used in order to influence employee brand-supported behavior.

2.4.1 The use of the HR practice Training

The HR practice of Training, is as mentioned one of the essential practices for the implementation of IB. This, since the integration between Training and IB is suggested to lead to employees’ attitudes of brand commitment, identification and loyalty (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). By educating all employees in brand training, they will learn the basics and essentials of the corporate brand and principles, which in turn helps them to deliver the wanted brand message to the external environment (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). It is argued that employees should be trained in brand values, meaning what the organization stands for and how they distinguish from its competitors. The training initiatives should act as a key part of the IB implementation to be able to influence employees and in the end, affect their commitment and attitudes towards the brand (Bach, 2005). Employees’ commitment enhances their efforts of acting in alignment with the brand, which will positively contribute to the organization’s internal and external image (Martin et al., 2004). The communication within Training gives the employees the chance to enhance their understanding of the brand. This in turn, will improve their skills and knowledge in their roles of delivering the brand promise (Martin et al., 2004). Moreover, this reduces the risk of delivering misleading messages, since the internal image will be better linked to the external one, when employees understand and engage in a coherent image. It is of high importance that training gets integrated in the implementation of IB, since it is only when the employees understand the organization’s brand and its promise, that the total impact of the brand can be realized (Aurand et al., 2005).
The use of Training in IB, might vary from organization to organization. However, it is concluded by Sharma and Kamalanabhan (2012), that Training should be continuously implemented over the entire employment to align corporate- and personal values. The continuous process require support, therefore there is need for HRM attention. Punjaisri et al. (2008) argued that training of employees is needed to fully understand and commit to the organization’s brand promise and to be able to transfer it into reality. Various Training programs and different courses that focus on coaching and educating employees, were suggested as the most essential to use (Punjaisri et al., 2008). Moreover, these activities included e.g., workshops and seminars, which was argued to be used in order to give the employees the chance to live the brand in practice (Punjaisri et al., 2011). This, in turn implies that the employees can develop a mind-set that align their attitudes towards the brand (Martin et. al. 2004). It is also suggested for companies to use Training in the orientation of new employees to effectively introduce them to brand- values and promises from the beginning (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Further, Punjaisri et al. (2008), highlighted that the HR practice Training need to also include development initiatives for the employees. This, in order to keep the employees committed and motivated, also to ensure that they feel valued in the organization (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011).

2.4.2 The use of the HR practice Internal Communication

As mentioned, the HR practice Internal Communication is argued to be another important element within IB. Punjaisri et al. (2008) stressed that Internal Communication is the element that gives employees the first idea of the brand and through which constantly remind them of the brand attributes. In addition, Panayotopoulou et al. (2007) stressed that Communication as a part of an organization’s HRM, benefit both managers and employees. This, since it enables easy access for managers to transmit information to its employees, but it also allows employees to upward communication. Moreover, it is argued that Internal Communication is needed to inform and remind the employees of brand promise (Punjaisri et al., 2008). Totsi and Stotz (2001) advocated in their study that an organization which works with IB initiatives cannot dump the information on its employees. Rather, it is important to inform the employees in an interactive way that gives them the opportunity to gain knowledge, experience and sense of what the brand stands for. This, also enables the opportunity for employees to ask questions and provide feedback to their managers (Totsi & Stotz, 2001).
In the study conducted by Punjaisri et al. (2008) it is suggested that Internal Communication should be used both through mass-methods including e.g. newsletters and memos, and through face-to-face communication such as, daily meetings both individual and in group. Written memos such as pop-ups on the employee’s computer or logbooks could also be used as reminders of brand promise (Punjaisri et al., 2008). Furthermore, it is argued for organizations to use brand-based intranet sites and internal publications. This, in order to inform the employees of the brand message and its attributes, which makes the organization different (Aurand et al., 2005). This assumption is also acknowledged by Panayotopoulou et al. (2007) who argued that technology solutions such as intranet and electronic mail within the HR practice of Communication should be used in order to easily and effectively inform employees about brand essentials and values. The authors stressed that this type of communication can be referred to as electronic HR (E-HR), since it undertake technology to reach the employees (Panayotopoulou et al., 2007). However, even though mass-methods have been proven as successful, face-to-face methods was suggested as most important within the IB initiatives of Internal Communication (Punjaisri et al., 2008). This, since it provides the employees with the opportunity to express their own thoughts and ask questions to clarify uncertainties about the brand message. However, memos and newsletters were also found important, since the employees could interpret as a reminder of the brand message (Punjaisri et al., 2008).

To conclude, Internal Communication is an important initiative for IB, since it provides employees with knowledge and information about brand values. Furthermore, the knowledge of the brand also enable them to follow brand standards and thereby deliver brand promise (Punjaisri et al., 2008). The combination of the HR practices Training and Internal Communication are suggested to influence the attitudes of employees. The outcomes of the initiatives as part of the IB strategy might according to Punjaisri and Wilson (2011), help employees to act accordingly with the brand values, in order to deliver the brand promise. This, in turn is argued enable employees to adapt brand-supported attitudes and enforce brand-supported behavior (Punjaisri et al., 2008).
2.5 Arguments of chosen theory

Due to that the purpose of this thesis is to explore how the highlighted HR practices can be used to promote IB and its influence on employee brand-supported attitudes and behavior in the delivery of brand promise. The chosen theory focuses on first introducing the reader to the broad perspective of brand management, which highlighted that there is an importance of aligning an organization’s internal image with its external, in order to deliver a coherent brand to the environment (Martin et al., 2004). Further, the theory stressed that there is an essential need of understanding the impact of IB, since it requires more than promotion and external communication in order for organizations to build strong brands (Judson et al., 2008). It was addressed by King and Grace (2008), that a brand is not only represented as the relationship between an organization and its customers but also the relationship with its employees. Therefore, efforts within IB are needed since companies must ensure that employees obtain the desired attitudes and behaviors in order to deliver the brand and represent its values (Punjaisri et al., 2008). If an IB strategy is well implemented it is argued by Punjaisri and Wilson (2011), to lead to that the employees’ feel commitment, identification and loyalty towards the brand. This in turn is stressed to affect the behavior of the employee. Since the suggested theory argued that service organizations are highly dependent on their employees’ behavior in the delivery of those services, the use of IB is considered more interesting within this sector according to the authors of this thesis.

As mentioned, the theory advocated that initiatives within IB can influence the attitudes of commitment, identification and loyalty, which in turn would enhance the employees’ willingness to stay within the organization (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Also, there is argued that by internalizing the brand and influencing employees’ attitudes, an alignment between their behavior and the brand values can occur in personal meetings with customers. This can furthermore be considered more influential than traditional external marketing (Sirianni et al., 2013).

Further, the chosen theory suggested the key elements of IB as the HR practices Training and Internal Communication. It is argued that the HR practice of Training through various training programs, orientation and development will contribute to the employees’ knowledge about the
brand. This in turn, is stressed to enhance the employees understanding and help them deliver
the desired brand promise (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). Moreover, the element of the
HR practice Internal Communication is suggested to give the employee the first idea of the
brand, combined with always reminding about brand values (Punjaisri et al., 2008). The
initiatives within Internal Communication is stressed to take on two forms namely, mass-
methods and face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication is argued to be the
most successful one, since employees can ask questions where it is confusion as well as give
feedback. However, mass-methods including brand-based intranet, memos and newsletters are
also considered of importance, since they act as reminders for the employees (Punjaisri et al.,
2008).

The chosen theory suggested that the HR practices of Training and Internal Communication
need to be aligned with IB for a successful implementation (Punjaisri et al., 2008). Further on,
it is also argued that by implementing an IB strategy the organization can influence its
employees to brand-supported attitudes which in turn might lead to brand-supported
behaviors in the delivery of brand promise (Punjaisri et al., 2008). HR practices such as,
Staffing policies, are not highlighted in the theory as key elements for IB. Although, it will be
interesting for the authors of this thesis to explore if the chosen IT consultancy firms in
Jönköping use other HR practices that are not brought up in previous research within IB.

