



# UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

## SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

Master Degree Project in Management

### **The importance of legitimacy**

**A qualitative study of how companies work to maintain employer branding practices**

Elin Jansson and Alice Sörensen Isaksson

Master Degree Project  
Supervisor: Maria Jose Zapata Campos  
Graduate School

## **The importance of legitimacy**

A qualitative study of how companies work to maintain employer branding practices

**Elin Jansson**

*Master of Science in Management,  
Graduate School,  
School of Business, Economics and Law,  
University of Gothenburg*

**Alice Sörensen Isaksson**

*Master of Science in Management,  
Graduate School,  
School of Business, Economics and Law,  
University of Gothenburg*

### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the relatively new, and increasingly popular, phenomenon of employer branding. The purpose is to examine how small and medium enterprises work on a managerial level to attract new potential employees. The method of research is a qualitative, single case study, performed at a medium-size company within the IT-consulting industry. The data was collected by conducting observations and 19 interviews. As for the analytical tool, we applied the lens of institutional work. Our findings indicate that several activities are performed in order to compete and attract new potential employees in a highly competitive market. We illustrate this by defining the activities, and how these can be categories within different sets of practices. This is done to highlight how they relate to each other and work together, with the result of maintaining and strengthening the institutionalised practice of employer branding. Altogether, our findings contribute to both the literature on institutional work as well as to employer branding literature, as the study reveals that legitimacy and employer branding is closely connected. Moreover, this paper can have practical implications for practitioners as it suggests practices that could be applicable in order to attract new employees.

### **Keywords**

Employer branding, Practices, Legitimacy, Institutional work, Set of practices and Isomorphism

### **Introduction**

#### **A competitive market**

The competition between organisations concerning the workforce, are increasing in today's society (Maheshwari et al., 2017; Backhaus, 2016; Drury, 2016; Wilden et al., 2010; Näppä et al., 2014). The baby boomer generation is retiring, and the remaining jobs are to be filled with the workforce left behind, a workforce that is smaller in size (Drury, 2016). Backhaus (2016) further explains this by arguing that the supply of high-quality workers is decreasing in many countries. A direct consequence is that companies have to become increasingly competitive in order to attract the most qualified employees to their company and also to retain them within the company (Backhaus, 2016). At the same time, as more qualified jobs are increasing, other types of jobs that require less qualification are decreasing as a result of digitalisation and technical developments, and, as such involve more routine tasks. Nevertheless, new technology can result in an increase of other jobs that do not exist today (Bender & Carlén, 2016). With

this said, it can be argued that it is difficult to know how the job-situation will look in the future as it is a complex phenomenon that can differ between industries. All in all, the ability to attract new employees will become increasingly important for companies (Leekha & Sharma, 2014; Backhaus, 2016).

### **Employer branding**

In recent years, the practices of marketing, attracting and retaining the right people have been put together and coined under the label of “employer branding”, a rather new phenomenon which has become increasingly popular during the last decade. From getting 3 000 hits when googling the term “employer branding” in 2004 (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Backhaus, 2016), to 5 930 000 hits when making the same search in December 2017. Employer branding is defined as “*the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company*” (Amber & Barrow, 1996 p187) and includes both internal and external employer branding. Internal employer branding concerns how organisations work in order to keep their employees within the organisation. External employer branding is about making the organisation and brand attractive to potential new employees in order to be able to recruit them to the organisation. The attributes that affect how attractive an organization is perceived differ depending on the generation and what stage of life a person is (Reis & Braga, 2016). One common belief, however, is that in order to attract potential new employees to the company, it has to gain legitimacy from the potential employees.

Previous research on the subject of employer branding has focused on the internal aspect and how employer branding is connected to the retention of employees. Näppä et al. (2014) show that strong employer branding can be helpful in regard to retaining current talents within a multinational company (MNC). This is in line with a study by Tanwar & Prasad (2016), which show that there is a positive relationship between employer branding and employee retention in an MNC. As for previous research on external employer branding, this has to a large extent focused on the employees’ perspective and includes how employees respond to employer branding. Research shows that organisations succeeding to attract the right employees deals with both functional and symbolic attributes (Drury, 2016) or, as Backhaus (2016) refer to them, instrumental and symbolic elements. The instrumental elements include, for example, objective information that can give an idea of what it would be like to work for the organisation, such as salary, working hours or location of the workplace; while symbolic elements can include, for instance, the social approval connected to the employees working at an organisation and the organisation’s reputation (Backhaus, 2016). A study conducted by Drury (2016) showed that the symbolic attributes appear to have a larger direct effect than functional attributes regarding how attractive an organisation is perceived to be.

To obtain information about potential employers, the main source of information is the internet, as the opinion of current and previous employees are a factor that place an increasingly important role in how attractive job-seekers perceive organisations to be, a phenomenon referred to as “crowdsourcing”. Research by Dabirian et al. (2017) argued that because of this increase, employer branding is changing. They conclude that the organisations that are perceived as most attractive by job-seekers have a good rating and deal with seven attributes: social value, interest value, application value, development value, economic value,

management value and work/life balance. Social value pertains to the enjoyable feeling an employee experience as a direct result from working at a given organisation, including having fun with coworkers and the extent of the people-focused organisational culture. Interest value is connected to how interesting the work is in regard to for instance the degree of innovative thinking that is used. Application value is connected to the fact that employees tend to want to use the skills and knowledge that they have gained. Development value is related to, for instance, the degree that the employer offers career advancement. The fifth value proposition, economic value, is the compensation provided by the employer in regard to salary or healthcare to name a few. Management value is as suggested, connected to the superiors of the organisation. Dabirian et al. (2017) claim that it is the boss and the employees' perception of him or her that determine if the employee will stay or leave the organisation rather than because of the company itself. The last value proposition, work/life balance, is related to the fact that employees would like to manage their work as well as their personal life in the sense of identifying themselves as a parent or friend in a balanced way. However, some attributes are more important in the eyes of the employees. Ratings made by employees at MNCs within the consulting industry claimed social value (35%) to be the most important, followed by interest (23%), economic (16%) and application (14%) in regard to what attributes attract employees most (Dabirian et al., 2017). However, the study stresses that the ranking of the value proposition can vary depending on the industry and appears to differ between organisations.

Continuing, on this theme, Van Hoyer and Lievens (2007) discuss organisational attractiveness and how word of mouth (WOM) can have a strong impact on how attractive a potential job-seeker finds an organisation. In many cases people talk to and consult others about organizations and jobs, including family, friends, acquaintances or employees of the organisation. The study shows that a positive WOM generates a greater feeling of attractiveness towards an organisation, and the effect is greater if the WOM comes from someone that the potential job-seeker has a close relationship to (Van Hoyer & Lievens, 2007; Van Hoyer et al., 2016). When this is the case, the receiver of the WOM feel a strong attraction and considers the organisation to be more credible (Van Hoyer et al., 2016). Information provided by the organisation itself is not considered to be WOM, however, and it is therefore regarded as a factor that the organisation can only influence indirectly. Possible ways to influence people can, for instance, be through an internship or being present at campus recruitments (Van Hoyer & Lievens, 2007). Van Hoyer et al. (2016) found that people who know that a monetary incentive is given to the person who provides them with WOM or information feel less attracted to the organisation. A further way to influence people around the organisation is through social media and Backhaus (2016) argues this to be the main platform in regard to external employer branding.

Although many studies have explored the attractiveness of employer branding, more research is required to learn more about the practices of employer branding (Reis & Braga, 2016; Backhaus, 2016). Furthermore, research shows that organisations, banks in this case, are competing to attract talented employees and those banks that attract the best talents have a “*distinct edge in the marketplace*” (Maheshwari et al., 2017 p742). However, they explain that these studies are somewhat limited as they only focus on specific sectors and industries. Consequently, and in line with this, we argue that it is relevant to study how companies work in practice with employer branding on a managerial level to create legitimacy.

We argue that this is a focus that requires more research as we see a gap in previous studies, that has mainly focused on MNC or certain industries and combined these with other factors, shown in the examples above. Therefore, this paper will study how companies work in practice with employer branding on a managerial level.

### **Research gap and aim**

In line with the previous research, mentioned above, it can be argued that studies of employer branding from a managerial perspective, with particular focus on practices, is somewhat limited and indicates that there is a research gap to fill. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate how companies work on a managerial level to strengthen their employer branding in order to attract potential new employees. This will be done through a case study in which the study object is located in Gothenburg and falls within the category of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME). The organisation has received several awards (Elicit(a) 2018; Elicit(b) 2018), the most recent being when the company became the number 11 best place to work in the SME-category carried out by “Great place to work, Sveriges bästa arbetsplatser 2018” (Greatplacetowork, 2018). As it is an SME and present within the IT-consultant industry, it is a suitable company to represent the focus of this paper’s study. The demand for new employees is high at the same time as the human resource pool is scarce. Our study will thereby contribute to the current theory on the subject of employer branding in the sense of what activities are taken within an SME in practice to attract new employees and create legitimacy. In other words, this paper’s research question is: *How do SMEs work in practice to attract new potential employees in a highly competitive market?*

This study is informed by an institutional theory perspective. It is an appropriate theory to use as it considers the role of legitimacy and on the institutional environment in understanding organizational practices.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is informed by an institutional theory perspective as it focuses on the role of legitimacy and the institutional environment in understanding organizational practices. The extended concept of institutional theory used here is institutional work as this can be argued to be appropriate when discussing the actions made by the case company, in regard to how they attract new potential recruits. Furthermore, the theory chapter will include an isomorphism section and ends with a legitimacy section, both highly relevant within institutional theory.

### **Institutional work**

One extended concept of institutional theory is what is referred to as “institutional work” and which is defined as a deliberate action made by individuals and/or institutions with the aim of creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009; Voronov & Vince, 2012; Zilber, 2013; Lawrence et al., 2013). Two great names within institutional work are Thomas B. Lawrence and Roy Suddaby, validated by the fact two of their articles (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009) have been cited over 1500 times on Google Scholar (Hampel et al., 2017). In regard to what can be considered to be an institution, this can be difficult to establish as it lacks definition and can be considered to be a

complex phenomenon. Several definitions of the concept have been proposed (Lawrence et al., 2011) and Fligstein (2001, p108) suggest the following definition “*rules and shared meanings [...] that define social relationships, help define who occupies what position in those relationships and guide interaction by giving actors cognitive frames or sets of meanings to interpret the behaviour of others*”.

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) have compiled material from studies made on the subject of institutional work and present a list of sets of practices that can be made in order to create institutions, for instance; defining, constructing identities, constructing normative networks and mimicry. These sets of practices were later echoed by Lawrence et al. (2009). *Defining* is about defining boundaries of membership and determining parameters for future institutional practices and structures. This action thereby focuses on politics and rules that affect the work of how an institution is created. From the examined empirical material, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) conclude that many rules were set in order to enable institutional work, rather than constrain it. One example by which they illustrate this, is an analysis of institutional change in banks made by Fox-Wolfgramm et al (1998). Based on 12 criteria, a sample of banks were ranked within four different groups, which later determined what access to resources the company would get (Ibid). As for *constructing identities*, this is achieved through collective actions and is focused on the development of professionals in the sense of both transforming existing ones and the appearance of new professions. This form of creating work can be affected both from within the group and from actors outside of it. According to Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), this type of action is exemplified by Oakes et al. (1998) in which an organisational change is studied in the context of a museum. They describe how the change implemented resulted in the employees at the museum being encouraged to regard themselves as “*working in business rather than working in museums that are run in a businesslike manner*” Oakes et al.,1998 p.279). The third action described by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), *constructing normative networks*, concerns how institutions are built through the connections between different actors. These actors involved in the network do not necessarily have the same agenda, but they share the same idea and, by being part of the same institution, they are able to get their desired outcome. An example of this is provided by Lawrence et al. (2002), who show how several actors, the Australian embassy and the University in Oslo to name a two, together formed an institution as they collectively strived to decrease malnutrition for children in Palestine. In regard to the action of *mimicry*, institutions can be created by copying taken-for-granted practices and rules from existing institutions. This is done in order to ease the creation of the new institution. Hargadon and Douglas (2001) exemplifies this by describing the work with institutionalising electric light. When an innovator was designing a new light system, he tried to make it similar to the existing system containing of gas lamps, in terms of showing technologies and its uses in ways that people already were familiar with. Further, and with the same arguments, he also shaped the bulbs to be similar to the flames in gas lamps (Ibid).

As for maintaining institutions, Dacin et al. (2010) argue that the research on the subject is somewhat limited. However, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) included this aspect in their study and describe that the following actions can be made to accomplish this: enabling work, valorizing and demonizing as well as embedding and routinizing. These sets of practices have also been described by Lawrence et al. (2009). As for *enabling work*, this action includes creating rules with the aim of facilitating and supporting institutions. An example of such an

action, is the creation of new roles on the ground that it is needed to execute institutional routines which, in turn, may be essential in order to maintain the institution. In Guler et al's (2002) study, this is exemplified by that certain qualified organisations have the authority to audit and award a specific certificate, thereby making it possible for the awarded organisations to work with this certificate. In regard to *valorizing*, these are actions made to supply positive examples of what the foundation of an institution should be like. By giving examples and encouraging specific actions and behaviour one can keep the institution in the desired manner. Angus exemplify this type of action in the context of a college in which institutions were in competition in ways linked to masculinity. Success in competition was positively acknowledged and provided an indicator of what was expected of the pupils. However, pupils that did not succeed or were not regarded as masculine, were *demonized* in the sense that they were referred to as girls. Continuing, another action that can be made to maintain an institution is that of *embedding and routinizing*. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) explain that it is the common practices and daily routines that maintain and reproduce the institution. These actions could be education, training, hiring or celebrations as it is through these that the institutions normative foundation becomes part of the actor's day to day work. This can again be exemplified by Angus (1993), as by acknowledging and celebrating successful competition and encouraging this, it is an indicator of what is expected of the pupils and what they should strive to live up to (Ibid). Zilber (2002) further exemplifies this set of practices by describing how the norms at a rape-crisis centre was maintained. As they wanted to keep the feminist norms of the centre, they were careful with whom they hired as it was important that they had the same view and understanding. For this reason, they routinely recruited people from a network of feminist supporters. As for the action made with the motive of disruption institutions, it can be hard to please everyone and thereby resulting in the risk of one or several people working against the institution as they do not believe that they are served by the existing arrangement (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Currie et al. (2012) however argue, as a result of their study made on the basis of Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) research, that the work of maintaining an institution is not only composed by activities in the category of maintaining, claimed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). Instead, Currie et al (2012) describe that different types of institutional work interact with each other and work across the categories with the result of still delivering the desired outcome. They observe that the work of "defining" and "constructing normative networks", which is categorised as working with creating an institution, could also be found and used in the work with maintaining an institution. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) confess that the consequences of the taken action might not always be as intended. Due to interactions with the existing environment it is possible that the outcome might be unexpected and not as desired. According to Zilber (2013), it can be hard to investigate if the taken action will lead to the intended consequence in terms of how it will affect the institution since it often requires a longitudinal approach for the study method. However, institutional work is not as much about consequences as it is about the actions. The work to build, sustain and tear down institutions happens on a daily basis. The interesting thing should be what they are doing and not whether they succeed (Dobbin, 2010; Lawrence et al., 2009). Zietsma and McKnight (2009) contributes with the idea that institutional work can be a process in which multiple actors work together, as coworkers or competitors, with the result of creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions, with the

outcome not necessarily being the same as that intended. All this can be reflected in Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) approach about what institutions are, "*institutions are the product (intentional or otherwise) of purposive actions*" (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006 p216).

### **Isomorphism**

Many organisations make organisational changes with the result that they become more alike. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that there are three different types of institutional isomorphism that can occur within organisations where all are made to, in some aspect, gain legitimacy. The first, *coercive isomorphism* is how companies make changes as a result of that they feel forced to do so in order to follow the norm or culture within that industry. The change made could also be due to political order or to follow rules and regulations. The second type is called *mimetic isomorphism* and refer to when organisations imitate each other as a response to the fact that they feel insecurity and uncertainty. This is common when a company deals with ambiguity or uncertain goals that they do not know how reach. The solution could be found in another organisation which they imitate. The last type, *normative isomorphism*, is associated with professionalism and the willingness to follow and do what is seen as best practice within the industry. One way of doing this is by hiring top-performing employees from successful companies and implement their way of working in the organisation. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argues that the fact that companies have many similarities can make it easier for them to work across organisations. It can also make it easier "*to attract career-minded staff*" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983 p153) as well as lead to gained legitimacy for the organisation within the field.

### **Legitimacy**

Meyer and Rowan (1977) discuss the fact that many of the programs, positions, and policies implemented by today's organisations are consequences of social pressure and enforced by the social opinion. This is similar to the arguments made by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) regarding isomorphism and how this can be a result of social pressure. The organisational structure is constructed by the people and shaped by the actors within the industry. They act as they do for several reasons but most often with the aim of gaining legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Concerning legitimacy, it is a term that is used by many but defined by few (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Suchman (1995), one of the few to offer a definition, argue legitimacy to be "*a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions*" (Suchman, 1995 p574), a definition that is echoed by Garud et al. (2007), thereby making it socially constructed and dependent on the collective audience.

Suchman (1995) describes three challenges that are associated with legitimacy: gaining, maintaining and repairing it, and for which gaining and repairing legitimacy requires more effort than simply maintaining legitimacy. This since legitimacy often tends to be taken for granted and the actions in order to maintain legitimacy quickly become routinised. As for gaining legitimacy, Suchman (1995) argues that this can be acquired by focusing on three main targets. The first is to focus on the public and actors that already are involved in the company, or who are in the company's surroundings. The second is to target the people who are in other environments at the moment, but who could share the company's values and thereby potentially



become involved. The last one contains efforts in which a new audience could manipulate the existing structure in the company, and thereby create new legitimacy beliefs. All these activities, if customized, could also be part in the work of trying to repair legitimacy. Furthermore, Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) also suggest three tactics to obtain legitimacy. The first option is for the organization to change in order to make it correspond to the existing definitions of legitimacy. The second is for the organisation to, through communication, try to change the existing definition of legitimacy into a definition that better corresponds to the organisations current practices, output and values. Thirdly, the organization can try to become associated or identified with symbols, values and institutions that are presently united with strong social legitimacy. This can be argued to be connected to what Suchman (1995) refers to as legitimacy management, which he proposes to rest upon on communication between the organisation and its audience.

As for maintaining legitimacy, Suchman (1995) describe that this requires that organisations focus on two things. The organisation needs to try to anticipate the future and the possible changes that could occur in order to be prepared and aware of the surroundings and thereby avoid making mistakes that might hurt the company's legitimacy. Besides this, the company also needs to protect its past accomplishments by optimizing its actions in order to maintain the trust and renommé it has.

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

In order to answer our research question, a qualitative method approach has been used. The company that has been used as the study object in this paper is called Elicit and is an IT-consultant firm that provides services within IT to other companies through their consultants. It represents companies in a highly competitive market as they are functioning in an industry with a high demand, but, at the same time, with a low supply of human resources. It is a scarce resource as the IT-market is continuing to grow and, for this reason, the case company is constantly looking for new employees to enlarge their team. This process, which the company finds challenging, makes them a suitable case company and a good representative for the paper's focus of this study. For a study such as this, where the aim is to investigate a specific topic further, it is beneficial to use a case study (Flyvberg, 2006) as it provides a deeper knowledge and understanding which is needed for this study. Case studies are furthermore argued to be important as they provide a significant contribution contribute to current research in the field and therefore help science evolve (Ibid). Despite that our study may not be able to lead to any generalizations per se, it will bring together knowledge within the field and contribute to future research on the subject of employer branding.

### **Data collection**

Given our aim, to understand how, at a managerial level, an SME works in practice with attracting potential employees and gain legitimacy, we sought to find the relevant answers and information by conducting interviews as, arguably this is the best method for this (Silverman, 2013). We conducted 19 interviews in which the interviewees have been the company's CEO and employees working within the sector of marketing, human resource, economy, business

area managers (BA-managers) as well as consultants with no or less managerial responsibilities. Having this range of employees with diverse roles in our study group helps to provide a broad understanding as it included all areas of the company (Backhaus, 2016). The majority of the interviewees are employees who have worked with tasks related to employer branding and the work around it. We have also interviewed a few recently recruited employees who work with other tasks, with the reason to find out the implications of the company's employer branding practices and get an additional perspective of the company's activities.