The authors believe that the frame of references and the chosen theory is relevant for the
purpose of this thesis. It is believed that the theory will contribute when conducting the
empirical data as well as analyzing the findings. The following chapters will present the
chosen method and methodology, to be able to explore if the presented theory is applicable
for the chosen IT consultancy firms in Jönköping.
3. Methodology and method

This chapter will describe the method and methodology used when conducting this thesis. The different research approaches, the collection of data and how the interviews were conducted will be discussed. The chapter will end with a discussion of the trustworthiness and criticisms of the chosen data collection.

3.1 Research philosophy

There are different paradigms one can adopt when conducting research. It function as a philosophical framework that directs the construction of a scientific research (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The authors suggested two main paradigms in their research, namely positivism and interpretivism. Positivism involves a deductive approach and are related to quantitative research methods, in which the researchers utilize existing theory to develop a hypothesis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Thus, this paradigm is unsuitable for the purpose of this thesis.

In contrast, the interpretivism paradigm focuses on investigating social reality. This is conducted by utilizing small samples and qualitative research. Due to this, the interpretivism paradigm is more suitable for the conduction of this thesis. Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2009), explained that previous research argued that it is appropriate to use an interpretivist approach when studies are conducted within the field of organizational behavior, marketing or HR management, which further strengthen the reason for the chosen approach.

3.2 Research purpose

The purpose of a study can be differentiated as either explanatory-, descriptive- or exploratory- approaches. Saunders et al. (2009) stated that explanatory research refers to studies that explains causal relationships between variables. Hence, this makes this approach unsuitable for this thesis, given that the authors of this thesis did not have enough understanding of the relationship between Internal Branding and the HR practices Training
and Communication in the beginning of the process. The aim with a descriptive research is to describe situations and establish an accurate profile of persons or events (Saunders et al., 2009). As well as the explanatory research, the descriptive approach is also unsuitable given this study’s purpose and research question(s).

Finally, the exploratory approach aims to investigate a specific topic and to understand and clarify a problem. Given this study’s research question(s), an exploratory study will be conducted. Exploratory research is useful when there is a need for an understanding of a problem and to assess the phenomenon in a new light (Saunders et al., 2009). The research is of great advantage when new data appears and the study tends to be adaptable to change. Furthermore, exploratory research is less concerned with statistical data and focus more on discovering new ideas with the aim to gain insight. Therefore, this research purpose was found more appropriate for this study’s purpose. Hence, this thesis will be an exploratory case study of the IT consultancy sector.

3.3 Research approach

There are three main approaches to undertake when designing a research project, more specifically a deductive, inductive or abductive approach. The deductive approach starts with the formulation of an assumption, with the aim to test a pre-set hypothesis. Moreover, it concerns the possible modification of existing literature, depending on the outcome of the testing (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In contrast, an inductive approach explores more complex human issues and aims to understand the nature of the problem better. Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2009) explained the inductive approach as an observation of a phenomenon and subsequently developing a theory by analyzing and interpreting the result. In this approach, theory should be the outcome to the research. This starts with observations and gathering of interview data in order to produce a theory formulation (Marshall, 1996). The qualitative research method is generally associated with the inductive approach while the deductive approach emphasizes quantitative data collection (Saunders et al., 2009). Finally, the abductive approach is a combination between the deductive and inductive approaches. However, it is important to note that it is not a mixture of the two approaches but that it shares characteristics with the deductive and inductive approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).
The inductive approach was used to meet the purpose of this study. The research process started with a literature review of relevant theories and concepts. Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2009) argued that when there is limited existing literature on the topic (as for this topic) it is more suitable to use the inductive approach.

3.4 Research method

When choosing between a quantitative and a qualitative research method, one should make the decision determined by the research question(s). Quantitative data are data in a numerical form, while qualitative data are data in a nominal form, non-numerical form (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Data collection methods included in the qualitative research method are group discussions, interviews, observations etc. The qualitative research method aims to supply the researchers with an in-depth understanding of participants’ experiences, histories and perspectives (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

As previously mentioned, the interpretivism philosophy is associated with the qualitative research method. Thus, this thesis is based on a qualitative research method with an interpretivist philosophy, in order to get a deeper and more detailed understanding of the underlying factors of the problem.

3.5 Research strategy

A research strategy is a general plan of action of how to collect data and information to enable the authors to conduct research systematically, analytically and on schedule. This, in order to reach the purpose and produce qualitative results. There are different strategies one can undertake when conducting a research, which all can be used as exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research (Saunders et al., 2009). The different strategies can be experiment, ethnography, case study, survey, action research and so forth. This study has used the case study strategy as it is argued that this is a suitable strategy when a phenomenon within a specific context is investigated (Yin, 2003). This is relevant, since the purpose of the study is to investigate how IB is used within the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping and in what ways
it is found to influence employees brand-supported attitudes and behavior. Furthermore, the case study strategy is found to be appropriate and often applied together with the exploratory research as it answers the questions “why”, “what” and “how”.

Moreover, Yin (2003) explained four case study strategies; single case with a holistic or embedded analysis or multiple case with a holistic or embedded analysis. Yin (2003) further discussed that the single case strategy is suitable when the researchers want to deepen the understanding and analyze a specific phenomenon that few researchers have reflected on before. Additionally, the holistic and embedded approach imply the unit of analysis. Hence, the holistic case study is appropriate when one wants to study an organization as a whole. On the contrary, the embedded approach still focuses on the organization but on different subunits or departments within the organization. As this study explores the phenomenon of how the HR practices of Training and Communication promote IB and how IB influences employee brand-supported attitude and behavior, the single case study strategy with a holistic approach is appropriate for this study. This, since the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping can be seen as the single case study.

The empirical data in this study was collected from interviews with multiple companies, therefore this study utilize an exploratory research. By adopting this strategy, the study allowed the authors of the thesis to examine the phenomenon in its natural venue, utilizing numerous processes of data collection from employees from the chosen companies (Yin, 2003). Morris and Wood (1991), further argued that if the researchers want to gain greater understanding of the field of study, the case study strategy should be particularly interesting. Finally, Yin (2003) argued that an exploratory case study is appropriate when researchers want to explore a specific phenomenon of interest.

3.6 Literature review

Documentary secondary data has been used to construct a frame of reference to develop a deeper understanding of the topic. The documentary secondary data includes relevant books, journals and articles within the fields of Brand management, Internal Branding, HR practices and brand-supported behavior. Saunders et al. (2009) stated that documentary secondary data is useful in research projects where case studies within certain industries are present.
Stewart and Kamins (1993) argued that secondary data can be favorably useful and even of higher quality when collecting data during a constricted time-frame. Furthermore, Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) stressed that using secondary data requires less resources and subsequently the authors have more time on analyzing the data collected. However, it was of great importance that the authors kept the research question(s) in mind at all time, as secondary data have been collected for a specific purpose, that differs from this study’s purpose. In addition, the evaluation of the data sources has been carefully examined in order to generate trustworthy information.

To gather trustworthy and accurate literature connected to the problem formulation and research question(s) the method of finding it has been crucial. The literature review was based on scientific articles, carefully chosen from trustworthy databases. Two main search engines were used, more specific Primo and Google Scholar, which has provided the authors with credible articles.

### 3.7 Selection of samples

After choosing the topic of this thesis the authors decided the chosen industry. The service sector was chosen since it was argued by Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) that initiatives within IB is more crucial in service organizations. This, due to that employees are the ones that interface with the customers. Also, the service sector was considered appropriate and interesting because of its relevance and dependence within the topic. Thereafter, the IT consultancy sector was chosen due to the fact that employees in the IT industry are considered of high importance, since their competences in today’s competitive market space are of great value when providing services to consumers. The IT consultancy sector also continues to grow rapidly, due to the need of technology in today’s workplace. (Vasiliev & Levochkina, 2015). Hence, this exploratory case study is of the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping.