In addition to the interviews, further data collection was made by observations. A template was created to enhance the data collection, and this made it possible to easily take notes and write down what happened during each session in an organised and structured manner. The template contained three categories; "situation", "observation" and "reflection" and allowed the observers to simply fill in the template and the data below the relevant heading. One observation took place at Halmstad University, where the company participated in a career fair. Another observation took place during a weekly meeting at the company's office in which the topic of recruitment and staffing was discussed. We have also made some additional observations at the office during coffee breaks and by watching the employees perform their ordinary work tasks. The total amount of collected observation time was 9 hours and have been conducted simultaneously by the two authors together. It has been beneficial that both authors were present at all times as we could elaborate and discuss our observations, resulting in a more thorough and detailed analysis. In addition to the interviews and observations, some secondary data, in terms of the company's social media and the web page, was assessed. This was performed to increase the authors understanding of what Elicit posts and what they try to mediate as well as to see the periodicity of the posts.

All collected data and respondents are compiled in table 1, 2 and 3. All respondents are anonymous throughout the report, yet this table shows their professions and how long each respondent has worked in the company. This to get a better understanding of the findings of the report.

**Table 1: Collected interviews**

<b>Interviews</b>				
Respondent	Business task	Years at Elicit	Date	Form of interview
1	(BA)Manager	>5	2018-02-22	Face-to-face
2	(BA)Manager	>5	2018-03-09	Face-to-face
3	(BA)Manager	>5	2018-04-09	Face-to-face
4	(BA)Manager	<5	2018-02-22	Face-to-face
5	Manager	>5	2018-04-09	Face-to-face
6	Manager	>5	2018-02-22	Face-to-face
7	Manager	>5	2018-03-05	Face-to-face
8	Manager	<5	2018-03-09	Face-to-face
9	Manager	<5	2018-02-22	Face-to-face
10	Consultant	>5	2018-03-02	Face-to-face

11	Consultant	>5	2018-03-13	Face-to-face
12	Consultant	<5	2018-03-02	Face-to-face
13	Consultant	<5	2018-03-02	Face-to-face
14	Consultant	<5	2018-03-09	Face-to-face
15	Consultant	<5	2018-03-05	Face-to-face
16	Consultant	<5	2018-03-07	Telephone
17	Consultant	<5	2018-03-09	Telephone
18	Consultant	<5	2018-03-09	Face-to-face
19	Consultant	<5	2018-03-27	Face-to-face

**Table 2: Observations**

<b>Observations</b>			
Event	Length	Date	Place
Career Fair	4h	2018-02-26	Halmstad University
Recruitment meeting	1h	2018-04-09	Elicit's office
Lunch, breaks & daily work	4h	Repeatedly	Elicit's office

**Table 3: Used documents**

<b>Documents</b>	
Document type	Available at
Elicit's Web Page	<a href="https://www.elicit.se/">https://www.elicit.se/</a>
Elicit's Blog	<a href="https://www.elicit.se/blogg/">https://www.elicit.se/blogg/</a>
Elicit's LinkedIn	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/elicit-ab/">https://www.linkedin.com/company/elicit-ab/</a>
Elicit's Instagram	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/elicit_ab/">https://www.instagram.com/elicit_ab/</a>

All the interviews had semi-structured character and four interview guides were created in order to fit the different professions within the company; BA-managers, managers, consultants as well as created a separate guide for the new role that was created by Elicit and which will be referred to as Employer branding manager (EB-manager) throughout the paper (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were a suitable way to conduct the interviews since it gave the respondents possibility to talk freely. It was essential not to influence them to answer in a certain way. The semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewees to interpret the question and then answer in the way he/she thought suitable. It also gave the authors a chance to ask additional and follow-up questions and allowed the interviewee to develop specific reasoning that we found interesting. In regard to the introduction of ourselves and our study, we avoided to provide specific information about the research question and the purpose of the study as we wanted the interviewee to be open-minded and avoid bias (Silverman, 2015). The interview guides began with some broader questions in which the interviewee told us about him/herself

and then continued with more specific questions related to our study. The later questions were part of several relevant areas and included: the company's daily activities in order to attract new potential employees, how to gain legitimacy, how they want to be perceived, how they believe they are perceived and also questions about why the work with employer branding is important for them. With permission from the interviewees, we recorded all interviews, since it was crucial for us in order to later on manage the transcription process later on. (Ibid) In line with the suggestion of Silverman (2015), most interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings, with the exception of two which were made over the phone as a result of long distance. In our experience it was good to conduct most of the interviews face-to-face as we believe this gave us a better connection with the respondent and more developed answers than we would have received during other circumstances.

Some of the employees that were interviewed were relatively new in the company and remembered their recruitment process vividly and especially why they have chosen to apply to this specific company. Their answers contributed to an additional view of the study, one with how the employees experience and interpret the work the company does in regard to employer branding. This contributes to a more accurate picture of the practices within the company and an additional reason to interview both sides of the recruitment process. The study primarily investigates how, on a managerial level, the company works with employer branding. By interviewing employees with different roles and differing amounts of insight into the workings of the company, it gave us a versatile view of how the work proceeds and what the implications of it are.

An interview can be constructed as a constructed and invented situation in which the conversation is controlled and shaped by a certain topic. Interviews can be complex in the sense that the involved parties are not in their natural environment, and we have considered this when performing the interviews as well as when analysing the material afterwards (Alvesson, 2003; Kvale, 2006). The interview is not a dialogue and it will easily become a power asymmetry in the interview situation (Kvale, 2006). With this in mind, we have done our best to adapt to the interviewees, concerning their preferences regarding time and place. We considered it important to create a secure and comfortable environment for them and make the situation as "natural" as possible.

### **Data analysis**

When analysing the collected data, we used grounded theory as a tool, which is an interpretative perspective that helped us to understand the meaning of all the collected data (Martin & Turner, 1986). All interviews were recorded as well as transcribed after each session with the motive of getting an overall understanding of the findings and discover if there were any interesting patterns or things that stand out. According to Silverman (2015), one can change the amount and intensity in the transcription from time to time, something that we had in mind while transcribing, even although we transcribed all of the interviews equally.

To stay true to the grounded theory we also coded our transcriptions and created both concept cards and concept memos (Martin & Turner, 1986). This process helped us to move our data into concepts and put the scenarios into different categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To categorise our material in this way helped us analyse the interviews and have an overview of the respondents' answers. After each observation, we went through the observation sheets

and turned them into longer reasoning and developed sentences. These were later on transformed into concepts and put together with the other material into the different categories in order to fit the concept cards. One example of this process can be seen in table 4. We have put a lot of effort in working with all the collected material in order to really get the essence of what the respondents mean and get a deeper understanding behind what they say (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Our aim was to not be too strict with the concepts and therefore we chose to put the same scenario into several categories, and supplemented and filled up the concept cards with additional scenarios during the process (Martin & Turner, 1986). However, we used many different categories in order to try to separate the scenarios from each other, since we wanted the concept cards to be effective and not too general (Ibid). Examples of categories that were used are; network, communication channels, recruitment process, and legitimacy. As the following step, we created memos with short texts of analysis and ideas that we found when going through the data in each concept.

**Table 4: Data Coding Process (one example)**

Codes	Scenarios taken from interviews	Concept	Category
Spread, Visible, Employees, Reputation	"tell everyone to recommend friends" "arranging big after work-event" "always try to speak well about the company" "a contact I have today, can be a coworker in the future"	The importance of communicating and spreading the word, perhaps in order to increase visibility and awareness.	Networking

An additional benefit of using grounded theory is that it does not require a linear process (Martin & Turner, 1986). This was suitable for us as we could work with the different tasks as they appeared and best fitted into our process. For example, we were working with transcriptions and concepts cards from the first interviews, while we were still conducting additional interviews. Using grounded theory as a tool when analysing and make meaning of our collected material helped us answer our research question, get a deeper understanding and contribute to the existing knowledge of employer branding. The secondary data has been analysed and functioned as a compliment in order for us to form our own opinion about how the company uses social media and their own web page.

**Findings**

**Setting the Stage**

Elicit is an SME with approximately 80 employees and function within the IT-consultant industry. It was founded in 1999 (Elicit(a) 2018) and is a privately held organisation with its headquarter located in Gothenburg which is where most part of the employees’ work. The exception is 8-10 people working in Malmö and Stockholm where the organisation is also present. During the last couple of years, competition between companies in the IT-industry to find and attract qualified workforce has increased. This change that has been noticed to great extent by Elicit. Companies have to more actively search for new employees and an employee

at Elicit describes that it is common to hear people in the office landscape talking to someone on the phone that is offering them a job or talk to them about a potential job opportunity (Respondent 10). Therefore, the competition is affecting Elicit as they have to work actively in order to keep up. As the environment is changing, Elicit has to change and adapt to the present situation. Elicit has for many years found pride in the fact that all of their employees have a decade of experience within the industry. However, during the last couple of years, Elicit has focused on attracting and recruiting more junior consultants in order to have a sustainable company growth. Another strategy, implemented in September 2017, was to create a new role, an EB-manager. Elicit implemented these practices and strategies, as a result of the increased competition, but also in order to grow. Elicit describe that in order to have happy and satisfied employees they must be able to offer them new challenges and positions within Elicit. By growing they open up for new areas of responsibility, they argue that they can get bigger and more customers, and other positive effects that contribute to stimulate the employees' need for development and change of work tasks (Respondent 5). The desired result being long-lasting employment. It is in this context that this paper is developed, with the starting point of the creation of the new EB-manager role and a subsequent introduction of a set of practices directed towards the strengthening of the employer branding activities.

### **A new role is introduced**

*“We definitely work actively to be perceived as an attractive company”* (Respondent 9). Elicit claim to be working actively through several actions in order to be perceived as an attractive company. One such action mentioned by all interviewed respondents is the new role of EB-manager that was introduced in the autumn of 2017, by the Management team with the argument that they felt that Elicit did not focus enough on showing themselves to the world and neither finding the right people for the company. Therefore, the EB-manager role was created and include the tasks of searching for new potential employees, being part of the recruitment process as well as handling the social media accounts, and thereby the marketing of Elicit. By being responsible for all these tasks, the EB-manager is responsible for the employer branding of Elicit as this includes both the recruitment aspect as well as the marketing aspect. Respondent 2 describe that as it was a new role, there were no clear guidelines or a developed role description for how the EB-manager was to work with these tasks. Therefore, it was a free role in the sense that the EB-manager could come up with own ideas and ways of working. Thereby, *“making it up along the way”* (Respondent 8).

Respondent 12 describes that there now have been changes compared to before the EB-manager role was introduced, and now. Respondent 2 and 4 describe that since the role was created, there has been a larger focus on finding the right people for the organisation, so-called “Elicitare”. One way of attracting new employees is that Elicit attended a career fair at Halmstad University, a kind of event which is new to the company. This was an occasion when the authors of this paper were present and conducted observations. Respondent 12 argue that *“since the new role was implemented, the marketing and recruitment of Elicit has really increased”*. This is further strengthened by Respondent 13 who claim that *“since the new role was implemented, Elicit has been more visible on social media”*. The social media platforms in this case are; Facebook, LinkedIn, the companies blog, the company's web page as well as Stackoverflow, a

community for people operating in the IT-sector, which is also used to market Elicit to people within the industry.

Respondents 2 and 11 explain that their work tasks have changed since the EB-manager started. Respondent 11 describes the task of social media, it was hard to get any continuity and actual value in the posts before because of other responsibilities, and it often became overshadowed by other things. Respondent 2 also describes that the daily work has changed as the work before contained more of searching for candidates and marketing. *“The EB-manager searches for more candidates now, it was something I worked with a little bit before, more sporadically. But because my day is so scattered it fell between other things. It didn’t get the focus it needed and now, the EB-manager has main responsibility for that task.”* (Respondent 2). Respondent 5 say that since the introduction of the EB-manager role, Elicit has been able to do all their recruitment within the company, and do not have the need for external recruitment firms as they did before. This is something that respondents 3 and 7 agree on being a good strategic decision as they benefit in many ways by having the recruitment process led by one of their own employees. *“To hire external recruitment firms is expensive. It is in every aspect a win for us to have someone internally who do the job, who is part of Elicit”* (Respondent 3).

The Instagram account was implemented as a result of that the new role of EB-manager was introduced. Respondent 8 say that it was an idea brought by the EB-manager with the argument that *“if you are not seen, you do not exist”*. The EB-manager had been responsible for a previous employers Instagram account and therefore simply took the knowledge and way of working there and implemented it to Elicit. Respondent 10 argue that the company's Instagram account is an important channel to show people outside the organisation what the company does in regard to the feeling of closeness and fellowship between the employees. Having looked at the Instagram account and the posts made, the authors interpret this as that the company try to mediate a feeling of closeness, as the Instagram posts concern coffee breaks, game evenings at the office, after works as well as posts made about when the company have won awards.

*“It is important that it is visible to the outside, what we are doing on the inside”* (Respondent 10). Respondent 10 state that he believes that the feeling of closeness and fellowship is something that Elicit can live on, *“our thing is being the cosiest within the industry”*. By showing that Elicit’s coworkers have fun and enjoy each other's company outside of working hours, it is a way to make the company culture clearer to the people outside the company. The jolly atmosphere and the will to socialise with coworkers outside working hours is part of the company culture, something that Respondent 12 describe as being something that Elicit cherish and can, in terms of showing the audience, be argued to be almost more important than the work task itself. *“We really care about our company culture and we try to show what we do at the office by using social media. Both what we do while working but also when not working. It is almost more important to enjoy time with the colleagues and do things outside of working hours, than the actual work itself”* (Respondent 12). According to Respondent 6, the culture is the company’s strongest attribute as it is what has attracted and made potential employees, current ones. *“When they have met people here at the office and been in our facilities, then the culture will be the winning thing. It is what we have gained most from”* (Respondent 6).

*“After my first interview at Elicit, I was sure that this was where I wanted to work”* (Respondent 12). There are several implications of the practices that Elicit, and its employees

do in order to attract people to the organisation. One such implication, mentioned by Respondent 12, is that he immediately got a feeling that he wanted to work at Elicit when he visited the office for his first interview. *“When I came in the front door and saw the view from the office window and people playing pool, I instantly felt the great atmosphere. I felt I could be myself and become a part of this family. This is a feeling that I still feel today”* (Respondent 12). Respondent 10 describe getting a similar feeling when he visited the office in Gothenburg the first time. His perception was that the employees knew, but also cared for each other. The respondent describe that the employees seemed to be involved in the family life of their coworkers in the sense of asking about the kids or partner by name. The fact that several of the respondents describe the company similarly to Respondent 10 and 12, strengthens what Respondent 4 and 5 describe, that Elicit has a high hit-rate in regard to hiring the candidates who come to the office for a first interview. Respondent 4 believe that Elicit’s beliefs of how they want to be as an employer are something that shines through to the people outside the organisation. *“We have an incredible high Satisfied Employer Index (SEI) and very low personnel turnover. Those two together indicate that we actually are being perceived as the way we are hoping to be”*.

### **Work with employer branding**

A practice that is commonly used in order to attract new potential employees to the organisation, is that Elicit use their current employees to spread the word about the company *“we work a great deal with spreading the word about Elicit”* (Respondent 10). Not only do the employees talk to their clients about Elicit and how it is to work there, they also talk to family, friends and other people in their network. An outcome of current employees talking about Elicit is, according to Respondent 11, that *“this has and further could attract people within the same industry and make them apply for a position at Elicit”*. Another practice that is similar to spreading the word is that Elicit hosts After works (AW) and game nights at the office, something which is up to each and every one of the employees to make time for. *“It requires that you engage yourself and make time for these meetings and events”* (Respondent 10). He continues by describing that the people that Elicit invite to these events have varied over the years but now it is both internal and external people that are invited. It started out as being only for the employees, then grew into employees and their friends and family and now it is the employees, their family and friends, Elicit’s customers as well as colleagues at other companies and potential new employees. That employees invite people in their networks is positive as Respondent 14 describe that *“most people in my network are people who are in the same industry as me”*.

When an employee at Elicit recommend a person from within his or her network, they are offered a recruitment-bonus. This means that the employee who recommends a person, who is later recruited, will receive a bonus of ten thousand SEK. Respondent 9 describe that she always talks very highly about Elicit and try to create a positive picture of the company. Respondent 13 explain this further, *“When I try to recruit friends, I talk about the good attributes connected to Elicit”*. Respondent 5 describes that he does not believe that the bonus that is offered by the company has any large effect on what extent people recommend potential employees. When a recommendation takes place, the company always make sure to contact the candidate and carry out the full recruitment process to show the employee who came with the recommendation that



Elicit takes the recommendation seriously. *“When it comes to employees’ recommendations, we always do the full scaled process, as we want them to understand that we appreciate their efforts”* (Respondent 5). With this said, it does not mean that every person that is recommended is also offered a job at Elicit. Respondent 5 describe that Elicit do not offer everyone a job just because they are recommended by a current employee, as all are not always a good fit for Elicit. In those cases when a person who applies for a job does not proceed in the recruitment process, or simply when someone has emailed the company asking a question, it is important to always respond or give feedback. Respondent 4 stress that by doing this, it increases the chance of Elicit being perceived as a kind company.

It is further important that Elicit is perceived as a fair company in the recruitment process, and more specifically when they are searching to find new potential employees. When doing this, it is important that they are perceived as being a company that plays fair. Respondent 8 describe that Elicit’s BA-managers have never stolen old co-workers or people from earlier employers, which is one way for Elicit to maintain their good renommé and be perceived as transparent and fair. *“Elicit is a company that play a very honest game within the industry. The BA-managers have never reached out to old colleagues and that is pretty sick, that they have never contacted some of their previous IT consultants despite that they haven't been in touch for years. So, in that sense, we have our principles”* (Respondent 8). Respondent 7 states that this is something that is not only important in recruiting but also in general for Elicit. That Elicit has a good reputation is the common understanding of the interviewed respondents. *“We have not had the profile that we are technically better, it is more of a general picture of us and what we can do. Technically skilled, socially competent and takes responsibility for what we do”* (Respondent 10). Respondent 18 describe that competitors, when finding out that he works at Elicit, rarely try to convince him to leave Elicit for their company as people working at Elicit rarely want to change employer.

### **Employer branding at the office**

Trying to find the right people is a task given large focus, and despite that Elicit has the EB-manager for this, the four BA-managers spend time on this as well. Each Monday and some Wednesdays the managers have a morning meeting where one of the topics on the agenda is recruitment.

*The meeting starts off with the EB-manager presenting all the potential employees to the rest of the group by showing an excel document which contains the names of the candidates, who has found respective person, a link to the LinkedIn profile and where the person is in the process. Thereafter, the EB-manager show the rest of the group the person's LinkedIn profile and the group discuss if the person is a suitable candidate or not. (Observation, 2018-04-09)*

If the candidate is suitable, he or she is contacted, and the recruitment process begins. The candidate has two interviews and apart from this, it is not uncommon for him or her to have a meeting with one of their potential new coworker to get a feeling of someone other than the BA-manager. This is also a possibility to ask questions that might not be answered equally well by the BA-manager.

The managers at Elicit believe that besides meeting the managers and employees, the office and its location can further be attributes in order to win the new potential employee over. “*Elicit have very nice offices, and for a newly graduated, that matters. The location matters as well as the office itself*” (Respondent 16). Several respondents (14,16 and 19) describe that the location of the office was an attractive attribute when applying to the organisation.

*Elicit’s office in Gothenburg is centrally located at the top floor of the central train station. The main part of the office consists of an open landscape workplace with desks and computers. The other part of the office consists of a smaller kitchen area and a larger living room area, with a sofa, TV, pool table and table tennis. Offering the possibility to play video games and watch a movie. That the table tennis is used, have been observed every time the authors have visited the office. Overall, the facilities look fresh and modern.* (Repeated observations)

Respondent 8 describes that having an office that is central is a strategic choice as the company believes it is important that consultants that live far from the office should be able to easily commute and work at Elicit. The same is true for having an office that resembles a living room, this is also a strategic choice as it enhances the desired culture of Elicit.