Patton (1990) discussed that a qualitative research often results in small samples. There are two different sampling techniques available when conducting a study namely, profitability and non-profitability techniques. The profitability samples are based on random sampling
technique to create a sample. On the other hand, non-profitability sampling uses a non-random process. This thesis uses a non-probability sampling technique, which can be divided into four categories; quota, snowball, purposive and convenience. The authors found that a purposive sampling technique was the most suitable technique for this study. This, since it implied that the authors could use their judgment to choose suitable cases to answer the research question(s). Furthermore, a homogenous sampling strategy with the focus on one particular sub-group, namely managers of organizations, including marketing, HR and consulting was used. Patton (1990) argued that the homogenous sampling focus on a small, homogenous sample in order to study and understand the research question(s) in-depth. Thus, this strategy is appropriate for this study.

3.8 Primary data collection

The primary data collection in this thesis has evolved from semi-structured face-to-face interviews with five IT consultancy firms. Since this study is an exploratory case study of the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping, different IT firms in the area were asked to participate in the study through interviews. The firms were evaluated and later chosen for the interviews based on their relevance, size and operation. It was discussed which were the most essential ones in Jönköping by evaluating their websites and their position in the market. Also, the companies were chosen based on the search engine results on Google, where key words such as; IT consultants in Jönköping”; popular IT Jönköping, etc. were used to generate results. Later, the authors contacted the chosen IT consultancy firms in the area, in order to know whether or not there was an interest of participation. When firms accepted, a group of the accepted companies was formed and became the base for the empirical data in this thesis.

An interview is a discussion between two or more people to fulfill a purpose that will provide the interviewer with useful data relevant to a specific research question(s). There are different types of interviews, such as structured, semi-structured, unstructured/in-depth interviews (Saunders et al., 2009). The qualitative research technique with semi-structured interviews were the chosen method in this thesis. Predetermined set of open questions was used to give the respondent the opportunity to express their experiences, opinions and perceptions. Moreover, additional questions were used to explore the research question
further. Saunders et al. (2009) highlighted that when no standardized questionnaires are used, questions asked might vary to be more compatible with the respondent’s answer. Therefore, this type of interviews was used in order to provide the authors with in-depth information from personal experiences, which not require standardized measures, as when using a quantitative method (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2009) argued that a qualitative research method increases the opportunity to develop new ideas and theories that is empirically supported. This, in turn was considered of interest for this thesis purpose, since it includes the exploration of how IB could be used in the chosen IT consultancy sector.

The questions were based on theories previously mentioned in this study and emphasizes were put on avoiding interviewer bias. This means that an interviewer asks questions with a tone or nonverbal behavior or the comments are influenced by the interviewer’s own beliefs and frame of reference (Kuzmanić, 2009). Moreover, the structure of the interviews can be found in the appendix 8.1. The company, respondent’s position, the date and the length of the interviews are presented below in Table 1. All interviews were recorded, in order to make sure that no important information would be unexploited. Furthermore, only two of the authors were present during the interviews. One who acted secretary and one that acted interviewer. This, in order to keep the interviews as simple and professional as possible. However, the authors changed the roles as secretary and interviewer from interview to interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HR Manager at Pdb</td>
<td>Pdb</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td>2018-03-02</td>
<td>00:45:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Manager at Pdb</td>
<td>Pdb</td>
<td>Marketing Manager</td>
<td>2018-03-27</td>
<td>00:27:34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All the interviews took place at the companies’ respective offices in Jönköping, either at the respondent’s office or in a conference room, in order to establish a comfortable setting. All interviews were conducted in Swedish, as all respondents had Swedish as native language. The authors of the thesis could therefore not assume that the respondents would be able to understand English good enough in order to answer the questions as detailed as they could in Swedish. Additionally, conducting the interviews in Swedish made the respondents more relaxed and willing to answer in a more comprehensive way.

### 3.9 Data reduction

The research gathered data has been managed and transformed into tangible form consisting of transcriptions. This, to be able to select and focus on data in line with the thesis purpose. As the gathered information came from semi-structured interviews not all of it was relevant for the research question(s). Therefore, the outcomes were thoroughly examined in order to exclude irrelevant information that did not add value to the thesis purpose. The thesis research question(s) and frame of reference were used as a framework for what was relevant information or not. The reduction was also made frequently and revised several times.
3.10 Data analysis

When analyzing qualitative data one must understand the nature of the collected data. Saunders et al. (2009) advocates that the analysis of collected data can be divided into summarizing, categorizing and structuring. In order for the analysis to be as smooth as possible, the gathered primary data in this thesis was carefully collected and summarized in order to identify key points, patterns and themes.

Yin (2003) explained that a common technique of analyzing qualitative data is through the construction of a conceptual framework. This thesis presents one that has been formulated throughout the whole process of data collection. Kvale (1996) argued for the same technique and stressed the importance of analyzing the qualitative data at the same time as it is collected. This method has been used in this study as well and the processes are further explained in previous sections in this chapter.

3.10.1 Narrative analysis

It is further argued that, when analyzing data, one should choose a method related to the study’s research strategy. There are various methods that can be applied, e.g. explanation building, logical models, pattern matching, narrative analysis or cross-case analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). Over the past years, storytelling has become more commonly used in organizational research. The narrative approach primary method to collect data is through in-depth interviews, where the participant provides the researchers with accounts that take the form of stories (Saunders et al., 2009). This is how the authors of this thesis collected their data, and the interviews were conducted in the way that the respondents communicated their organizational experiences and events. It is argued that a narrative analysis can be used to analyze and discover linkages and patterns in narrative stories in this case in-depth interviews. This, by analyzing the data in its originally told form rather than to break it down into fragments (Saunders et al., 2009). Due to this, the narrative analysis method has been used in order to understand the semi-structured interviews. Moreover, this process suggests that the
researchers’ gathered data should retain integrity and analyze verbatim transcripts, hence this approach is appropriate for this study (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.11 Trustworthiness and Criticism of choice of method

The primary concern when conducting a thesis is to establishing trustworthiness. The findings must be critically analyzed and reflect reality in order to be trustworthy and thus relevant for the study. There are different studies that suggest how to measure the quality in qualitative studies. Although, several researchers argue that qualitative studies can be measured by the four components: transferability, dependability, confirmability and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Suter, 2012).

Transferability refers to what extent data and conclusions is applicable in other contexts or studies, and if it is possible to generalize the findings over an entire population. It can be difficult to generalize the results due to small and unrepresentative samples in a qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to this, the reader should bear in mind that the finding in this thesis is only applicable on IT consultancy firms and that the findings will not be generalized on a larger population. However, the analysis and conclusions of the empirical findings together with the frame of references will result in an accurate conclusion, and the authors believe that the study can be a foundation for future research within other industries, such as manufacturing.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is said to be high when the findings are consistent and could be repeated. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that whether a study is reliable or not depends on if the findings would be the same if repeated by the same or a similar study, and this is referred to as dependability. This, would be impossible for the authors to answer since the findings are based on a contemporary case study in a continuously changing business-environment. However, the methods used as well as the process of the way this research is conducted is clearly presented to support future researchers when repeating the study.
Moreover, confirmability refers to the degree that the study’s findings are affected and shaped by the respondents and not the authors, i.e. that the researchers remain objective and neutral. Shenton (2004) pinpointed that when conducting tests or questionnaires designed by humans, it is inevitable to avoid researcher’s bias. In order to avoid this, the authors have been transparent and have clearly explained why the methods and theories have been used.