The managers at Elicit have always encouraged the employees to use the office space also outside office hours as they argue it to be an appreciated part of the company culture. However, Respondent 3 describes that the part where employees hang out at the office outside working hours is something that has become less of during the last few years. However, he explains that he has seen a change by describing that since the last year or so, it has been an increase in this type of gatherings. “*We have been extremely lucky as many of our junior consultants have been here at the office a lot. They embraced it directly, and started spending evenings at the office, drinking beer or watching a movie. Simply doing fun things together. To be honest, this was something that was declining as many of us that have been around for a while, had children and then simply did not have the time for it. But now, the office is alive again*” (Respondent 3).

### **A great place to work**

Elicit has several times been awarded for their placements on the Great Place to Work list. Respondent 5 explains that besides being part of a contest and the eager to get a good placement, these competition gives the organisation a good evaluation of the employees’ feelings and opinions. It gives Elicit rich information which they can work with in order to improve the company’s climate and employees’ wellbeing. “*We often do our satisfied employee survey through competitions. The most important part of that competition is that we get really solid material about how our employees think within many different categories. We can then compare this material with previous years and see that we constantly get better but also what areas we need to improve on*” (Respondent 5). According to Respondent 8, the working environment and the care of the employees are very important to Elicit, “*Our focus has never been mere business. We should be a company who has the most satisfied customers and the most satisfied employees, and then the business comes third*”.

Continuing, the Management team agrees that Great Place to Work is an important factor behind their perceived attractiveness. This is strengthened by Respondent 8 and 19 as being a

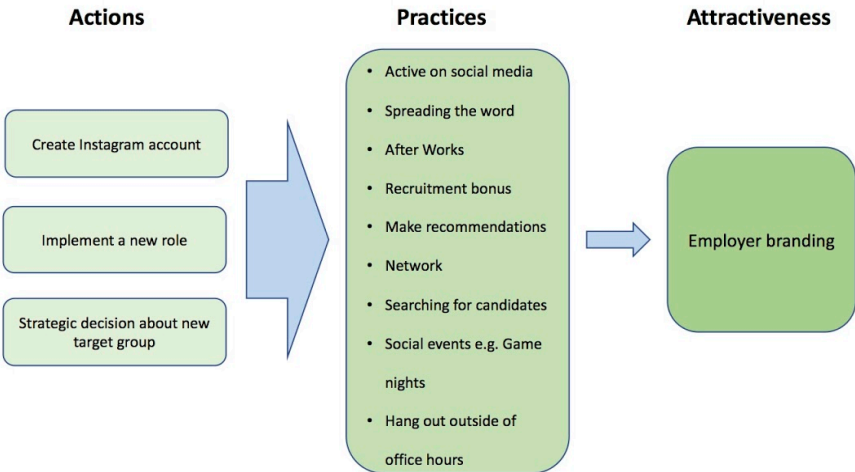
factor that they considered and that attracted them when applying to Elicit. *“It is important for me to work at a company who truly cares for their employees, and who believes that happy employees do a better job. When I saw that Elicit was on the Great Place to Work list, in combination with the feeling I got from their web page, this made me apply”* (Respondent 19)

**Thoughts about the future**

Respondent 13 and 15 see a challenge in keeping the great community, fellowship and unique atmosphere when the company grows. The solution to this is, according to Respondent 3, to work with hiring the right employees. *“We will keep this culture by focusing on doing the right recruitments. It is very much about personality”*. Elicit wants to continue to attract people that have the right personality in the sense that they appreciate and can contribute to the atmosphere at the office and who also matches with the company's values and believes. Respondent 12 explains that the experience and competence are less important since those things are easier to learn. Whereas, who you are is harder to change and therefore something they put an effort into trying to understand when recruiting.

Employees at Elicit believe that they have a bright future ahead of them and hope that the actions of today will lead to positive implications for the future as well. Respondent 3 say that, *“I believe it would be favourably for us if our name was more known and that people recognised our logo”*. Respondent 3 and 6 both claim that it would be easier for them to get qualified candidates in the future if the company was more known and visible by the public. Something which they believe that they are heading towards, both considering their increased activity in social media, as well as the growth of the company. Both strategies which they believe would lead to greater general awareness of their existence. There are ideas of how the EB-manager role will develop, Respondent 3 and 8 both believe that this will become even more important in the future and the tasks and responsibility will expand to other people as well. Respondent 3 says that; *“If I was to look into the future I can imagine I would see an expansion of the new role in the company. It is possible that we BA-managers work more with recruitments as well.”*

**Figure 1: How practices relate to attraction**



Elicit performs a number of actions in their work with employer branding. This figure shows how these actions can become practices as they are being routinized within the organisation. These practices will in turn affect employer branding as the institutional practice, which influence the company's attractiveness and thereby their ability to attract new employees.

## **Discussion**

In order to explain how SME work in practice with attracting new potential employees in a highly competitive market, this paper is informed by institutional theory and particularly recent developments in institutional work. The employees' everyday practices, work tasks and routines, can altogether be considered as institutional work that is performed in order to maintain the institutionalised practice of employer branding. In line with Fligstein's (2001) definition of an institution, the employees at the company have common rules and shared meanings that set the standard for how to act within the area of employer branding. Furthermore, their professions and work tasks help them to define their social relationships between each other which also shapes their common behaviour.

The findings presented in the previous section, show that the employees at Elicit perform institutional work in the form of several actions, which can be argued to have the desired outcome of attracting new potential employees to the organisation by strengthening employer branding as an institutionalised practice. However, not all of these actions lead to routinized behaviour and are therefore not practices. What we refer to as an *action* is institutional work that is performed and can be seen as one incident, while a *practice* is institutional work that has become routinized and thereby is made on a daily basis by the actors within the institution. The structure of the discussion is inspired by the of sets of practices presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). We have observed 7 set of practices through which actors engage in activities that result in the maintenance and strengthening of employer branding as an institutionalized practice. These set of practice are: enabling, constructing identity, mimicry, defining, valorizing and demonizing, constructing normative network, embedding and routinizing, and the additional set of practice inspired by Suchman's work (1995) of managing legitimacy. In the following, we unfold each of these sets of practices and illustrate them with examples from our findings. At the end of this section, we discuss how the sets of practices are articulated together.

### **Enabling**

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) exemplify enabling with the creation of new roles in organisations, made in order to set up new institutional routines. The creation of the new EB-manager role at Elicit illustrates enabling work as a form of institutional work. It can further be connected to what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe as normative isomorphism as the role was created as a result of that the Management team at Elicit believed it was essential to have this position in order to strengthen employer branding as an institutionalized practice in the company. This is similar to the study made by Guler et al. (2002) where there were certain qualified companies that had the authority to award a specific certificate instead of that every company was authorized to do this. Thereby, enabling certificate awards in the same way as the new EB-role enables employer branding. By creating the new position within Elicit, it allowed the EB-manager to focus on tasks that had previously been overshadowed and given

limited focus. While the creation of the new EB-manager role responds to some form of enabling work, the tasks that this person started on a daily basis were embedded into new routines, also illustrates a parallel process of embedding and routinizing practices. These practices can, in turn, be argued to be institutional work that is made in order to create new routines.

### **Constructing Identity**

In parallel to the creation of the new role, the Management team at Elicit encouraged their employees to recommend people that they know and that they believe would be a good fit for the company. This is a practice that falls under what Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) refer to as constructing identity, which is characterized by that it is the collective actions that develop professions. By encouraging all the employees to keep their eyes open for new recruits, it makes everyone part of the recruitment process. When this is the case, the company may encourage the employees, as in the example of Oakes et al. (1998), to see themselves as working with employer branding, and not simply as employees working within an organization that perform employer branding activities. A result of encouraging the employees to keep their eyes open for recruits, is that the work with employer branding is a responsibility for all the employees, and not concentrated to one specific profession, redefining the classical definition of the identity of an employee that traditionally is not formally included in recruitment efforts. This is a practice that has been performed since the start of the company and is, therefore, something that has become deeply routinized and embedded within the company. A further example of such a practice is how not only the EB-manager search for new potential employees, but this is rather a task that is made by both the EB-manager and the BA-managers within the company. This is a task that can be regarded as an old practice as it was made even before the EB-manager role was introduced, but also a new practice as it is made to a larger degree by the EB-manager and is now more routinized than previously. On that note, it can be argued that this is made in order to strengthen the institutionalized practice as Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) describe that maintaining an institution is something which can be done by encouraging certain practices. In the case of Elicit, these are that employees are taking part of the employer branding practices. As some of the employees believe that the EB-manager role will become increasingly important, it could be argued to strengthen the presumption that the work with employer branding will continue to expand within the company. Thereby, making it a central practice of the organisation, and can possibly colour more of the activities and tasks of the employees in the future.

### **Mimicry**

As there was no clear role description for the EB-manager role, this opened up for the EB-manager to shape the position and decide how to work in order to reach the company's goals. One decision that was made, was the action to create an Instagram account, a practice that the EB-manager copied from previous employment and is an example of what is referred to as mimicry (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) or mimetic isomorphism discussed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). This action of creating an Instagram account is similar to the example provided by Hargadon and Douglas (2001), where Edison tried to make his electric light similar to the existing system of the gas lamp. By creating something that is already familiar to the intended

audience, an Instagram account in this case, one can assume that it will ease the process of acceptance. It can be argued that Elicit is affected from both inside and outside the organisation, and the fact that other companies/competitors are active on social media platforms could be a reason for why Elicit's Instagram account was created. That the EB-manager copied this practice from a previous employer can be argued to be what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) refer to as normative isomorphism, in the sense that a person is recruited and some of this person's way of working is implemented into the organisation. This is what the Management team did when they decided to hire the current EB-manager as this person had a certain experience of the tasks and qualities that the Management team believed could be useful at Elicit. Furthermore, normative isomorphism is when organisations make changes in order to gain legitimacy or changes made by the company as they feel forced to follow the norms of the industry (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Social media accounts therefore become a "must have" for companies as it might otherwise be interpreted as that the company is not keeping up with society and its norms, especially a company within the IT-industry. Thereby, the company could be argued to be influenced by the social expectations about what a modern IT-company should do and have in terms of recruitment. This could be argued to be applicable for Elicit as Respondent 8 believe that a company has to be visible on social media.