Lastly, the credibility of the research is a crucial factor in order to establish trustworthiness. The level of credibility of a research can be measured by the extent which the study’s result reflects the reality (Shenton, 2004). As previously mentioned, all interviews were recorded in order to ensure that no important information would be unexploited. Given this, it might affect the respondents’ answers which could result in a different or defective analysis of the answers. However, this was taken into consideration during the analysis of the outcomes. When semi-structured interviews are used, one might question the reliability of the data, given that there is a lack of standardized questions and answers (Saunders et al., 2009). However, by conducting interviews through semi-structured questions the authors were able to direct the questions from different angles in order to make sure that the outcomes would be as fruitful and detailed as possible. Additionally, by using semi-structured interviews the authors decreased the room for misunderstanding the respondents’ answers.

The authors of this thesis believe that the chosen method is the most suitable, in order to reach the purpose and answer the thesis research question(s). However, there are some criticism to be noted. When choosing exploratory case study as a research study one should be aware that the ability to explore and understand the field of study is limited by the number of variables for which data can be gathered (Saunders et al., 2009). It could be argued that six interviews is a too small of a number and that it did not provide the full picture. This has been noted by the authors and extra caution has been taken when generalizing the findings. However, since the interviews were conducted with managers involved with both HR and Marketing, the authors were able to get a better understanding of the companies’ operations.
4. Empirical Findings and Analysis

This chapter will start by shortly presenting the chosen IT consultancy firms in Jönköping. Further on, the findings from this thesis exploratory study will be presented to enable analysis between results and theory. The results and analysis will be presented in the same order as the theoretical framework, by starting with Brand management in general and concluding with the HR practices within Internal Branding.

4.1 About the chosen companies

The chosen companies, Koneo, Pdb, Invid, Knowit and Consid, operate within the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping. The authors of this thesis have interacted with the chosen companies by interviewing managers at their offices, to get information of their strategies within IB for the purpose of this thesis. The chosen companies are of different size, however they include in total a minimum of 70 employees and a maximum of 2000. They offer similar services to their customers including, digital solutions and consultancy services. They also integrate IT in customers’ daily operations and provide new insights and experiences into the customers’ businesses. The companies operate in a high competitive industry and therefore have different strategies to encounter their customers. Next section will provide the findings and analysis from the exploration of the companies, starting by presenting their general brand management.

4.2 Brand Management

As an introduction to IB the chosen companies were asked about their general brand management in order to conclude if they actively worked with values and corporate culture within their organizations. During the interviews the five chosen companies were asked to explain their company's identity and value base. Firstly, it was found that the words or terms used to describe this varied between the companies. All the companies called it “values” or “value grounds”. Although, Pdb repeatedly lifted “corporate culture” and Koneo raised the concepts of ”identity” and ”who we are” as well as “the promise”. The companies’ development of organizational values can be likened with the work that Malmelin and Hakala
(2009) described as the tactical development of differentiation, which arrive in a distinctive identity. As the authors mentioned, brand management is not only about managing the benefits to the consumer, it is also about how to manage the appearance of the whole organization towards internal and external stakeholders. This further implies that the companies have put effort on the development of a brand proposition including, values and promises as Foster et al. (2010) discussed in their study.

The word "revived" was recurring several times during the interviews with representatives from the companies. The Marketing Manager at Pdb raised that the values are used for making everything in the company to be revamped by the same value base. Moreover, Knowit used their values to pervade who they are but also mentioned that they have chosen their values to be aligned with their corporate culture. Considering culture, The HR Manager at Pdb claimed that if an organization work a lot with its corporate culture for an extended period of time, it sets itself into the walls and the culture will thus change. From an internal perspective, this statement can be linked to what Wilson et al. (2012) defined corporate culture as; "the way we do things around here". The development of a corporate culture is also something that Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) argued may affect the level of success when it comes to IB.

Furthermore, Invid and Pdb pointed out that the behavior of employees at management level have a major impact on the entire organization. Invid highlighted the fact that the individuals in the management team should be an example for the rest of the organization, and denoted that they are ambassadors and representatives of the company. The great importance of ambassadorship is also something that Consid referred to. Furthermore, the management’s impact on the organization and its climate was lifted by Scott & Bruce (1994) arguing that the leadership and problem solving practices influence the climate character. The management role has also been acknowledged by Liu et al. (2017) who addressed that organizations should promote brand values and promises within the organization, from managers to employees, to motivate the employees to transform brand values into reality. Moreover, the HR manager at Pdb described the importance of the management’s actions as an example by pointing out that the internal behavior at the organization tends to affect others. To quote the respondent;
"If you have a boss who screams and is unpleasant, you soon have a group that does the same, which leads to a dysfunctional group. Everything is running down and influence."

- HR Manager at Pdb

After the interviews, it was clear that all five companies were actively working to develop values and promises that were used both internally and externally. The interviews revealed that many of the values and promises of the five companies in the sector was connected to desired behaviors. The four brand values of Invid consisted of; security, efficiency, quality and ethics, and morals. Furthermore, Koneo had explicit values connected to behaviors such as “keeping eye contact”, “show the way” and “go hand in hand”. Moreover, Pdb had developed a value concept consisting of the three words; inspire, collaborate and perform, while Knowit had values such as; being kind, transparent, being close and innovative. Lastly, Consid considered three value pillars when it came to their brand platform where words of commitment, entrepreneurship and effect were used. The development of values and the promise can be likened with the term “corporate branding” which was as mentioned above defined by Foster et al. (2010) as the expressed promise between an organization and its stakeholders. The authors further explained corporate branding as a company's systematic planning and management of behavior, communication and symbolism (Foster et al., 2010).

### 4.3 Internal Branding

When asking about the companies’ external promotion in relation to its internal, the HR-manager at Pdb touched upon this by explaining that they have reduced marketing such as advertising and sponsorship. This, in order to begin to redirect and rethink how to communicate the brand externally. This was something also stressed by Judson et al. (2008) when they in their findings presented that organizations now have begun to understand the fact that more than external promotion strategies such as advertising and sales promotion are required in order for firms to build strong brands. The chosen IT consultancy firms have all agreed on the importance of employees for the organization’s identity and image. Further, all the interviewed discussed the significance of presenting their corporate brand through their employees.
The HR manager at Pdb, explained that they instead informed the customers in the personal meeting with them. The importance of the personal meeting is lifted by Sirianni et al. (2013) who considered it more influential when communicating the brand, unlike traditional marketing-based communication. The personal meeting and the social setting that comes with it is further lifted by Peterson (2007) who address that social skills is needed in order to be an ideal IT consultant.

Among the respondents IB was a known concept, however not always a term actively used internally at all of the five chosen companies. The interviews revealed that Invid, Knowit and Pdb used the term internally while Consid more often used the term “employer branding”. However, Consid considered it as a work that resembles the internal perspective as well. Koneo did not use the term internally but mentioned that they put a lot of efforts on the concept's practices where they through staff meetings and the like, returned to visions and how to communicate internally. According to Punjaisri et al. (2008) IB has gained a lot of space in literature recent years. This, since companies today must ensure that their employees have the appropriate attitudes and behavior in order to deliver the promise of the brand and to represent it.

4.3.1 Objectives of Internal Branding

During the interviews, it was found that many of the companies used IB to achieve internal objectives when it came to recruitment of new employees and the retention of current ones. Although, this may be more seen as employer branding, which put emphasis on attracting new employees through recruitment as well as maintaining the right employees at the firm (Van Mossevelde, 2014). The Marketing Manager at Pdb argued that it is expensive to recruit and therefore they rather retain those employees they already have. This argument can be anchored with the findings presented by Punjaisri et al. (2008), that if a company support a
positive employee-firm relationship, the company's earnings and profitability can be affected in a positive direction. While Pdb used their value base to fulfill their explicit zero vision with the aim of minimizing terminations. Koneo advocated that by actively working with their values they try to make sure that they become an attractive employer. By the same token Consid talked about having a strong employer brand and being an attractive workplace since they are in need of constantly recruitment. This, to both attract new workforce but also retain the once they have. Invid also highlighted that their internal efforts are used to create value for the employees and to manage employees’ attitudes towards the brand as an employer. The companies' objectives are supported by the theory that King and Grace (2008) highlighted in their study, that a brand not only represents the relationship between the organization and its customers, but equally the relationship between it and its employees.

“IB as we look at it, is about creating a value for employees to work here and to be proud of working at Invid. This means that you want to remain, but you should also deliver while you are there.”- Invid

The respondent at Invid pinpointed the fact that the employee should deliver while working at the company. This is also brought up by Knowit who stated that their main objective with IB is to increase visibility towards customers. They also highlighted that it is crucial for employees to deliver and to be on the verge of building trust and relationships. King and Grace (2008) advocated that, e.g. the implementation of IB initiatives are aimed at the employees’ ability to improve service quality. As the Consultant Manager at Knowit mentioned, even if they build IT systems and solutions, it is in the interaction with the customers that the customer further decides if she or he wants to continue with the company. This is also something that Punjaisri et al. (2008) pointed out in their study, that is, depending on the way employees are taken care of affects the way in which they in turn take care of the organization's customers. This theory is subconsciously lifted by the Brand Manager at Consid who stated:
“For us it is the air we breathe, we have to take care of our employees and we need to find and attract new staff to be able to deliver continuously. It has become a matter of course to invest a lot of resources on this.” – Consid

4.3.2 Internal Branding in the Service and IT consultancy sector

When asking the chosen companies if they believe that IB might be more important within the service sector, it was obvious that they could relate to this assertion. Both Consid and Invid stated that their employees are their product and Pdb emphasized that employees are hard to replace. All companies argued that this was especially essential in the IT industry where they perceived the lack of competence as significant.

“We work with people, they are our product and everything we have.” – Consid

The respondent at Invid compared a service company with a manufacturing company and believed that the difference is that it is the product that comes out which you sell further. If the product is good and delivered on time, the customer is satisfied. However, in organizations providing services the respondent argued that the interaction is important, by stating that, “here the employee is the product”. The importance of the employees was further highlighted by the respondent at Consid, who stated that a product can be continued to be produced but not a new colleague. Considering the theory conducted by Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) they highlighted that IB is considered more important within the service sector. This, since the service is not a tangible product. Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) raised that service organizations are highly dependent on their employees' behavior when they produce and deliver their services to the customer, thus affecting the customers’ perception of the brand. The role of employees in the IT consultancy sector is furthermore highlighted as important by Vasiliev and Levochkina (2015), since their competences are of great value when providing services to consumers.
Moreover, the respondent at Koneo argued that when delivering large IT solutions, it requires a major responsibility and therefore it is significant that they demonstrate reliability and that the customers have trust in the company. Considering the services within IT consultancy, the respondent at Knowit asserted the crucial role of employees meaning that it is easier to explain a mistake that they have coded wrong, than if any of the employees has failed in their behavior. According to Knowit this is the reason why it is of high importance to work internally with the employees.

“Within the service sector, the human interaction is what one gets, so it is extra important to radiate the company's value base.” - Invid

This is further argued by Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) who advocated that in the situations when tangible goods, shift to intangible services the employees’ roles get more crucial. This, since the front-line employees are expected to deliver the promises of the brand and shape the perceptions of the consumers (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014).

4.4 The effects of Internal Branding

4.4.1 Brand-supported attitudes

Commitment

Considering the effects of brand-aligned attitudes it was argued by Knowit that the work of IB enhance that employees’ willingness to engage more in the values by promoting discussion about them. This, can be recognized in the theory by Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010) who argued that in order to consistently deliver the brand promises to customers it is of great importance that the employees are committed when it comes to supporting the brand they are working for. Brand commitment among employees is one of several attitudes that IB is claimed to influence. It is said to be developed through IB where the creation of a shared understanding of the brand values are implemented (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). The quotation from the respondent at Knowit further highlight the importance of employee involvement in the creation of brand commitment:
“I believe that by the work of IB, employees now want to engage and discuss values even more by interacting with me as a manager and among each other.” - Knowit

Moreover, it was highlighted by the brand manager at Consid, who stressed that commitment towards the company will not only lead to brand supported attitudes but also that the employees are willing to develop. This, was further stressed by Punjaisri et al. (2008) who argued that Internal Communication contributed to make sure that employees felt committed and enthusiastic to induce attitudes that promoted the brand. Brand commitment is considered as one factor that further includes three interrelated attitudes, namely, involvement, identification and loyalty. It is referred to as the extent that employees can identify with the brand, their willingness to exert efforts in order to achieve the brand's objectives as well as their interest to remain within the organization (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010).

**Involvement**

Considering involvement, Consid discussed the importance of involving their employees in the process of creating their corporate values and brand. The process was based on a branding model, and developed together with interviews from selected employees. It was later compiled into a brand platform that all employees could stand for. The respondent further explained that the Consid believe that it is even more important to involve the employees within the IT consultancy sector, as consultants are the ones who face the consumers. This is also something that Tosti and Stotz (2001) highlighted, where IB is considered a useful method for achieving positive impact on employees in the actual delivery of the service.

Moreover, the Marketing Manager at Pdb stressed that, since all employees at Pdb have been involved in the creation of the brand values they have been engaged from the beginning. By letting employees and management work together in the establishment, involvement from employees could easily be achieved. Moreover, Pdb also involved their employees through surveys every two years, where the values return. Here, the employees get the opportunity to be even more involved by expressing their opinions considering the values. In addition, the
respondent at Invid denoted that their business is entirely dependent on their employees’ involvement considering the thoughts and ideas they possess.

Identification

The importance of employees’ identification with its organization was lifted by Consid and Pdb, where Consid argued that it is crucial that the employees can identify themselves with the company which in turn generates commitment. Moreover, Pdb highlighted that working with IB results in identification among employees, since the initiatives creates an appreciated culture and environment at the workplace. This, according to the HR Manager at Pdb seems to result in that employees do not quit. Additionally, Koneo claimed that identification towards the brand not only make employees stay within the company, but may also attract potential recruits. The respondent claimed this since new recruits have lifted the fact that they were attracted to the company's values and working methods. Invid highlighted that when the employees identify with the organization, trustworthiness is reflected towards the customers.

“IB creates a feeling among employees, which they identify with and in turn lead to a good environment, which imply that employees want to stay and not move on to another employer.”

- Marketing manager at Pdb

The companies’ statements can further be connected to the theory by Punjaisri and Wilson (2011), who raised the idea that the more the employees identify with an organization, the greater the chance that they maintain that particular identity through their actions. Therefore, the attitude of identification is agreed to be of high importance from both chosen companies and theory, in order for employees to act according to the organizational values. Moreover, repetition of brand values was brought up by all companies, as they argued that it was essential for the corporate culture as well as the identification towards the brand. This was also lifted in the study conducted by Sharma and Kamalanabhan (2012), who recognized Training within IB as beneficial for a company, since it repeats, interpret and align corporate- and personal values. If personal values are aligned with corporate, employees will more likely
identify with the company. This, in turn create the positive attitude of identification, which in turn might lead to commitment (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012).

**Loyalty**

To sum up the effects of brand-supported attitudes, all the respondents revealed that their initiatives within IB is about creating a value for the employees who work there. Also, making them feel proud of working within the organization and thereby wanting to remain. Pdb explained the effects of loyalty in the same manner, by highlighting that their IB initiatives enhance the employees’ feelings of loyalty. However, the Marketing Manager at Pdb believed that loyalty is also a genuine feeling towards the company. Therefore, Pdb tries to identify common interest among employees, to enhance the feeling of “I’m a part of Pdb”. Respondents at Pdb also brought up, that if employees believe in the brand values, it will create loyalty towards the brand. Moreover, Knowit stressed that the Training and Internal Communication initiatives within IB are important to enhance loyalty:

*By creating a good corporate culture, we can enhance employee loyalty by providing development opportunities and fair workload. Also, the Internal Communication is important between employees to enhance their commitment and loyalty towards each other and the company.*” - Knowit

This can be connected to the theory presented by Punjaisri and Wilson (2011), where IB is said to have an essential impact on employees’ loyalty towards the brand. Meaning that, when the employees’ personal values are aligned with those of the brand, the loyalty towards the brand is said to increase. Moreover, the companies view of employees’ loyalty can be connected to the theory raised by Chauhan and Mahajan (2013). The authors stated that when employees identify with the organizational culture, they create a strong sense of commitment. This in turn, is argued to include loyalty towards the organization and lead to that employees do not want to leave. Chauhan and Mahajan (2013) also highlighted that, by creating loyalty, employees will feel proud of the organization, which in turn results in that they want to stay within it. One can therefore argue, that Pdb had this in mind when they stated that the feeling
“I’m a part of Pdb” creates a sense of pride, which in turn increase loyalty towards the organization.