In regard to the fact that a part of the office resembles a living room, this could be a further example of mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). A possible reason why Elicit has created this living room feeling could be as they have seen other companies, such as Google, have this arrangement. And as they are considered to be an attractive company, this could be a motive for Elicit to allow themselves to be influenced by this way of working. As several of the employees described that the location of the office, as well as the office itself, mattered when they applied to Elicit, it could be argued that Elicit has mimicked this strategy successfully. By doing this, Elicit also acknowledge the importance of offering functional as well as symbolic attributes (Drury, 2016).

### **Defining**

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) describe a further set of practice with focus on defining boundaries of membership. That Elicit posts pictures and videos on Instagram that show what Elicit and its employees do besides to work, is an example of this. It illustrates that the employees who work at Elicit feel a sense of closeness and a fellowship towards their coworkers. This can be argued to be a good strategy as social value, i.e. having fun with coworkers, was the most attractive attribute in regard to how attractive an organisation was perceived to be (Dabirian et al., 2017). By showing the culture and who the current employees at Elicit are, the company also tries to mediate what type of people that would fit within the company. One could argue that this is an early stage of defining whom they indirectly encourage to apply for a job at the company, and thereby defining who an "Eliciatre" is. It is a way to determine a parameter for future structure and institutional practices, similar to the example of Fox-Wolfgramm et al. (1998), where the performance today will determine future resources.

### **Valorizing and Demonizing**

Valorizing is an action to exemplify positive behaviours and encourage values that are in line with the organisation. On the contrary, demonizing are actions made with the aim to ridicule

bad or unwanted behaviour (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006). One example of valorizing that has been observed at Elicit is that the company prefers employees that will contribute to the company culture. The strategy to recruit more junior consultants to the team could affect the company culture, as recruiting more junior consultant often mean recruiting younger people, and this could be the reason why employees at Elicit have started to hang out at the office more regularly on evenings and weekends. On this note, one can argue that where you are in life can affect what you priorities and prefer, which is strengthened by studies made by Dabirian et al. (2017) and Reis & Braga (2016). Recruiting more junior consultant can be argued to generate a cheaper labour force that is also easier to access as well as it makes it possible for Elicit to maintain their carefully formed company culture. This as it could be assumed that most junior consultants do not have families and kids to the same extent that senior consultants do. Therefore, they might be the ones that to the largest extent socialize with colleagues at the office in the evenings and at the weekends. Respondent 11 explain this strategy to be a way in which the company could develop a sustainable growth and a future, in regard to human resources. Our understanding is that the effect it had on the culture was not something they had in mind when changing the strategy, but rather an unintended positive consequence. It can be argued that this strategic decision was important for the company's future in many ways and one can only assume that Elicit do a great job with welcoming and integrating new employees into their company culture, explained as valorizing by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). All this can be implications of actions that result in of maintaining employer branding as an institutionalized practice (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006). As Dobber (2013) argues, in line with Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), this is an example of when the consequence of the action was not necessarily consistent with the intended effect. Recruiting more junior consultants does not only maintain the institutional practices of employer branding, it also strengthens and improves the culture of the company and thereby the feeling of closeness towards the coworkers. With this said, it could be argued that the company valorizes the junior consultants' behaviour when they socialize outside working hours. However, how does this affect they who do not attend? Are these in fact being demonized by the company as the pupils that did not live up to the encouraged behaviours were in the study by Angus (1993).

Other practices that could result in some type of valorizing and demonizing are those of the AW and game nights held by Elicit as it could be argued that there are both positive and negative aspects with these types of events. As these events are in the evenings, one can assume that the employees who have families do not have the same possibility to attend as they might have to be home in the evenings to take care of their children. If this is the case it could lead to that these employees feel excluded from the organisation which could in turn result in that they do not feel the belongingness and family feeling to the same extent as those employees that are able to attend most events. In regard to this, Respondent 10 claims that it is up to oneself to engage and take time for these events, and thereby your own responsibility to feel part of the fellowship. However, one could argue that although it may partly be up to the individual employee to make time for these meetings, it is up to the employer to provide conditions for each and every one to be able to attend and take part of the events. Could Elicit instead hold these events during office hours to enable access for all employees? Having said this, we see that there are other problems that would arise with this, for instance, that the external people that Elicit invite also work office hours and would therefore not be able to attend the events.

However, what are the main purpose of these events, to strengthen the company culture or to expand the network?

### **Constructing Normative Networks**

The connection between different actors is what build institutions, something which Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) refer to as constructing normative networks. At Elicit, the EB-manager and the rest of the employees are connected. It is through the connections between these different actors, that they anchor the institutional practices of employer branding. As the employees have different positions within the company, they have different tasks and thereby do not share the same agenda. However, they share the same idea that they want Elicit to attract more new employees and by them working together, they can reach their goal. For instance, one employee work with Elicit's economy, another work as a consultant and a third work as EB-manager, however, they all share the desire for Elicit to grow and employ the right people. This is similar to the study by Lawrence et al. (2002), in the way that several different actors together form the institution. As Elicit perform the action of recruiting a new EB-manager, who have some tasks that others had before the introduction of the new role, it can be argued that this action turns old practices into new daily routines in the sense of searching for and attracting new employees. This is described by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) to be a way to maintain institutions. This way of collaborating can further be seen when all the employees at Elicit assist in the practice of spreading the word and making people aware of Elicit. This is mentioned by several of the employees as being the most important practice related to employer branding that they do on a daily basis. One could argue that by making more people aware of the company, it can, in turn, lead to that these people talk to others about Elicit and so on, possibly resulting in some kind of ripple effect and thereby making the company more well known. These examples illustrate the set of practices of constructive normative networks. However, parallel to this, it can also symbolize the practice of embedding and routinizing.

### **Embedding and Routinizing**

Many of the mentioned practices could also fall under the set of practice called embedding and routinizing. It is through these practices that the normative foundation of the institutional practices become part of the actors' daily work. Thereby, maintaining the institutional practices through day to day routines and common practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). An example of this is how the managers at Elicit encourage the employees to always spread the word about the company. By continually stressing and celebrating this behaviour it becomes a common practice that is part of the daily routines of the employees. To encourage WOM and to spread information about the company, both by talking but also by writing on forums on the internet, can be argued to be even more important nowadays than before, as research show that crowdsourcing is increasing. The opinion of current and previous employees matters when people are thinking of applying for a job. (Dabirian 2017) This set of practice, embedding and routinizing, is similar to that described by Zilber (2002), in the way that certain routines are taken-for-granted as they constitute an important part of maintaining the institution.



## **Managing legitimacy**

During this case study, we have observed that institutional work is connected to legitimacy, its management, and maintenance. We have seen a great deal of work that we categorize under the name of managing legitimacy and which can be argued to be a new set of practices that could be added to the ones listed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). Thereby, managing legitimacy can be regarded as institutional work that is performed, rather than seeing gained and maintained legitimacy simply as the outcome. We have divided this set of practice into three categories; internal, external and incentive to spread positive WOM.

### **Managing legitimacy - internal work to reach audience**

Suchman (1995) argue that targeting people who are not directly attached to the company's institutional environment is a good strategy when trying to gain legitimacy, something that companies strive to secure (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). In the case of Elicit, the Instagram account was a way to reach people who were not necessarily familiar with the company. Elicit's work with social media is a tool for them to spread their brand to people outside of the company, by focusing on their culture and not necessarily on their profession. The work on visibility can at first be seen as a way to reach a larger audience, but as mentioned it can also be a way in which the company gains legitimacy. The institutional work of updating the social media platforms has become embedded and routinized into new practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) since it is frequently updated by the EB-manager. The reason being that the managers believe it is important to be visible and active on social media, a belief that can be argued to consist with that of Backhaus (2016), who argue that social media is the main platform for external employer branding. The fact that Elicit uses these platforms to indirectly attract new potential employees through being visible and mediate the company culture, the company is using the social media platforms for their external employer branding.

Elicit strive to show people on the outside of the organisation what they are doing within, especially in the sense of trying to mediate the culture that is present within the company, which is something that Elicit argue to be what they have gained most from and is the company's strongest attribute. It can be argued that this is a good strategy to focus on as Drury (2016) show that the symbolic attributes have larger effect than functional attributes when it comes to how attractive an organisation is perceived. Trying to mediate the culture to the people outside the company is important as Elicit argue that when people visit the office, they often feel the closeness and fellowship that is present. Respondent 4 describe that they have a high hit-rate when people actually come to the office. However, Elicit wants this feeling to be sensed simply by looking at the social media accounts. Furthermore, it can be argued from a legitimacy viewpoint, that mediating the same feeling through social media which is also felt when visiting the office, can result in gained legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). A further way in which Elicit work with providing the potential employee with a fair and true picture of the company is in the recruitment process. The candidates do not only have interviews with the managers but also in some cases have a meeting with a potential new coworker. By letting the candidate meet current employees, they are given the chance to get a better and more honest picture of what it would be like to work at Elicit, thereby connecting it to legitimacy where this action could result in the company being perceived as transparent and legitimate. A practice that can be argued to

be connected to legitimacy management discussed by Suchman (1995) and explained as being communication between the audience and the company.

One way of increasing the audience is through social media, another approach used by Elicit in order to spread the awareness of the company is by hosting social events, such as AW and game nights. These are both ways in which they enable for people outside the company's surrounding to find and interact with them (Suchman, 1995). As there is a spread of people who are invited to these events, including people that are functioning in the same industry, it could be a good practice that could help to spread the word about Elicit. Especially, those that are functioning within the same industry, these people could be argued to be even more likely to spread the word about Elicit to people that also are in the same industry and thereby also being potential new employees at Elicit. Having these AWs can be a good way to spread the word about Elicit but also show the people that come to these events that Elicit have a culture, equal the one described on the web page and that is visible on the Instagram account.