4.4.2 Employee brand-supported behavior

Delivering Brand promise

The respondents at Pdb strongly believed that their employees acted according to their values. This, since as mentioned they took part in the creation of the new value base. Invid highlighted the effect of repetition and continuously imprint the values and the desirable behavior among their employees:

“If someone loses the values or does not act accordingly, we will help the person in the right direction by repeating the values and we will lead them back on track.” - Invid

Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) stated, when brand values have been internalized among employees, it will result in a consistent delivery of the brand promise across all contact points between the company and its various stakeholders. Also, Sirianni et al. (2013) noted that when employees’ behavior is in line with the brand's personality in interactions, the ability for customers to experience the brand as a consistently uniform entity increases. As the respondent at Invid stated:

“If the employees are satisfied the customers will also be.” – Invid

The interviews revealed that all of the companies have developed a value concept in the form of either a folder, matrix, film or the like, which can be considered as giving the employees a clear direction. The concepts clearly stated the values, the company's identity, and the way in which the employees are expected to behave. King and Grace (2008) accentuated that through the internalization and development of value concepts, employees are considered better
equipped to act and fulfill the expressed and implied promises that the brand stands for and that is expected by the customers. This, because the brand’s values, practices and behaviors are clarified and defined. In turn this can be connected to the companies’ efforts of creating concepts that give their employees a clearer direction in how to behave accordingly with the brand values.

Moreover, considering transferring brand message to reality, all companies agreed on that it is crucial to focus on the employees and their interaction with the final customer. Koneo, Consid, Invid and Knowit raised the personal meeting with the customer. Koneo pointed out that it is crucial that the employees keep what the company has promised and referred to their value concept. This crucially is further addressed by Punjaisri and Wilson (2007), who define the purpose of IB as a way to ensure that employees translate expressed brand messages into reality for both customers and other stakeholders.

**Corporate culture**

Invid and Pdb highlighted in their interviews that they tried to create a “feeling” within the corporate culture, which could be applicable in everything they did. Invid stressed the importance of creating a feeling of “we” and argued that if their employees do not enjoy their workplace they are not able to deliver or behave accordingly either. Yang et al. (2015) noted that an effective implementation of IB may lead to an enhancement of employee commitment, which furthermore positively influences employee behavior to be brand-appropriate. The employee behavior is said to be heavily dependent on the organizational culture, norms and values that tend to influence individual and group behavior (Wilson et al., 2012). This culture can in other words be called the ”corporate culture” and is defined as the shared values and beliefs between its members that contribute to meaning and rules for behavior within the organization. Informally, this culture may internally be defined as ”the way we do things around here” (Wilson et al., 2012).
Brand-supported behavior from the start of employment

The findings from the interviews indicated that the values generated by the initiatives of IB are also used to find the "right" people. When the chosen companies were asked to explain how they get their employees to act according to the brand values, it arose that values are used already at the first employment meeting to make sure that the applicant matches it, support it and is willing to act accordingly. If the personal values of the employees are aligned with those of the brand it is argued that the identification and loyalty towards the brand will increase. This, in turn promotes brand-supported behavior as mentioned by Punjaisri & Wilson (2011).

“When we meet potential employees we look for people that go hand in hand with the values we stand for and that they really should line up with it.” – Consid

By the same token, Koneo argued that they always make sure that all their employees agree upon the company values and are willing to work accordingly. The HR Manager at Pdb pointed out that they always try to find people who have a certain profile and that matches the company and its value base. The respondent professed that they pay particular attention to ensure that their employees match the company and its values. These practices are exactly what Yi and La (2006) brought up in their study. The authors lifted that it is of great importance for an organization to hire people with the right personality that matches the personality traits of the brand. Finding the "right" people will according to the authors benefit the company since these people are able to convey the brand promise to customers in an effective and trustworthy manner (Yi & La, 2006). It is interesting that this was highlighted by the companies, since the main theory of this thesis argued that the key elements of IB that influence brand-supported behavior including Training and Communication, rather than Staffing practices (Punjaisri et al., 2008).
4.5 HR within Internal Branding

The alignment of the external and internal image

When asking the chosen five companies “How do you present your brand image externally?”, they clearly answered that they want to present their external image aligned with the internal one. Pdb stressed, that this is important to be able to establish trust among customers. They highlighted that if the internal reality is not coherent with the image presented to the external environment, no trust can be created. The external image will then only act as a façade, which will reduce their trustworthiness in the market. Knowit also highlighted in their response that it is of great importance that their values are coherent from the center of the organization (internal) and out to its customers (external). This, in order to build trust among customers and be able to protect that:

“We are the same company inside as outside.” - Knowit

According to the study by Foster et al. (2010), aligning HR practices with IB is a key factor for the success of IB implementation. This, in order to effectively align an organization’s internal image with its external (Martin et al., 2004). Moreover, the study further advocated that the integration of internal- and external- image has become important for the purpose of delivering a coherent brand message (Martin et al., 2004).

Furthermore, all companies interviewed presented that they at some degree aligned the HR practice of Training and Development in their activities within IB. The study by Aurand et al. (2005) stressed that a stronger involvement of HR practices in IB, enhance the employees’ ability to deliver a coherent brand image to the external environment. The interviews found that Invid, Knowit, Pdb and Koneo used training to educate their employees in organizational values, in order for all employees to deliver what the company stands for both internal and external:
“It is important for us that the employees understand why we have established these values, in order to communicate them in everything they do.” – Koneo

This, can further be connected to Punjaisri et al. (2008) who identified the HR practice Training as one of the key elements for a successful implementation of IB, which will be presented in following section.

4.5.1 The use of the HR practice Training

Orientation

As above mentioned, interviews presented that all companies used Training somehow in their initiatives of IB. The participants from Knowit, Pdb and Koneo explained that they engaged their new employees in an orientation program, when starting their employment. They stressed that this is arranged in order to educate their new employees in corporate values and give them an introduction of corporate principles and their way of working.

“All our new employees get an orientation-day in Stockholm, where we educate and provide information of our values and principles.” - Knowit.

The study conducted by Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) identified orientation for employees as an activity within Training in the process of IB. They highlighted that it is important for employees in the beginning of their employment to learn about company values and promises in order to transfer the brand message into reality. Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) advocated that the effects of IB, including commitment and loyalty, were stronger on employees who were better educated within the brand. Training employees already during orientation, might therefore give companies an early advantage of employees’ commitment and loyalty towards the brand.
Training programs

Furthermore, Koneo presented that they also provided education programs to improve the employees’ knowledge. This initiative was also recognized in the study of Punjaisri and Wilson (2011), by suggesting companies to arrange training programs in order to better educate employees in brand values. Moreover, all companies provided conference days, where employees were trained and reminded of corporate values. The interviews presented that all companies arranged these types of gatherings a couple of times per year to continuously train and remind their employees of company values:

“We have conferences every year, including group assignments and workshops which focus on our brand values. This is also a part of our Internal Communication, with the purpose of reminding employees of our corporate values.” - Marketing Manager at Pdb

Continuous training over the entire employment was in the study by Sharma and Kamalanabhan (2012) recognized as beneficial for a company, since it aligns corporate- and personal- values. As mentioned, if personal values are aligned with corporate ones, employees will identify with the company, which in turn create positive attitudes such as, identification and commitment. This, is also applicable at Consid, since they presented in their interview that it is important with a continuous process as:

“IB is an ongoing process to provide our employees with the information needed to educate them in; who we are; what we value; and what you are a part of when working at Consid.”

-Consid

Therefore, one can conclude that the participating companies’ arrangement of continuously training through conferences and other initiatives are beneficial for positively influencing employees.
Workshops

As mentioned above, Pdb together with Koneo and Invid, provided workshops for their employees. By the same token Martin et al. (2004) advocated that it is beneficial to provide the opportunity of living the brand in practice, since in turn it develop employees’ mind-sets and align their attitudes towards the brand (Martin et al., 2004). From the interviews, this could also be connected to the inspirational lectures arranged by Pdb, Consid and Invid, since they were provided to further improve employees’ knowledge and inspire them to development. According to Consid, their yearly conference has a clear brand/HR focus just to educate and inspire their employees. Consid considered their larger events incredible cultural building itself. It is found in the interviews that these initiatives were arranged to create a feeling of positive corporate culture:

“We provide gatherings with all employees in form of inspirational lectures in order to inform, educate and inspire. This provides training and inspiration to our employees and it is highly appreciated.” -Marketing Manager at Pdb

“It is all about the feeling, it is not a single thing. You do not know why it is a positive corporate culture, it just is.” -HR Manager at Pdb

Development

Another important initiative within HR found for IB when interviewing the participants was development of employees. All participants presented that development is an important part of their IB initiatives. Koneo advocated that it is of high importance to provide possibilities to encourage employees to development. Pdb argued that the managers within the company work to find the right development for each individual employee in its team. By the same token, Consid stressed that they focused on the individual employee’s development within the company. Moreover, Invid highlighted that development is needed in order to keep the employees motivated. The importance of keeping the employees motivated can be linked to the study by Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) where they described development as a factor to
enhance the commitment of employees. The study found that if employees are offered development opportunities, they tend to feel valued within the organization, which in turn lead to commitment towards the company (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). However, respondents did not lift that development opportunities were provided in order to influence employees’ commitment, rather to demonstrate that the employees are a valuable resource:

“The employees have to feel that they can advance and develop within the company. Employees are the most valuable resource we have.” - Koneo.

Even though that the companies did not exactly point out that the opportunities of development influenced employees to commitment, they presented that by making the employees feel valued, they ensured that employees appreciated the organization and wanted to stay. Therefore, one can argue that by providing development opportunities, it influences employees to feel committed to the organization. A connection between the interviews and the study by Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) could therefore be seen.

4.5.2 The use of Internal Communication

Interviews with the chosen companies found that all companies used a combination of Training and Internal Communication, where the Internal Communication was the most essential, since it was a part of the firms’ every day work. As argued by Punjaisri et al. (2008), to successfully implement IB, both of the HR practices Training and Internal Communication are needed and neither could work by itself. This, since the employees need to get trained in how to deliver the brand values, but also get information and knowledge about the essential principles of the brand (Punjaisri et al., 2008). Moreover, their study also recognized that it is essential to put extensive focus on Internal Communication, which as mentioned also was found in the interviews.
**Face-to-face methods**

**Group meetings**

All companies presented that group-meetings or staff-meetings were an essential tool within their Internal Communication during a regular week:

“*Internal Communication is about always informing about what is essential in the organization right now and what our principles are.*” -Marketing Manager Pdb

“*Internally, we try to highlight our values in staff-meetings in order to promote and imprint them.*” -Koneo

When the respondents referred to the group meetings they highlighted that they enabled interaction between employees and managers. Punjaisri et al. (2008), argued this as the most important part of the initiatives within Internal Communication. This, since it provides the employees with the opportunities to ask questions and express own thoughts if there is any uncertainty of the brand values. It also enables the employees to develop and give suggestions of improvements. Knowit, Pdb and Consid also highlighted that the face-to-face meetings are important for the development of the employees, since managers can provide feedback and evaluate the employees’ work:

“I work with my team by discussing our values, mutual principles and the way we act. We also talk about how we can be better and how the customers perceive us.” - Knowit.

“In individual meetings the employee get the opportunity to discuss their development and how they want their professional future to develop”. -Marketing Manager Pdb
“Every department work with its employees to establish the right feeling and to communicate the right values among each other.” Consid.

Moreover, effective Internal Communication as the one enabling interaction between management and employees, was presented as crucial in order to make sure that employees feel committed and willing to induce a behavior that promotes the brand (Punjaisri et al., 2008).

**Mass-methods**

**Newsletters and memos**

When asking about communication, Consid stressed that they used newsletters, to update their employees with news of the week. According to the study newsletters is a positive tool to use as a reminder of brand promise (Punjaisri et al., 2008). Koneo on the other hand presented that they instead used memos as pop-ups on employees’ computers in order to remind about their values.

“We communicate by e.g. putting the values as a first page when the employees open our program “Teams”, thereby the values will remind immediately.” -Koneo.

This, is highlighted by Punjaisri et al. (2008), who suggested pop-ups at employees’ computers to easily and effectively remind them about brand promise.

**Intranet-sites**

All companies presented in their interviews that they used intranet-sites as informational platforms to provide information and principles of brand and values. They highlighted that the intranet was an essential tool to always remind employees of values and brand promise. The
companies Consid and Koneo also used their intranets as a discussion forum, to enable digital communication among employees.

“We have a tool at our intranet where employees can chat with one another. There are different chat-groups where we can communicate. One group with the whole company and several for each region.” –Consid

The study conducted by Aurand et al. (2005) advocated that companies should use brand-based intranet sites in order to inform and always develop employees experience of the brand message. Invid explained in the interview that they used their intranet to publish documents of values and principles of how they work within the company. Moreover, they also used the platform to remind and repeat the values to the employees. Pdb presented their intranet as similar to Invid’s, namely that they also used it as a tool to remind employees of the brand promise. Furthermore, Consid explained that they used the intranet to enhance the knowledge of employees by publishing the inspirational lectures, which were arranged within the company. This, to enable the employees who could not participate in the lectures to get inspired and enhance their knowledge. One can conclude that the intranet-sites are used among the companies to influence and repeat the employees’ knowledge of brand values.

Social media platforms

Internal Communication through social media platforms was also identified through the interviews. Consid has developed an unofficial, internal Instagram account. This, to enable employees to share their days, illustrate what the different regional offices are working on, as well as sharing corporate advices for further development. The initiative contributed to maintaining and increasing the corporate brand within the company. Pdb has also implemented an internal Facebook-page available for all employees, which supports and educates new and existing employees within the company's values. They further explained that their brand concept is pervaded through all their social media channels. Social media platforms were something which was not recognized in the chosen theory for this thesis. However, the interviews argued that the use of social media has emerged over the recent
years. Therefore, one can argue that it might not yet have been a key initiative suggested by the chosen literature.

**The Internal Communication as a whole**

Lastly, the companies did present that the face-to-face methods were the most essential ones, however they all argued that the mass-methods’ purpose included repetition of brand values and therefore worked as important reminders. As presented by Invid:

"If there is anyone who loses track of the values, or start wandering in the wrong direction, we help that person to find his/hers way back by repeating the brand values. It is all about repeat, repeat, repeat..." - Invid.

As mentioned above Punjaisri et al. (2008) argued that the face-to-face methods were most important, however they suggested that the mass-methods of memos, intranet and newsletter were appropriate backup tools for continuous reminding. Furthermore, all of the participating companies have taken into account that communication needs to be delivered in an interactive way. Considering reminding their employees of the brand values, the HR Manager at Pdb compared their IB initiatives with external marketing and stated that it should be present in many different places and be a part of all activities:

"You can say that if you work with these types of activities on a small scale. Something happens and put things into motion. By this you can achieve greater results as a whole."