As previously discussed, one can, however, question the main purpose of these kinds of events. If the main reason is to strengthen the company culture or if the main goal with these events are to get people outside the organisation to come, in order to create conditions for them to spread the word about Elicit. Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) describe that one way of obtaining legitimacy is for the organisation to become identified with values that are associated with strong social legitimacy. By claiming, on social media, that Elicit has a certain culture, and then also to show that they live up to this culture, this can be argued to be a way for the organisation to obtain legitimacy from the people attending the AW. Elicit then becomes associated with having a strong company culture which, in turn, can create strong social legitimacy. Furthermore, as Suchman (1995) claim that legitimacy is socially constructed and dependent on the collective audience, it can be argued that the people attending Elicit's AW form an opinion about the company which in turn affect if the organisation will be regarded as legitimate or not. The people that attend the AW are those that make up the collective audience and if they do not perceive Elicit as legitimate, the company has not gained any legitimacy.

### **Managing legitimacy - external work to reach audience**

Employees at Elicit work hard to have an appreciated work environment and focus a lot on the wellbeing at the office. One way of measuring their job has been to participate in competitions. Their newly received high placement on the Great Place to Work list is one factor that indicate that the company treat their employees well, since it is the employees' opinions about the company that lay the foundation of the award. It has also shown to be an important attribute considered by potential employees when applying to the company. The fact that they got the award can also be an implication that the company live up to their promises of the company picture and can thereby be perceived as legitimate and transparent. Since they are part of a contest, they will get publicity and it can be a way for them to reach a new audience, this is suggested by Suchman (1995) to be a way to gain legitimacy. Elicit's company name and their achievement will through Great Place to Work now be visible for people who are not in their regular network, and perhaps reach them who values the award as an attractive attribute when searching for a new employer (Suchman 1995). Furthermore, according to both Suchman (1995) and Dowling and Pfeffer (1975), the communication between the organisation and the audience plays an important role when it comes to gaining legitimacy. This can be related to

the Great Place to Work award in at least two ways. The fact that the material, on which the award is based, is distributed to the company and that Respondent 5 argues it to be a valuable asset for them, shows that the communication of thoughts and opinions within the company in this case is one important factor behind the successful outcome. Furthermore, the award can also be argued to be important for people outside of the company, for example potential employees, who perceive Elicit as legitimate thanks to the great placement in the contest. That Elicit communicate the award to the internal as well as the external audience shows to be successful ways of gaining legitimacy.

All competing companies within the Great Place to Work, are compared to each other and it is a visible way to see how Elicit stands compared to their competitors. On that note, Dowling and Pfeffer (1975), describe that one way of obtaining legitimacy is to become identified with symbols or institutions that are united with strong social legitimacy. By Elicit having a place on the Great Place To Work list, they are associated with having legitimacy and the possibility to obtain legitimacy from people outside the organisation could be argued to be greater than if they would not have a place on the list. If the company stop competing for these kind of awards, a possible consequence is that people would question why they are no longer qualified to be on the list. If this is the case, they might believe that the company's work environment has a lower standard than previously. This could result in an absent of newly obtained legitimacy as well as the need to repair the legitimacy that might have been damaged as a result of Elicit losing their placement. Therefore, it could be argued that it is in the interest of Elicit to continue to be rewarded and get a place on the list of Great Place to Work. This way of working with managing legitimacy is another part of the institutional work done in order to strengthen the company's legitimacy and nourish the institutionalised practices of attracting new employees.

### **Managing legitimacy - incentive to spread positive WOM**

A practice in which the company is performing institutional work with the desired outcome of strengthening the institutional practice of employer branding, is WOM. Van Hoya et al. (2016) argues that companies can only indirectly affect what is being said in regard to WOM. However, one way to influence what people say can be through participating in recruitment events at universities. What Elicit's representatives said at the career fair in Halmstad or on their Instagram cannot be considered as WOM. What can be is, however, how the receiver of the information perceives it and how they chose to spread it. Therefore, these practices can be argued to provide conditions for Elicit to become more exposed and more known in the sense that people have heard and talked about Elicit. Thereby, increasing the awareness of Elicit through reaching out to people who are not necessarily familiar with the company previous to this (Suchman, 1995).

A further practice, related to WOM, is that Elicit offer so called "recruitment bonuses". Respondent 5 claim that he does not see a problem or a negative aspect of the fact that employees are offered a monetary incentive for recommending a potential employee. One could, however, argue that this could affect how the current employees talk about their employer. Van Hoya et al. (2016) describe that people who knew that the person who spread the WOM or information would get a monetary incentive felt less attracted to the organisation. The employees could choose to focus only on the positive factors in regard to working at Elicit, possibly resulting in that the receiver of the WOM gets a slightly embellished

picture of the company. If this is the case, it can be argued that the WOM that the employees spread is influenced by the bonus and could, in turn, affect the potential legitimacy that the company would obtain. However, Van Hoya and Lievens (2007) argue that when the WOM come from family and friends, i.e. between people who have a mutual trust for each other, the WOM can lead to an increased attractiveness. The Management team aspire Elicit to become more known to the public, in the sense that they want Elicit's name to be recognized by a larger amount of people. Their strategy of encouraging their employees to talk well about the company could, therefore, be an efficient way of achieving that. However, it could be important for them in some sense to be aware of what is being said in order not to be perceived as a showoff. An implication of that could be that Elicit would lose legitimacy, something which is hard work to repair when it has been lost or disrupted (Suchman, 1995).

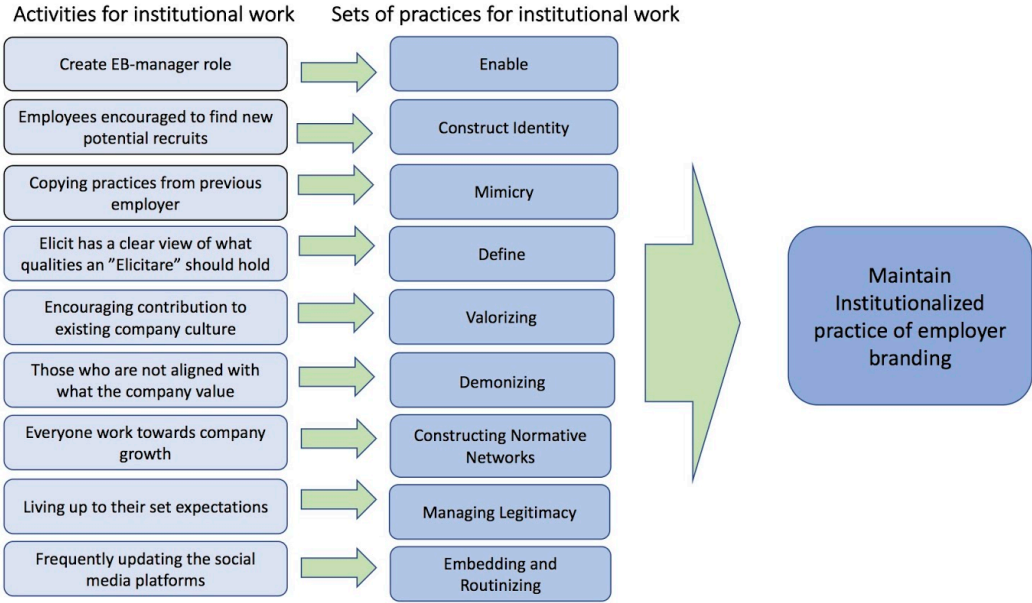
### **To sum up..**

In this case study, we have observed institutional work in the sense of several different practices being performed in order to maintain the institutional practices of employer branding within Elicit. These practices fall under the different categories of enabling, constructing identity, mimicry, defining, valorizing and demonizing, constructing normative networks, embedding and routinizing and managing legitimacy. Our observation revealed that all sets of practices resulted in the maintenance of the institutional practices, which is in line with the result from the study made by Currie et al (2012). The set of practices were thereby not separated between being made to create and being made to maintain institutions which is the division Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) suggest. Nevertheless, we argue that there are similarities and patterns that can be seen, and which can explain how the sets of practices relate to each other. Therefore, we have categorized these in the following manner; valorizing and demonizing falls under *work with values*; managing legitimacy, defining and, embedding and routinizing, falls under the category of *work with norms*; and enabling, constructing identity, mimicry and constructing normative networks are *work with roles*. By sectioning the work like this, it highlights three main areas which have been present in the work with maintaining an institutionalised practice. Despite that we do not agree with Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) categorization of differing between practices made to create and practices made to maintain institutions, we argue that all observed actions by Elicit have been purposive. However, the outcome has differed between intended and unintended, similar to Zietsma and McKnight (2009) argue about the fact that all outcomes are not necessarily the same as the intended.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we examined the relatively new phenomena of employer branding, and how SME work in practice with attracting new potential employees in a highly competitive market. By studying the practices made on a managerial level, and by using a qualitative approach informed by interviews and observations, our findings indicate that the company perform institutional work categorized under a number of different sets of practices.

**Figure 2: How institutional work maintain the institutionalised practice of employer branding.**



Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) present several sets of practices that are made, both to create as well as maintain institutions, and 7 of these were identified in this case study; enabling, constructing identity, mimicry, defining, valorizing and demonizing, constructing normative networks, and embedding and routinizing. In addition to this, we recognize a great deal of work directly connected to legitimacy and the company’s ambition to gain, as well as maintain their legitimacy. Therefore, we conclude that a further set of practices could be added to Lawrence and Suddaby’s (2006) list of work in order to maintain the institution, a category we would like to call managing legitimacy. All the forms of institutional work operating in the company are functioning together, and parallel with each other in the organisation with the result of maintaining employer branding as an institutionalized practice. As we have seen certain similarities and patterns between these sets of practices, we suggest that these are categories under work with values (valorizing and demonizing), work with norms (managing legitimacy, defining and, embedding and routinizing) and work with roles (enabling, constructing identity, mimicry and constructing normative networks).

We have analysed the process of how a company works with attracting potential new employees and this, in turn, answers to the call for more research on the practices of employer branding as limited attention has been given to the subject. As a result, this paper has made three main contributions, first to the institutional work literature, second to the literature on employer branding, and third to the practitioners working with employer branding. First, a theoretical implication steaming from our study is how practices oriented towards the maintenance and strengthening of legitimacy can lead to new forms of institutional work that can create, as well as maintain, current institutional practices. Also, we take it one step further by introducing a new set of practice that could be added to the ones suggested by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). Second, this paper presents insights into what practices are performed by companies in regard to working with employer branding, in the sense of attracting new employees. Furthermore, this paper contributes with new insight as it reveals that employer

branding is connected to legitimacy. It can be argued that the practices made do not reach their full potential, in the sense of attracting new potential employees, unless the company also work with gaining and maintaining legitimacy. Therefore, managing legitimacy also becomes a new set of institutional work practices. This is an exciting insight and where we show how this unfold on a managerial level at an SME within the consulting industry. As managers are those who to greatest extent work in practice to attract new employees, it is important that they understand what it is that attract and what are important attributes for new potential employees. Our study strengthens previous research as it indicates that it is important to work with both symbolic and functional attributes (Drury, 2016) in order to be perceived as an attractive company. The study, however, also shows that the symbolic attributes have stronger effect on the perceived attraction, than functional attributes, which is also in line with previous research (Ibid). Third, by revealing the practices that an SME successfully implemented to attract new employees, this paper contributes to providing insights and practices that could be applicable for Elicit as well as other SME functioning within the same field in order to attract new employees. One such insight is the importance of working with managing legitimacy as a practice and not only regarding it as a potential outcome. Another insight is that the company culture can to a large extent affect the level of attractiveness, which is in line with Dabirian et al. (2017) who shows that social value is the most important attribute in regard to attractiveness. However, it can be hard to make any generalizations that go outside of the conditions for this case company.

A limitation of this study is the fact that we did not have the possibility to follow the studied organisation for a longer period of time with the consequence that we could not adopt a longitude approach. It could have been of interest to see how initiative in the organisation, like the role of EB-manager in this case, would evolve through time and follow up on the other strategic decisions that have been taken. Further, it would be interesting to see what the implications would be in the future and how the company continue to develop and respond to the challenges they are facing within the area of employer branding. A second limitation is due to that the methodology of this study was a single case study. This study focuses on one specific company operating in one industry. The result can, therefore, be hard to applicate for SMEs in other industries. On that note, the fact that all the respondents mainly had positive things to say, made it hard to see if there were any negative consequences of the work with employer branding. However, this opens up for future research within the topic. A suggestion would, therefore, be to investigate a more critical view, and see if this type of work could have any negative outcomes. It could also be interesting to compare this company and its activities to another company functioning within another industry. This in order to see the result in relation to how practices possibly could differ. An additional suggestion for future studies would be to develop and dig deeper into the relationship between employer branding and legitimacy. One study could examine companies practices with managing legitimacy and their view of its importance, preferable on a longer term, in order to also be able to investigate the implications of the actions taken by actively being part and following the process. Thereby making the researchers part of the whole process by follow the initiatives behind each practice, the actual implementation and also the implications and respond/reaction to it.

## Acknowledgement

This case study was made possible thanks to the collaboration with Elicit. We would like to thank everyone that contributed with their time and shared their thoughts with us. A special thanks to our contact person who provided us with access and enabled this study. Furthermore, we would like to thank our supervisor Maria Jose Zapata Campos at the School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg for all assistance.

## Reference list

- Alvesson, M., 2003. Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *Academy Of Management Review*, 28(1), pp.13–33.
- Amber, T. & Barrow, S., 1996. The employer brand. *The Journal of brand management*, 4(3), pp.185-206
- Angus, L.B., 1993. Masculinity and Women Teachers at Christian Brothers College. *Organization Studies*, 14(2), pp.235–260.
- Backhaus, K., 2016. Employer Branding Revisited. *Organization Management Journal*, 13(4), pp.193–201.
- Backhaus, K. & Tikoo, S., 2004. Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International*, 9(5), pp.501–517.
- Bender, G., & Carlén, T., 2016. Vi gillar förändring! -en progressiv agenda för framtidens jobb. Stockholm: Landsorganisationen i Sverige
- Berthon, P., Ewing, M., and Hah, L. L., 2005. Captivating company: Dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *International Journal of Advertising*, 24(2), pp. 151—172.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E., 2013. *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder*, 2nd edition. Stockholm: Liber
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 2008. *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 3rd edition. California: Sage
- Currie, G., Lockett, A., Finn, R., Martin, G., & Waring, J., 2012. Institutional Work to Maintain Professional Power: Recreating the Model of Medical Professionalism. *Organization Studies*, 33(7), pp.937–962.
- Dabirian, Kietzmann & Diba, 2017. A great place to work!? Understanding crowdsourced employer branding. *Business Horizons*, 60(2), pp.197–205.
- Dacin, M.T.T., Munir, K. & Tracey, P., 2010. Formal dining at Cambridge colleges: Linking ritual performance and institutional maintenance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(6), pp.1393–1418.
- Deephouse, D.L. & Suchman, Mark, 2008. Legitimacy in organizational institutionalism. In Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Sahlin, K., & Suddaby, R., 2008. *The SAGE handbook of organizational institutionalism*. pp. 49–77.
- DiMaggio, P. & Powell, W., 1983. The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), pp.147–160.
- Dobbin, F., 2010. Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations.(Book review). *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(4), pp.673–675.

- Dowling, J. & Pfeffer, J., 1975. Organizational legitimacy: Social Values and Organizational Behavior. *Pacific Sociological Review*, 18(1), pp.122–136.
- Drury, P., 2016. Employer branding: Your not-so-secret weapon in the competition for young workers. *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 24(3), pp.29–31.
- Elicit(a) 2018. “Om Elicit” Available at: <https://www.elicit.se/om-elic-it/> [2018-05-16]
- Elicit(b), 2018. “Jobba hos oss” Available at: <https://www.elicit.se/jobba-hos-oss/> [2018-05-16]
- Fligstein, N., 2001. Social Skill and the Theory of Fields \*. *Sociological Theory*, 19(2), pp.105–125.
- Flyvberg, B., 2006. Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, pp.219-245
- Fox-Wolfgramm, S., Boal, K. & Hunt, J., 1998. Organizational Adaptation to Institutional Change: A Comparative Study of First-order Change in Prospector and Defender Banks. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43(1), p.87-126
- Garud, R., Hardy, C. & Maguire, S., 2007. Institutional Entrepreneurship as Embedded Agency: An Introduction to the Special Issue. *Organization Studies*, 28(7), pp.957–969.
- Great place to work, 2018. “Svergies bästa arbetsplatser” Available at: <https://www.greatplacetowork.se/employer-branding/sveriges-basta-arbetsplatser/> [2018-03-28]
- Guler, I., Guillén, M.F. & Macpherson, J.M., 2002. Global Competition, Institutions, and the Diffusion of Organizational Practices: The International Spread of ISO 9000 Quality Certificates. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(2), pp.207–232.
- Hampel, C.E., Lawrence, T.B. and Tracey, P., 2017. Institutional Work: Taking Stock and Making It Matter. In Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Lawrence, T. B., & Meyer, R. E. (Eds.). 2017. *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*. Sage
- Hargadon, A.B. & Douglas, Y., 2001. When Innovations Meet Institutions: Edison and the Design of the Electric Light. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46(3), pp.476–501.
- Kvale, S., 2006. Dominance Through Interviews and Dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), pp.480-500.
- Lawrence, T.B., 1999. Institutional strategy. *Journal of Management*, 25(2), pp.161–187.
- Lawrence, T.B., Hardy, C. & Phillips, N., 2002. Institutional effects of interorganizational collaboration: The emergence of proto-institutions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(1), pp.281–290.
- Lawrence, T.B. & Suddaby, R., 2006. Institutions and institutional work. In *The SAGE Handbook of Organization Studies*. SAGE Publications Inc., pp. 215–25
- Lawrence, T.B., Suddaby, R. & Leca, B., 2009. Introduction: theorizing and studying institutional work. In Lawrence, T.B., Suddaby, R. & Leca, B., *Institutional work : actors and agency in institutional studies of organizations*, Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawrence, T.B., Suddaby, R., & Leca, B., 2011. Institutional work: Refocusing institutional studies of organization. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 20(1), pp.52-58.
- Lawrence, T.B., Leca, B. & Zilber, T.B., 2013. Institutional Work: Current Research, New Directions and Overlooked Issues. *Organization Studies*, 34(8), pp.1023–1033.



- Leekha Chhabra, N. & Sharma, S., 2014. Employer branding: strategy for improving employer attractiveness. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 22(1), pp.48–60.
- Martin, P.Y. & Turner, B.A., 1986. Grounded Theory and Organizational Research. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 22(2), pp.141–157.
- Näppä, A., Farshid, M. & Foster, T., 2014. Employer branding: Attracting and retaining talent in financial services. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing June 2014*, 19(2), pp.132–145
- Oakes, L. S., Townley, B. & Cooper, D. J., 1998. Business planning as pedagogy: language and control in a changing institutional field. (Special Issue: Critical Perspectives on Organizational Control). *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43(2), pp.257–292.
- Reis, G.G. & Braga, B.M, 2016. Employer attractiveness from a generational perspective: Implications for employer branding. *Revista de Administração*, 51(1), pp.103–116.
- Silverman, D., 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th edition. London: SAGE.
- Suchman, M.C., 1995. Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), pp.571–610.
- Tanwar, K. & Prasad, A., 2016. Exploring the Relationship between Employer Branding and Employee Retention. *Global Business Review*, 17(3), pp.186-206
- Van Hoye, G. & Lievens, F., 2007. Social Influences on Organizational Attractiveness: Investigating If and When Word of Mouth Matters 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37(9), pp.2024–2047.
- Maheshwari, V., Gunesh, P., Lodorfos, G. & Konstantopoulou, A., 2017. Exploring HR practitioners' perspective on employer branding and its role in organisational attractiveness and talent management, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 25(5), pp.742-761
- Voronov, M. & Russ, V., 2012. Integrating emotions into the analysis of institutional work. *The Academy of Management review: AMR*, 37(1), pp.58–81.
- Wilden, R., Gudergan, S., & Lings, I., 2010. Employer branding: strategic implications for staff recruitment. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(1–2), pp.56–73
- Ziestma, C. & McKnight, B., 2009. Building the iron cage: institutional creation work in the context of competing proto-institutions. In Lawrence, T.B., Suddaby, R. & Leca,B., *Institutional work : actors and agency in institutional studies of organizations*, Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zilber, T., 2013. Institutional Logics and Institutional Work: Should They Be Agreed? *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, (39A), pp.77–96.
- Zilber, T., 2002. Institutionalization as an interplay between actions, meanings, and actors: The case of a rape crisis center in Israel. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(1), pp.234–254.