- HR Manager Pdb

Delivering information in an interactive way is something that Tosti and Stotz (2001) described in their study. Meaning that an organization cannot just dump the information to its employees. Rather, it is important to inform employees in an interactive way that give them the opportunity to get a detailed presentation of what applies, experience, knowledge and sense of what the brand stands for and also the opportunity to ask questions.
5. Conclusion

This section will present the conclusion of this thesis in relation to its purpose and research questions.

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore how Internal Branding was used within the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping (1). The authors also wanted to investigate whether the HR practices Training and Communication promoted the initiatives within IB to influence employee brand-supported behavior (2). The results of this study have indicated a successful fulfillment of the purpose and therefore several conclusions can be drawn.

i. How does the chosen IT consultancy firms in Jönköping use Internal Branding?

The study presented that all participating companies in the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping used IB, however it was used in various ways and to different extents. One of the major findings connected to the theory was that all participants used the key HR practices suggested, including Training and Internal Communication. However, Internal Communication was considered as the most essential when internalizing the brand and enhancing employees’ knowledge of brand values. This, since it was a part of the firms’ every day work. They highlighted that they used mass-methods such as brand-based internet sites and memos for the reminding of values. However, the face-to-face methods was stressed to be the most essential ones used, in order to involve the employees through interaction. Considering training, all companies provided educational conference days, where employees achieved improved knowledge and got reminded of values. Moreover, all companies used practices within development, in order to motivate the employees and enhance their feeling of value and commitment towards the company.
ii. How does the HR practices Training and Communication promote Internal Branding to influence employee brand-supported behavior?

All companies agreed upon the theory that the HR practices Training and Communication within IB influenced employee brand-supported attitudes and behaviors. The findings of the interviews indicated that the management of the participating companies believed that the enhanced knowledge gained from Training and Internal Communication generated in commitment and attitudes such as involvement, identification and loyalty towards the brand. The interaction between employees and management through Internal Communication was according to the companies a way of creating involvement, which in turn was believed to enhance brand-supported attitudes. Another major conclusion indicated that companies’ efforts within IB created a positive internal environment, which increased the employees’ commitment and willingness to remain within the organization, thus the attitude referred to as loyalty.

Considering the brand-supported behavior, the authors of this thesis concluded that when the companies involved their employees in the IB process, the employees were more likely to behave accordingly with the values and deliver the brand promise. Moreover, it was found that the companies created a corporate culture by IB, to establish a feeling of belongingness for the employees. This in turn was concluded to result in that the employees behaved according to the brand in the delivery of brand promise.

6. Discussion

This chapter concludes this thesis by discussing the results, limitations and suggestions for further research.

Based on the analysis if Internal Branding influence brand-supported attitudes and behavior, the authors of this thesis believe that this in the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping can be held true. Considering the HR practices Training and Communication within IB that was suggested by Punjaisri et al. (2008), it is revealed through interviews that the companies in the
study used these efforts within their IB initiatives. The authors of this thesis agree upon that IB can be held true as an effective strategy to develop a pleasant corporate culture, which in turn might imply that employees want to remain within the organization. However, the findings revealed that IB must be used as a continuous process for the effects of employees’ brand-supported attitudes and behavior in the delivery of the brand promise. Therefore, the authors obtained insights that the initiatives of IB cannot be used as a “quick fix”, rather as an integrated way of continuously working.

Furthermore, the authors experienced a major implication when holding interviews considering that a few respondents related the questions to employer branding. This implied that the authors obtained information of recruitment policies, which primary could not be used for the purpose of this thesis. However, it resulted in the authors enhanced understanding of the IB and employer branding connection. By this, meaning that to obtain the best outcome of IB, employer branding might have to be integrated and considered.

Moreover, findings from the interviews presented that all participating companies used social media platforms as an initiative within IB. However, this was not presented in previous literature. Therefore, the authors could conclude that the trend of social media in today’s society might also influence the initiatives of IB. Furthermore, this indicates that incentives within IB might develop through time depending on trends and social behavior.

6.1 Limitations and future research

When conducting this thesis, the authors faced several limitations in the early stages of the process. Considering that this thesis had a controlled time-frame of five months the authors faced limitations when conducting the study. If the time-frame was extended the authors could have considered doing a greater number of interviews at the chosen companies. Meaning, that if more interviews were conducted it is believed that it would be interesting to bring up employees’ perceptions and experiences of efforts within IB. This, in order to identify if the initiatives in the mind of the employees contribute to their way of working. This extended angle might have been interesting, since it could contribute to the purpose of
this thesis. Further, if more time was given the authors could have considered interviewing several more companies within the sector in Jönköping, in order to get a more certain result and conclusion.

Furthermore, the focus of writing an exploratory case study within IT consultancy sector in Jönköping was a new experience for the authors. This, at times in the beginning resulted in confusion and uncertainty, considering what the companies’ services and operations offered to the market. Due to no prior experience, the authors experienced limitations when choosing companies, since they did not have enough knowledge about which companies had accurate and important positions within the sector to contribute in this study.

Lastly, writing an exploratory case study as a thesis was new to the authors, meaning that they at times experienced difficulties and confusion. The process was at times time-consuming, considering that the authors needed to put energy on understanding how the different parts of the thesis should be written. However, the learning process has to a great extent developed the authors within academic writing.

6.2 Future Research

IB is a relatively new and unexplored topic, which makes it interesting for further research. Considering the research being an exploratory case study of the IT consultancy sector in Jönköping, the empirical findings are connected to that specific industry in a specific area and cannot be generalized on other industries in other areas. However, the analysis and conclusions of the empirical findings together with the frame of references resulted in an accurate conclusion. The authors therefore believe that this study can be a foundation for future research within other industries, such as manufacturing.

Furthermore, one might find it interesting to investigate how IB could affect the manufacturing industry, due to that several of the chosen companies in this study believed
that the manufacturing sector is not as dependent on the delivery of service and brand promise. Therefore, comparing the service sector with the manufacturing sector would be an interesting perspective to explore. Furthermore, it would be intriguing to investigate whether companies’ brand images are perceived as the same by employees and customers. Moreover, findings from the interviews presented that all participating companies used social media platforms as an initiative within IB. However, this was not presented in previous literature. Therefore, it could be interesting to further investigate social media’s role within IB as this indicates that incentives within IB might develop through time depending on trends and social behavior. Lastly, as mentioned, one of the conclusions of this study was that the chosen companies related IB to employer branding. Due to this, it would be interesting to further investigate how these two topics are interrelated and how they contribute to strong corporate brand and brand image.
7. References


8. Appendix

8.1 Interview outline

About the respondent

- Who are you, and what’s your role within the company?
- Can you tell us about the company? What are your operations and main functions?

Brand Management

- Are there any specific overall values that your company works and stands for?
- How do you represent the company brand to consumers? How do you work with external marketing?

Internal Branding

- Is internal branding a phenomenon you use and work with within the company? What does it mean for you?
- Do you work with initiatives or activities for internal branding? Which ones?
  Is there a specific goal with these initiatives?
  What is the company’s objective with this work?
- Previous literature suggested that internal branding is more important within the service sector. How can you relate to that? Does it make sense within your company?

Internal Branding and HR practices

- Are there any HR practices you believe are more relevant or important for the work of internal branding?
- How can you use HR as a part of your work with internal branding?
- Do you as a company educate and train your employees in the company values? How do you use training?
  Do you use specific platforms such as; intranet, employee sites etc.?
- How can you as a manager influence your employees to behave in line with the overall company values?

Brand-supported employee attitudes

- What effects do you recognize from the work of internal branding? Does it influence your employees’ actions? How?
- Do you have any desirable attitudes you want the employees to present towards customers and within the company?
- How do you want them to behave in their interaction with consumers?
- How important are the company values during the interaction with consumers?
- Is it important that your employees identify with the company’s brand? Are there any advantages of them doing so?
- How do you believe internal branding anyhow can contribute to employees’ loyalty?